PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 69

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1984-85

COMPRISING PERIOD
3 DECEMBER—14 DECEMBER 1984

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IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 69**

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 1984-85

House of Commons

Monday 3 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Passenger Transport Executive

1. **Mr. Edwards** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with British Rail regarding the proposal to end section 20 grants.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): We have no intention to end the powers of passenger transport executives to make such payments.

Mr. Edwards: Did I hear the Minister say that he has no powers?

Mr. Mitchell: We have no intention to end the powers of passenger transport executives to make such payments. I am afraid that this is typical of the myth designed to frighten travellers and I am glad to have this opportunity to kill stone dead that rumour before it spreads further.

Mr. Edwards: Is the Minister aware that a grant of £100 million to British Rail is in jeopardy? Is the Minister further aware that the west midlands passenger service will have difficulty in surviving?

Mr. Mitchell: I have endeavoured to kill the rumour. I can only add that the West Midlands PTE, in the three-year plan that it made this year, makes no suggestion of possible withdrawals of section 20 grants to British Rail.

Bus Services

2. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what impact he anticipates there will be on the creation of new jobs if free competition in the provision of bus services is introduced.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): Our policy will give operators a greater incentive to provide the transport which customers want by improving existing services and developing new ones. Growth in new services will create additional jobs.

Mr. Baldry: Does not the evidence of allowing competition into express coach services and of trial areas such as Hereford, Worcester and Exeter show that by allowing competition double decker buses will no longer trundle around the countryside on fixed routes with no passengers and that they will be able to provide a service that people need, in areas where they want it, and thus provide a better service and more jobs?

Mr. Ridley: Yes, Sir. My hon. Friend is right. Another example is the new Exeter minibus service, which operates at high frequency and therefore attracts many more passengers. By virtue of having a much higher frequency it has already created more jobs. If that sort of thing were repeated throughout the country there would be many more jobs.

Mr. Mason: Is the Minister aware that after privatisation, if he manages to get the legislation through, there are likely to be fewer night and rural services, a cutback in services and routes that do not pay, and, inevitably, fewer jobs? Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that?

Mr. Ridley: The right hon. Gentleman clearly has not studied the White Paper.

Mr. Mason: Oh yes I have.

Mr. Ridley: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that local authorities, even his local authority, will be able to bring into existence services which do not now operate, by going out to tender and giving subsidies to provide such services. If such services do not exist in his area, that will be because of his local authority, not me.

Mr. Fry: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) in relation to express services? Is it not true that although there has been increased activity on the most popular routes, many places which used to have express coach services no longer have such services today?

Mr. Ridley: There are, of course, many more new services than services which have ceased to run. That may be a defect in the legislation, which confines such services to journeys over 30 miles. By reducing that distance we shall have more express coach services as well.

Mr. Anderson: Is not the reality likely to be that although the gross number of new jobs may increase, one will see part-timers hobbling for pin money and replacing full-time men now in the industry?

Mr. Ridley: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is at least beginning to acknowledge that this policy will result in more jobs, but, given the Opposition's continuing concern about unemployment, horrified to hear him condemning that.

Mr. Lawrence: Is it not obvious that most of the opposition to these proposals comes from those who feel that their little empires are being threatened, and, in particular, from trade union organisers who are fearful that under private enterprise they will have fewer people under their control?

Mr. Ridley: Yes, Sir. Monopolies on busy routes have led to high fares in order to provide the money for cross subsidy. In turn, that has choked off much of the traffic on buses. If that was stopped the amount of traffic on the buses would increase, so there would be more jobs and less expense.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Secretary of State not aware of the report prepared for the Plymouth authority, which clearly shows that to maintain the existing level of provision there will have to be a 22 per cent. rise in the rate? Will he acknowledge that creating part-time black economy jobs for people who are already tired from other jobs does not create new employment but merely puts passengers at risk?

Mr. Ridley: I have not yet received a copy of the Plymouth report, but I should obviously like to study it——

Mrs. Dunwoody: Why not?

Mr. Ridley: A copy has not been sent to me. The hon. Lady mentioned part-time black economy jobs, so I shall have to refer again to the Exeter experiment. If the frequency of minibuses increases, many more people can be employed full time. That is the sort of service that people want. They demand a better service. Our policy is designed to end the restrictions on providing better services.

Bus Services

3. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received to date from Yorkshire-based individuals, unions and companies in respect of the Government's White Paper on de-regulating local bus services.

Mr. David Mitchell: Out of a population of over 4 million in Yorkshire, I have received around 30 representations on the main bus policy and about 20 representations specifically on our proposals for taxis. These include representations from North Yorkshire county council and the two metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Gregory: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he give an assurance that the bus policy poses no threat whatever to safety and that, on the contrary, safety standards will be better? Will he also give an assurance that the policy does not pose a threat to concessionary bus fares?

Mr. Mitchell: I assure my hon. Friend that there is no interference with the concessionary bus fare arrangements. What happened in Hereford and Worcester shows that the system for checking on safety works effectively.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister agree that as more and more people in Yorkshire and elsewhere become aware of the Government's proposals they will realise that they will lead to greater urban congestion, a marked deterioration in services and a rapid increase in fares?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. He referred to greater urban congestion and implied that more people would be travelling by bus and probably fewer by car. That should not affect congestion, but will give satisfaction to far more people who will have a bus service which they did not have under the monopoly.

Mr. Waller: As many organisations in Yorkshire have given the impression that concessionary fares for the disabled and elderly are under threat, will my hon. Friend emphasise that he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are particularly concerned that an authority's right to give such concessions will remain?

Mr. Mitchell: I can give that assurance with alacrity. Indeed, I shall take this opportunity yet again to deny a rumour that is being deliberately spread to frighten elderly people in order to achieve political objectives.

Cycleways

4. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further proposals he has for increasing the number of cycleways in inner cities.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): We continue to encourage local highway authorities to make appropriate safe cycling provision in inner city areas as elsewhere. Whether to provide individual cycleways or other arrangements is generally a matter for the local authorities concerned with, and knowledgeable about, the local area.

Mr. Dormand: That was a rather disappointing answer. Does the Minister agree that the provision of cycleways should be a high priority because of their benefits, not only to cyclists, but to other traffic? Although I recognise that some local authorities have done splendid

work, does the Minister not accept that there has been a decline in interest in providing cycleways? Will the hon. Lady expand a little more on what the Government are doing? In particular, what are the regional cycling officers doing to stir up more enthusiasm among inner city authorities?

Mrs. Chalker: I continue to give high priority to the provision of specialist cycleways where possible. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that there has been a decline in interest. In every transport policy and programme invitation we have, through the guidelines, reiterated our willingness to support the programmes that come forward. We have done so wherever we have been able to. The hon. Gentleman well knows that the Canterbury scheme, and the Stockton scheme in his area, towards which the Department is paying a large amount, are progressing well. The regional cycling officers are as active as ever and are encouraging the local authorities to bring schemes forward.

Mr. Roger King: With regard to the provision of special facilities for two-wheeled traffic, has my hon. Friend considered setting up motor cycle scramble circuits in our city centres so that those who wish to take part in dodging and weaving in and out of traffic and take horrible risks with other drivers will not feel compelled to become motor cycle dispatch riders?

Mrs. Chalker: I well understand what my hon. Friend is saying, but I think that it is for the local authorities to provide those sorts of recreational facilities. It is high time that all two-wheeled and four-wheeled road users learned to tolerate one another and to obey the "Highway Code". I say to every cyclist and motorist that to cycle or to drive with inadequate lights is sheer craziness, and I hope that everyone, by whatever vehicle they travel will check their lights regularly.

Bus Services

6. **Mr. Snape** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many replies he has received to his consultation document on the deregulation of bus services; and if he will make a statement.

8. **Mr. Bagier** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many replies he has received to his consultation document on subsidies to local bus services; and if he will make a statement.

13. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has received to the White Paper, "Buses", Cmnd. 9300 and the related consultation papers; what percentage have been favourable and what percentage unfavourable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have received over 3,000 responses to the White Paper and the consultation documents which my Department issued subsequently. We are studying those representations as part of the preparation of the forthcoming Bill.

Mr. Snape: Has the Secretary of State seen the report from Conservative-controlled Hertfordshire district council, which estimates that the Government's bus proposals will cost the council £3 for every £1 saved? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that for Conservative-controlled Hertfordshire district council to join the Conservative-controlled Association of County Councils and the Conservative-controlled Association of District Councils in criticising those proposals means that Conservatives outside the House of Commons are extremely worried about the future of their bus services? Does some peculiar reason draw the right hon. Gentleman continually to the Dispatch Box to make a fool of himself?

Mr. Ridley: I have seen the report in *The Guardian* today. I have always thought that it was better to read *The Guardian* carefully. The hon. Gentleman has failed to do so and has made a fool of himself this afternoon. The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be aware that *The Guardian* report on Hertfordshire was referring to transport supplementary grant and not to the bus policy.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Gordon Bagier. Mr. Robert Wareing.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall hear points of order later.

Dr. Mawhinney: What about my question No. 7?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions No. 8 and 13 were linked with question No. 6. Mr. Gordon Bagier is not here. I therefore called Mr. Robert Wareing.

Mr. Wareing: As the Secretary of State is actively promoting the co-ordination and integration of transport fares and services in London, why does he insist on attempting to dismantle the very system that is allowing Merseyside and other major conurbations to have an integrated and co-ordinated system of transport fares and services? Is this not peculiar?

Mr. Ridley: I pay tribute to Merseyside in the sense that the Greater London council has done even more damage to London Transport than Merseyside has done to its transport organisation. As a result, London Regional Transport will take longer to recover from that unfortunate experience. After that, we can see about applying the policy.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: In view of the scurrilous campaign being conducted by the Labour-controlled Lancashire county council at a cost to ratepayers of £135,000 against my right hon. Friend's plans to modernise and improve the public transport services, will he assure my rural constituents that they will be infinitely better off under the new plans than they are at present?

Mr. Ridley: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend. Under the new policy we shall have a better, more flexible and more extensive system of rural bus transport. If Lancashire county council had not indulged in the expenditure to which my hon. Friend referred, it would have been able to afford several more rural bus services for the amount of money it spent on political propaganda.

Mr. Cartwright: Why does the Secretary of State believe that the limited experience of bus deregulation in an area such as Hereford and Worcester can be automatically translated into the different situation in the great industrial conurbations, which depend on an integrated bus system?

Mr. Ridley: I never made that claim. I said that what has happened in Hereford and Worcester is a good guide

to what will happen in the rural areas. I never extended that to what will happen in the urban areas. I believe that great savings can be made through competition to enable county councils to purchase more services as well as to cut their costs.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the Secretary of State is so convinced that Hereford is a good example, why were operators not prepared to tender for rural services? Will the right hon. Gentleman be honest and explain that, except on populated routes, people in rural areas will be deprived of bus transport?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Lady should do her homework and go to Hereford and Worcester and ask the people on the streets what they think about their new bus services.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Rural areas?

Mr. Ridley: I think she will find that in both the towns and the rural areas the bus services are better. The hon. Lady is wrong to say that rural routes are being withdrawn, because they are not.

East Coast Electrification

7. **Dr. Brian Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the east coast main line to be electrified to Peterborough.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail plans to introduce electrified services to Peterborough in October 1987.

Dr. Mawhinney: I apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, but I did not hear my right hon. Friend say that question No 8 was to be linked. Will my hon. Friend give my constituents an assurance that once the main line to Peterborough is electrified services will start and that we shall not have to wait until the line is electrified beyond Peterborough?

Mr. Mitchell: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. He has badgered me and my predecessor to bring this enhanced service to his city. I am pleased to reassure him.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the timetable for the Peterborough to Edinburgh line?

Mr. Mitchell: The electrification date for the line between Edinburgh and Newcastle is May 1991 and to Leeds 1989.

Mr. Yeo: Is my hon. Friend aware that the electrification of the line even further to the east, to Ipswich, has been accompanied by considerable disruption, and that there will be consternation among my constituents and those in Peterborough if electrification of that line results in similar disruption?

Mr. Mitchell: A certain amount of disruption is inevitable to achieve such major reconstruction. British Rail has said that 95 per cent. of the work will be done at a time when the track is in possession for normal maintenance. We expect hold-ups to be approximately eight minutes.

Mr. Anderson: Will the Minister say which is the next line, in order of priority, after the east coast main line electrification?

Mr. Mitchell: It is for British Rail to come forward with a proposal, which we shall then consider.

Mr. Soames: When my hon. Friend has finished electrifying the Peterborough line, will he be so kind as to put the same amount of investment into the line serving my constituents?

Mr. Speaker: That is also rather outside the question.

M25 (Payments)

9. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the reasons for his Department's refusal to pay Bovis-Birse for concrete operations during winter months, affecting work on the M25 Reigate to Leatherhead section.

Mrs. Chalker: The contract requires completion by 26 August 1985. It is for the contractor to work out his own programme for completing the work by that date. The Department has not refused to pay for any normal winter work.

Mr. Bidwell: Is the hon. Lady aware that about 120 workers, members of my union, the Transport and General Workers Union, and of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, have been laid off and are concerned about the matter? What control has her Department over the consulting engineers, W. S. Atkins? Who supervises the contractors, Bovis-Birse, on the Leatherhead to Reigate section of the M25? Can her Department insist on winter working if it is deemed necessary?

Mrs. Chalker: Of course I understand the concern of those staff who have been laid off by Bovis-Birse, but they are employed by that contractor and are that contractor's responsibility.

Our consultants, W. S. Atkins, who have an independent role as engineers to the contract, have acted exactly in line with the extensions of time according to the Institute of Civil Engineers' conditions of contract, which were established about 20 years ago. It is not unusual for extensions of contract to be given from time to time, according to what is necessary on a particular contract. I do not have direct control over them. I am not consulted unless a date goes outside the original target, and in this case that was not so.

Pelican Crossings

10. **Mr. Andrew Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his consultation paper concerning the timings for the flashing green man used at pelican crossings.

Mrs. Chalker: Consultation has already taken place on procedures to amend the signal phasings and other aspects of the procedure at pelican crossings. We have been doing further work in the light of the comments received and I hope to bring forward the necessary revised regulations shortly.

Mr. Bowden: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are too many green men flashing for too long? What is needed is a longer time at a stationary position. Elderly people find that they get about one third of the way across, the green man starts to flash, and they then go back again. Will she please consider the problem in relation to the elderly and in particular those using zimmers?

Mrs. Chalker: I am only too happy to assist my hon. Friend. I agree that the precedence of pedestrians over

vehicles during the steady flashing green man phases is not always understood. To deal with that problem we have proposed, in consultation, that the change from the red to the flashing amber phase in the driver's signal be delayed for two seconds, to give pedestrians more security on the wider crossings. That consultation has attracted strong support among the consultees, and we hope very shortly to be able to improve pelican crossings.

Motorway Speed Limits

11. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is satisfied with the effectiveness of motorway speed limits.

Mrs. Chalker: Observance is not as good as it should be, but raising the limit could lead to even higher speeds than at present and cause an increase in the number and severity of accidents.

The Government therefore concluded that the limit should stay at 70 mph.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since the Department's figures show that more than 40 per cent. of cars on motorways are travelling above the speed limit, will my hon. Friend agree that the law has been brought into disrepute? If the limit is unrealistic, will she consider raising it? If not, will she discuss with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary ways of enforcing the present limit?

Mrs. Chalker: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety. I have already said on many occasions that there should be far better observance of speed limits. Of the 40 per cent. of cars quoted by my hon. Friend, some were only briefly over the 70 mph limit as a result of overtaking. I note the consternation. Despite the fact that motorways are our safest roads, having only 1·5 per cent. of all accidents, there is no excuse for not obeying speed limits. There is a great need for a better standard of motorway driving, particularly in regard to lane discipline and signalling. I praise the police forces on the M1, who have been conducting a campaign to get better observance. In that way we shall get not only law-abiding drivers on the motorways, but greater safety.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: I fear that that answer is not good enough, because too many people are speeding and something has to be done at once. Throughout the week, travelling on the M1, whatever lane I am driving in at 70 mph, I am bound to be forced to pull over because everything is overtaking me. If speed limits are to be retained, will my hon. Friend ensure that offenders are prosecuted, especially lorries, as they are the most dangerous in causing accidents?

Mrs. Chalker: I must put my hon. Friend right. The improvement in the record for lorry safety over the years, especially on motorways, does not bear out my hon. Friend's last comment. I should also make it clear to all motorists as well as to my hon. Friend that if there is room in the inside lane that is where they should be driving, at whatever speed. They should not be hogging either the centre or the overtaking lane, which is not to be regarded as a "fast" lane.

Mr. Bidwell: May I congratulate the Minister on refusing to increase the speed limit beyond 70 mph? Does she agree that the figures show that when the speed limit is reduced in periods of fuel shortage and subsequently raised again there is a substantial effect on the accident rate? Although the percentage of accidents on motorways is smaller, due to the absence of traffic lights and other hazards, does the hon. Lady agree that when accidents occur they are severe and that important people are killed who are often not responsible for the dangers which exist? [HON. MEMBERS: "What about ordinary people?"]

Mrs. Chalker: In countries such as the United States, which have lower speed limits on interstate rural roads, there is even less compliance than there is here. On motorways and other roads we need greater consideration and thoughtfulness on the part of each driver for every other road user. I commend to the House the use at all times of the skills of defensive driving, which help motorists to anticipate the actions of others and thus to avoid accidents.

National Bus Company

12. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what were his reasons for rejecting proposals to split the National Bus Company into four private companies.

Mr. Ridley: I have not done so. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on Friday 30 November.

Mr. Powell: As I received this morning a two-page foolscap letter outlining the Minister's reply on Friday — such a lengthy reply to an oral question is most unusual—perhaps you, Mr. Speaker, will allow me time to ask at least five supplementary questions.

Mr. Speaker: No, I cannot do that.

Mr. Powell: In that case, I must content myself with at least one. The two-page letter to which I have referred outlines the Goverment's objectives. The reply that concerns me refers to "the disposal——"

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not quote.

Mr. Powell: The Minister suggests that the Government intend to dispose of the assets as going concerns. How will he dispose of going concerns that are not going — concerns that are going under — and how will that affect rural services? Is he aware that in my area bus routes are being curtailed and done away with because companies are going under?

Mr. Ridley: I thought it only courteous to send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the rather detailed answer that I gave to my hon. Friend in view of the fact that the hon. Gentleman had a question down for answer today. We believe that all the concerns are going concerns. Under the policy in the White Paper, those mainly engaged in uneconomic routes will be able to obtain subsidy after tender, or move into other areas if they wish to compete with other operators. That being so, I do not believe that any part of the National Bus Company need be non-viable.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend favourably consider a scheme to allow as many local managers and employees as possible to buy into their companies and so to share in the efficiency and profitability that will flow from bus deregulation?

Mr. Ridley: One of the conditions that I laid down for the disposal of NBC's assets was that managers and employees should be offered opportunities to acquire the whole of, or at least a stake in, the undertakings for which they worked. I very much hope that that will happen on a large scale.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Secretary of State aware that, however he chooses to split up the National Bus Company, the change will affect the orders for buses given to the National Bus Company at the moment, which in the main go to the Leyland National plant at Workington in my constituency? Is the Secretary of State aware that this arrangement will destroy the bus industry and that many people believe that it will be his Passchendaele? He will destroy himself and the credibility of his Department if he presses on with such ludicrous legislation.

Mr. Ridley: Over the past five or six years, the decline in the number of orders for buses has been very steep indeed. I do not have the figures here, but there has been a decline of about two thirds. It is time for us to change the regime under which the industry operates. If we do so, and if we try to find out what people want and allow bus companies to respond to the market, rather than imposing a pattern upon the market—the policy that has resulted in that disastrous decline in orders—there may even be an increase in demand in due course.

Mr. Stott: Might not the decline in ordering have some connection with the Government's withdrawal of bus grant?

What is the point of legislating to break up and to privatise the National Bus Company when the company and its subsidiaries have been successful and productive in their many areas of operation, primarily because of economies of scale in the areas of vehicle interchangeability, garage facilities, maintenance and so on? What is the point of legislating to destroy the principle of economies of scale?

Could the Secretary of State answer a further question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The same rules must apply to the Front Benches as to the Back Benches. We can allow only one question.

Mr. Ridley: The withdrawal of bus grant—a policy embarked on by the previous Administration—may have led to some decline in orders for buses, but the major part of the decline has been caused by high pricing in many prosperous areas, which has lost the bus industry much patronage. We want to reverse that decline, and we believe that a little competition will bring down fares and attract more passengers on to the buses.

I do not believe that, over most of the range of bus operations, it has been established or agreed that there are economies of scale. Indeed, the bus industry is one of the few industries in which economies of scale are of very little importance.

British Airports Authority

14. **Mr. Fry** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has come to any decision regarding the privatisation of the British Airports Authority; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): We are still considering how best to introduce private capital into the British Airports Authority.

Mr. Fry: I note my hon. Friend's reply, but I suggest to him that such a scheme would be a source of revenue for the Treasury and would be much easier to introduce than some of the other Department of Transport schemes for privatisation. Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the strong recommendation of most members of the Select Committee on Transport on the subject?

Mr. Spicer: I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. He was a member of that Select Committee, the report of which we are considering carefully. We have made no final decisions. There are several options which range from outright sale to extending franchising and to securing private capital for new development.

Rear Seat Belts

15. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the mandatory fitting of rear seat belts.

Mrs. Chalker: I discussed this matter with the Select Committee on Transport on 12 March and told it that I would take account of its views when it made its report, which I understand is due soon. I hope my hon. Friend will understand that it would be inappropriate for me to make a statement before seeing the Select Committee's report.

Mr. Knox: As the case for the mandatory use of front seat belts is now proven, does my hon. Friend agree that she should be moving a little faster on this issue?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend might care to refer to what I said to the Select Committee on 12 March 1983. I said that although I think that it is sensible to wear rear seat belts, I do not think that the House would accept the compulsory wearing of such seat belts now. I stand by what I said and await with interest the Select Committee's report.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Judges (Freemasons)

45. **Mr. Fraser** asked the Attorney-General if the Lord Chancellor collects information on how many judges are freemasons.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): No, Sir.

Mr. Fraser: On the basis that justice should be done and be seen to be done, does the hon. and learned Gentleman think it right that the judge and perhaps one of the parties to proceedings should be members of a secret society able to communicate that fact to each other, and members of a society to which perhaps one of the other parties to the proceedings—a woman or the victim of a crime—cannot belong? Does he agree that the healthiest thing under those circumstances is to have full disclosure?

The Solicitor-General: The important thing is that the judge should be loyal to his judicial oath, which is to do justice without fear or favour, affection or ill will. A judge

can discharge that important responsibility while being a freemason, which is a perfectly lawful thing to be, just as he could if he were a Forester, a Buffalo or an Oddfellow.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is it not a fact that no one, not even a judge, is without his private and personal loyalties and prejudices and that a judge puts such things aside when he acts in a public capacity? On that ground, are we not fortunate in the quality of our judiciary? Would it not be extremely harmful if there were to be some form of personal test of integrity?

The Solicitor-General: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is extremely important that judges should be representative of the community. They are. We have a judiciary that is much more impartial than suits the book of many of its detractors.

Mr. Winnick: Why does the hon. and learned Gentleman not recognise that there is some anxiety on this issue? If it was right for the police in London to be advised to give up their membership of such societies, why should the same not apply to those who decide on cases, such as judges?

The Solicitor-General: A judge who recognises a conflict of interest can stand down from any involvement with the case. A police officer cannot.

Building Defects (Liability)

46. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Attorney-General if he will report progress on the Lord Chancellor's Law Reform Committee's inquiry into the law of liability in relation to latent defects in buildings.

The Solicitor-General: My noble and learned Friend announced in another place on 29 November that he had that day presented to Parliament the 24th report of the Law Reform Committee on latent damage.

Mr. Chapman: I welcome the publication of this long-awaited report and its recommendation that there should be a limited period for action relating to latent effects, which everyone thought was the case until recent court cases. Can my hon. and learned Friend give an assurance that consultation with the construction industry will take place speedily? Can he give us an idea whether amending legislation will be introduced in this Session of Parliament?

The Solicitor-General: The Government will certainly give early consideration to the report. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is considering it now. As my hon. Friend fairly recognised, there was the Pirelli case in 1983, which was decided in another place and which caused an immense stir. It has occasioned some protraction of the committee's proceedings. I cannot give the undertaking for which my hon. Friend asked, but the report will receive urgent consideration.

Mr. John Morris: Given the importance of law reform is the staffing of the various law reform committees adequate, and has this part of the Lord Chancellor's Department suffered from the Government's commitment to cut the size of the Civil Service?

The Solicitor-General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the matters referred to the law reform committees are particularly difficult and need expert and unhurried consideration. I have no reason to suppose that staffing is less than adequate. It is a mistake to suppose that there is a deficiency just because some considerable time is taken in respect of individual inquiries.

Commercial Court (Resources)

47. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Attorney-General if the Lord Chancellor has any plans to increase resources in the commercial court, Royal Courts of Justice.

The Solicitor-General: The level of business in the commercial court has increased significantly in recent years, and is being kept under review, but there are no immediate plans for an increase in resources.

Mr. Ottaway: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that in view of the delays—in some cases up to two years—there is a case for increasing the number of judges and courts to deal with commercial cases, especially as he has said that this is an expanding area of the law which is tantamount to an invisible export?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend is right in his reference to the invisible export capacity of the commercial court. Delays have increased because the number of cases tried in the commercial list has greatly increased in recent years. In some ways, it is a victim of its own success. It is for the Lord Chief Justice to determine how many judges at any one time should be engaged on commercial work, but the Lord Chancellor is concerned to examine whether time savings can be made by any changes in the procedural rules.

Coal Industry Dispute

48. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Attorney-General how many prosecutions arising out of the miners' strike have been instituted by the Director of Public Prosecutions since 13 March under section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875; how many cases have been before the courts; and how many convictions have been secured.

The Solicitor-General: Proceedings under this section are instituted by the police and not by the director. Since 13 March, 251 people have been charged under this section. The offence does not have to be reported to the director, who therefore does not receive statistics on the progress of these cases.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the Solicitor-General for that answer. Is he aware that there is a widespread belief among the public that the leadership of the NUM is engaged in a nation-wide organised conspiracy, which is precisely what the 1875 Act was designed to deal with? Will he assure the House that the law enforcement agencies will be encouraged to search for the necessary evidence to bring the convictions which the public believe should be brought?

The Solicitor-General: In the eyes of the law and in the eyes of those who administer the law, any union leader rates exactly the same as any other individual. If evidence justifying proceedings becomes available to chief constables, appropriate action will be taken. I have absolutely no reason to believe that chief constables are any less astute in seeking out evidence, where they believe this offence to have been commi[illegible] than they are in respect of any other criminal offence.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Have any of the powers available to the DPP or chief constables during the mining dispute proved to be unsatisfactory for dealing with the problems that have arisen?

The Solicitor-General: I understand that each of the chief constables in the areas affected by this dispute has assured the Home Secretary that he seeks no change in the content of the criminal law.

Sir William Clark: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that there must be some evidence that the NUM leadership knows of this violence? As the NUM is paying the pickets out of union funds, when it can get its hands on the money, is that not tacit evidence that the leadership is condoning, if not encouraging, this violence on the picket lines?

The Solicitor-General: There must be evidence of the commission of an offence, including a conspiracy, before there is any reasonable prospect of a conviction. Those who make up the massive crowds that we have experienced during this dispute are at best demonstrators and at worst rioters. As to cases already before the courts, whether any individual is guilty of any offence depends on the evidence against him personally.

Mr. John Morris: Has any policy guidance been given either by the Attorney-General to the director or by the director to the chief constables on this issue?

The Solicitor-General: No, Sir.

Solicitors (Complaints)

49. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Attorney-General if he has any plans to meet the Law Society to discuss the handling of complaints against solicitors.

The Solicitor-General: No, but it is intended this Session to introduce legislation to give effect to the Law Society's proposals to improve and extend its disciplinary powers.

Mr. Dubs: Is the Minister aware that there is still serious anxiety about the lack of sanctions against solicitors and that this month the legal action group drew attention to a case, which the Law Society refused to investigate against a solicitor in North Bedfordshire, in which the solicitor had advised his client to commit a criminal offence? The north Bedfordshire borough council and the court refused to do anything about it. How can the public interest be protected in such instances?

The Solicitor-General: The professional purposes committee of the Law Society, which will be augmented to include lay representatives and solicitors who are not members of the society's council, will be given powers to order a solicitor whose work has fallen short of the appropriate standard to remit or repay part or all of his costs or to do specified work at his own expense. The society will be given wider powers to compel the production of case files and to impose conditions on a solicitor's practising certificate. A number of other improvements will also be made in the existing arrangements. It can be fairly said that the Law Society has greatly increased the amount of attention that it has given in the past to anxieties of the sort that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Humanitarian Aid

50. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes he has made, or expects to make, in respect of allocations of resources for humanitarian aid in the financial year 1984-85.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): Following my visit to Ethiopia, I am arranging for two extra grain conveyors and 20 grain mills to be sent to Addis as quickly as possible. I am also arranging for 18,000 blankets to be airlifted. The total cost of those extra items will be £215,000.

I am arranging for 5,000 tonnes of grain to be supplied through Oxfam for delivery at the end of December.

I am also arranging for 10,000 tonnes of grain to be shipped to Ethiopia through the World Food Programme. That includes our contribution of 5,000 tonnes to the International Emergency Food Reserve, which I have directed be used for Ethiopian relief. The total cost of this further 15,000 tonnes of grain will be about £2·75 million.

I am also providing for further help to go to the Sudan. A sum of £348,000 is being made available to Oxfam for relief supplies, and other requests are being urgently considered.

After this I shall have allocated a total of about £41 million to emergency aid for disaster and refugee relief in the current financial year. The comparable original provision from the Main Estimates presented to Parliament in March was £15·6 million.

Mr. Spearing: I thank the Minister for that information. Does he agree that the allocation of £40 million, however welcome, is large compared with the cut of £4 million which he made last year to the Tropical Development and Research Institute? To prevent famine, would it not be a good idea for the Government to restore those cuts and give one-tenth of the sum that they are now spending to research, which this country's experience is well placed to execute?

Mr. Raison: The TDRI is a valuable institution. I believe that it will continue to do excellent work under the new system. I must point out to the House that we provide considerable quantities of aid of an important nature to agricultural development in Africa.

Mr. Stuart Holland: While I welcome what the Government have been able to do, will the Minister tell the House what parts of Tigre or Eritrea he visited when he was in Ethiopia? I understand that he visited Mekele. Was he able to visit the surrounding areas? Did he raise with the Ethiopian authorities the fact that 85 per cent. of those areas are not in their control, and would they agree to a ceasefire for a safe passage of food to the key affected areas?

Mr. Raison: I visited Mekele, but it was not possible to visit the surrounding areas. As I have said before, the right way to ensure that aid goes to the rebel-held areas is by working through voluntary agencies, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross, rather than by politicising the matter.

Sir John Farr: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking the initiative and going to Ethiopia to see

what is needed there. I assure him that if he can make arrangements to get some of western Europe's big cereal surplus to Ethiopia as quickly as possible, regardless of cost, and by slashing red tape, he will earn the gratitude of everyone in the country.

Mr. Raison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have been working hard within the European Community to ensure that, within the allocation of food aid, the highest priority goes to areas such as Ethiopia, where the need is desperate.

Mr. Alton: Notwithstanding the Minister's helpful statement, does he agree that he should now reconsider his admission of 10 days ago that the total amount of aid for next year will be reduced by 2 to 3 per cent.? Does he accept that the average member of the British public would rather see at least existing levels of aid maintained than money being given away in tax cuts?

Mr. Raison: I believe that with the level of aid that is available to me next year I shall be able to maintain an effective aid programme and, in particular, deal with the kind of humanitarian circumstances that we are facing at present.

UN Disaster Relief Office

51. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the role played by the United Nations disaster relief office.

Mr. Raison: I am satisfied that the United Nations disaster relief office, with support from the UN system, is effectively carrying out its responsibilities for the mobilisation and co-ordination of international emergency relief to disaster-stricken areas.

Mr. Chapman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he satisfied with the role of that United Nations agency in tackling the famine in Ethiopia? Will he sympathetically consider representations that may be made to the effect that that office should have its role and resources extended, and increased if necessary, to deal with other major catastrophes that may take place in future?

Mr. Raison: UNDRO is a monitoring, advisory and co-ordinating body with a small organisation, which is not designed to run a major famine relief operation. It is important to have effective co-ordination in places such as Ethiopia, and for that reason we support the action of the United Nations Secretary-General in appointing a special co-ordinator in the form of Mr. Jansson to operate from Addis.

Mr. Dalyell: As transport is crucial, what are the Government doing to help with the provision of British-made trucks?

Mr. Raison: Transport is crucial. We have allocated a good proportion of our aid to Ethiopia to road transport as well as to the Royal Air Force Hercules operation. We are providing new Land Rovers and spares for those that are already there.

Aid Programme

52. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the Government's present level of overseas aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: Representations have been received from hon. Members and from members of the public. On 22 November during the debate on overseas aid I confirmed to the House that the net aid programme for 1985-86 would remain at the previously planned and published level of £1,130 million.

Mr. Parry: Is it not shameful that the Government's contributions to the Third world are less than half the United Nations recommended level? When do the Government intend to implement policies for the poorest of the poor, and why do we lag so far behind our European partners, particularly West Germany, France and the Netherlands, in providing aid to the African continent?

Mr. Raison: Our recent performance has been close to the overall OECD donor average. We have been behind France and Germany, but we are ahead of the United States, Japan and Italy. Our record is by no means bad.

Mr. Latham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us on the Conservative Benches will welcome the statement that he made earlier and the positive extra arrangements that he announced? Although this is a subject on which we can never do enough, he at any rate is showing a great commitment.

Mr. Raison: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister send an urgent message today to the Prime Minister at the Common Market summit in Dublin telling her that millions of people in this country, from schoolchildren to old-age pensioners, are outraged by the fact that the Common Market is holding on to about 7 million tonnes of surplus grain while millions of people face starvation in Ethiopia and other African countries? The Minister's announcement today of 15,000 tonnes of food aid amounts to about only one week's requirement for the people of Ethiopia. Would it not therefore be appropriate for Britain to be seen for once to be taking the lead by urging the immediate release of all that surplus grain to help the people of Ethiopia?

Mr. Raison: This topic will crop up at the summit conference in Dublin. As I have already told the House, we have been pressing that the European Community should give the highest priority to the use of its food aid for dealing with disasters and famine such as this. I do not believe that, when the history of this affair comes to be written, the European Community's part will prove to have been negligible. I think that it will be to the contrary.

Mr. Bowen Wells: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the generosity and timely nature of the aid to Ethiopia. In view of the figures that he has given the House, will he bring forward in his next Spring Supplementary Estimates additional sums to recompense the aid budget for risen overseas costs and for the additional programme carried out in Ethiopia?

Mr. Raison: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's kind remarks. I explained in the debate the other day that what I had to say about risen costs applied to the other parts of the Foreign Office budget and not to the overseas aid programme. Risen costs are not the problem for the aid programme that they are for other parts of the Foreign and Commonwealth budget, and in particular only a small part of our expenditure has to take place in dollars.

British Telecom

3.31 pm

The Minister for Information Technology (Mr. Geoffrey Pattie): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement to the House about the allocation of shares in British Telecommunications plc.

First, on employees and pensioners, approximately 184,000 employees out of an elegible total of just over 230,000 responded to the matching offer by putting their own money into the company. Of these, more than 62,000 employees together with 25,000 BT pensioners applied for shares over and above the matching offer. I welcome this impressive commitment to BT's future by its own work force. Including those employees who have taken up the free offer alone, some 222,000 of all BT's employees—over 96 per cent. of those eligible — have become shareholders in the company.

Secondly, on the general public, we received more than 2 million applications for the 1,000 million shares available. Almost half of these applications were for 200 shares or 400 shares. The Government have decided to give priority to smaller applications, and all applications for 200 and 400 shares are therefore being met in full.

Applications for 800 and 1,200 shares will receive 500 and 600 shares respectively. Applicants for higher numbers up to a maximum of 100,000 shares will receive 800 shares. No allocation will be made to applicants for over 100,000 shares. As a result of these arrangements, BT commences its role as a public quoted company with very substantially more shareholders than any company in this country.

The arrangements for institutional priority applicants and overseas markets are as I told the House on 16 November. The offers of BT shares in Canada, Japan and the United States are now taking place.

British Telecom has now been sucessfully privatised. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish success to Sir George Jefferson, to BT's management and to its employees, who have shown, by their commitment to the company, their confidence in its future success.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does the Minister realise that BT shares are now trading at 95p, a premium of 45p, or 90 per cent., on the 50p down payment? On this basis, does the Minister realise that the Government have presided over the biggest give away in British commercial history? Is the Minister aware of the assessment in today's *Daily Telegraph* that for every penny above the offer price at which the shares traded, the Government lose £30 million that they should have received? On this basis, has not today's so-called success for the Government meant giving, as a bonus to 2 million of us, £1,350 million that really belongs to all of us?

Is the hon. Gentleman really surprised that employees have accepted offers of two free shares for every share purchased?

When claiming success in attracting 2 million shareholders does not the hon. Gentleman realise that it is possible to sell almost anything at half price but that in this case it is taxpayers' assets that are being sold short?

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): The right hon. Gentleman said that the flotation would be under-subscribed.

Mr. Williams: No, I did not. I prophesied that it was under-priced from the start.

Why did not the Government try to head off the speculative hysteria that we have seen on the market today by transferring to the United Kingdom market the 400 million shares allocated to Japan, the United States of America and Canada, a solution that was available to them? Why, after all, should foreigners enjoy the double bonus of buying under-valued BT shares with under-valued £1 notes?

How did the Government's advisers get it so wrong? Before the launch the Opposition said that the Government would price it too low. How did the Government get it so wrong? It has been five times over-subscribed. A 45p premium is not miscalculation: it is criminal incompetence.

Mr. Pattie: I seem to recall reading in the report of the proceedings of the Committee stage of the Bill several occasions when the Committee was told that no one would subscribe to this enterprise. It is well known that on these occasions the Opposition have two folders, one marked "rip-off" and the other marked "failure". They have taken out the "rip-off" folder today and are trying to suggest, for example, that 184,000 employee shareholders of British Telecom represent some kind of failure and, what is more, that we should have allocated more of the foreign shares to the domestic market. The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to appreciate that it was essential for the proper standing of this flotation to have a 13·7 per cent. allocation of shares to the international market.

On a day that has seen nearly 1 million small shareholders, who are not stags, deciding to invest their own money and 184,000 employees of British Telecom who have voted with their cheque books, I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that this can only be seen as a massive gesture of defiance to the Labour party.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Does not my hon. Friend think that the investment in success by British Telecom employees is not only to be welcomed but to be considered at variance with their trade unions, which campaigned consistently against that investment? Will my hon. Friend also seek an assurance from the Opposition that no right hon. or hon. Member on their Benches invested in that success?

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am aware of the trade union advice to which he referred. The House is waiting to hear an assurance from the Labour Opposition that they would be foolish enough to go in for something like renationalisation in the future.

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): Does the Minister believe that the shares would have sold if they had been 10p dearer?

Mr. Pattie: That is for the market to decide.

Mr. Hanley: I congratulate my hon. Friend on this superb issue, which has brought into the property-owning democracy 1 million peopie who have not owned shares before. However, may I introduce one small fear? One million people have applied for shares, never having done so before, yet this morning I heard that many applications had been rejected because, instead of using the word "Yes" under

"Telephone bill vouchers or share bonuses,"

some people had put a tick in the box, showing clearly their assent to one or the other, and those have been called incorrect applications. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that there will be no rejections on this ground?

Mr. Pattie: I cannot give my hon. Friend that assurance. The applications had to be strictly assessed and scrutinised. I assure my hon. Friend that I have looked again at the way in which applications were listed and the criteria that were set. If people were careful about filling in the application forms, they should not have made those mistakes.

Mr. John Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Is the Minister aware that the test will be not whether employees take free shares and cut-price shares but whether they keep those shares or sell them at the first opportunity? Is he also aware the employees feel that this offer of money for nothing is no compensation for the loss of job security that they will suffer under privatisation?

Mr. Pattie: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is offering advice on whether employees ought to sell their shares. Individual retail subscribers were asked to say yes in the voucher box or the share bonus box. The vast proportion opted for share bonuses. As those will not be freely available for three years, that seems to suggest that people want to stay with the offer. I am sure that the vast majority will do so.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Has my hon. Friend noted that, on previous privatisation issues where shares have been left with the underwriters, the Opposition have derided the exercise as a flop, but on this occasion, when shares have been taken up enthusiastically by the public, the Opposition deride the exercise as a rip-off? Does my hon. Friend agree that, while there will inevitably be a shake-out in share ownership in favour of the institutions over the next few weeks, this privatisation marks a major increase in the number of shareholders in this country? In congratulating my hon. Friend, I am sure that all Conservative Members will also wish to thank our right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), the former Minister for Information Technology, and our hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I particularly echo the appreciation that he expressed of my ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Will the Minister confirm that a rake-off of about £100 million has gone to City institutions that engaged in this casino-like exercise? Will he tell the House how many of the 3 million to 4 million on the dole sought to get hold of shares? Can he say why I and another 50 million-odd people who were shareholders are no longer shareholders but are expected to foot the bills? What advantage is there for the consumer in this exercise?

Mr. Pattie: The advantage to the consumer is already becoming manifest, in improved performance by BT. Any consumer who has dealings with BT can see that the possibility of competition from Mercury has already had a dramatic effect on BT's consumer relations, because it knows that it no longer has an automatic monopoly. That will be to the benefit of consumers. As for shareholders, the advantage of having 1 million new shareholders ought to speak for itself.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Opposition are really asking how the Government dare be so successful in the privatisation of BT?

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Anybody can give something away at half price.

Mr. Grylls: Does my hon. Friend agree that the privatisation is the most massive leap in spreading real public ownership—by individual members of the public, which is the only effective public ownership—ever seen in our history? The fact that 184,000 employees have taken up shares is a big vote of confidence in the future of BT and a slap in the face for the Labour party, which is, yet again, out of touch with public opinion.

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Despite what the Post Office unions and the Opposition said, 184,000 people have done something that they did not have to do and were not cajoled into doing. They took out their cheque books and made applications for the shareholding. They recognise, even if the Opposition do not, that this is a highly successful enterprise with which to be involved, and they wish it every success.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Is it not just those small applications and allocations which will become the speculative objective of the money merchants in the City?

Mr. Pattie: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but, as I said earlier, a large proportion of people in that category have applied for share bonuses. As they have to hold shares for three years to qualify for those bonuses, it does not appear that the pattern suggested by the hon. Gentleman will develop.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is my hon. Friend aware of the hypocrisy of the Labour party which, in the summer, was gleefully predicting a complete flop but which is now having to eat its words in the face of a remarkable success story? Will he consider with ministerial colleagues the implications of a new development in mass share flotation—a development for the first time of share shops within stores, and so on, which will bring home the realities and benefits of share ownership to a wide public for the first time?

Mr. Pattie: My hon. Friend is right to identify the wider significance of this day's events. I know that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is listening carefully to what is being said.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that any old fool, including a Minister, can give away a national asset at half price? That is what has happened. How can the Government say to the country that they want to reduce student grants and raise water charges when at the same time they can afford to give away £1,000 million in speculative gains to City speculators? Should not that matter now be dealt with by the Committee of Public Accounts in so far as a full investigation is needed into the Government's negligence?

Mr. Pattie: As I have had occasion to tell the hon. Gentleman before, in this case the real advantage to the nation is the possibility of over 1 million people being able to own shares in a great international public corporation. That is not giving things away.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): In view of the carping and ignorant criticisms of the Opposition as a

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

result of the successful share issue, will my hon. Friend take steps to put BT well out of the range of the doctrinaire renationalisers opposite by, in years to come, selling off a further percentage of the shares so that more trade unionists, workers and small shareholders can benefit?

Mr. Pattie: I note what my hon. Friend says. He will be aware from his close reading of the prospectus that further sales will not be possible before April 1988.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Has the Minister no regret at all that he under-priced the shares, or is the truth that the whole thing was a massive bribe so that he could then pretend that wider shareholding had been achieved, although it will be only transitory? Ought he not to say that he regrets that so much money, belonging to the British public, has been given away through this enterprise?

Mr. Pattie: No, certainly not. As several of my hon. Friends have pointed out, if the hon. Gentleman had been able to say that we had been left with a lot of shares on our hands—in other words if there had been a flop—he would have been rising to his feet saying that the House had been warned for months past that the issue would not go. Once the flotation is a success, the rip-off argument is used, and that is not the case.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): Is the Minister aware that on 29 November 1983 in Committee the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said that the Minister would

"dispose of at least £3,500 million" — [*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 29 November 1983; c.*990*.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must paraphrase, not quote.

Mr. Hayward: I apologise, Mr. Speaker.

Is my hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central referred to selling off £3·5 billion worth of assets and in fact my hon. Friend has achieved £500 million more than the Labour party thought that he would fail to achieve?

Mr. Pattie: I seem to remember that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) went on to say that nobody would want to buy the shares. He does not appear to be a great forecaster in such matters.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the Minister surprised at the price? If not, why did he sell so cheap? If he is, does he retain confidence in those who advised him?

Mr. Pattie: It is not a matter of being surprised. As the hon. Gentleman will know, if one makes a price, as we did on 15 November, we have to do so in the expectation of what might obtain in the intervening two and a half weeks. It is interesting to note that at that time commentators said that they thought that it was a fair price and that it was at the upper end of the expected range.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): In congratulating my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on this great success in getting the money in, will he bear in mind that it might be a good idea, as a thank offering, to help the Secretary of State for Education and Science to deal with the minimum problem that he has on student grants out of the profits?

Mr. Pattie: I do not think that that is properly a matter for me.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I had always thought that the people owned BT anyway, before it was given away by the Government. I am glad that mention has been made of the Minister for Local Government, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), because on the same day as the Minister for Information Technology has given away £1,000 million of public money, we are to discuss a Bill that is supposed to save £100 million a year. In one day, one Minister has given away 10 years' savings that another Minister is trying to gain by destroying local government.

Mr. Pattie: The House will not want me to explain the difference between the nature of the individual shareholding that has been made possible today and the previous so-called public involvement in British Telecom.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is a very important debate to follow and more than 50 hon. Members have so far indicated their wish to take part in it. I shall take two more questions from Conservative Members and then call the Opposition Front Bench spokesman.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Although I congratulate my hon. Friend on this success, will he bear in mind for the future the fact that many smaller shareholders cannot deal in the shares, because, although they know the number that they may get, they cannot be certain until they receive their allotment letters? Will he bear that in mind for future privatisations?

Mr. Pattie: My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and I will note what my hon. Friend has said. My hon. Friend will be aware, of course, that all the applicants for 200 and 400 shares will receive their allotments in full, so by definition all of them—they number about 1 million—will know immediately.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): As 95 per cent. of BT's employees have taken up shares, does that not knock on the head the allegation of the Post Office unions that the work force was opposed to the sale and, in turn, mean that the new privatised company will start life with one of the largest proportions of employee shareholders of any business in Western Europe? Indeed, should we not applaud the extent of wider share ownership that this privatisation has brought about?

Mr. Pattie: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and correct him on only one minor detail. According to our calculations the figure is 96 per cent.

Mr. Williams: The Minister still has not answered the fundamental question—precisely how did he and his advisers get the offer price 45p wrong? That is not a small but an enormous difference. Will he answer that simple question?

Mr. Pattie: For a start, we do not know that the offer price was wrong. There may well be buyers entering the market who are putting on pressure to see whether there are any sellers. However, for obvious reasons, there seem to be very few sellers at the moment. As I have said, on 15 November we had to make a judgment as to what a fair price was. Commentators thought that it was a fair price at that time, and so do we today.

CND Members (Bail Conditions)

3.53 pm

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Marylebone stipendiary magistrate imposed bail conditions on 12 members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, banning them from entering Parliament and Whitehall, and obviously the Palace of Westminster, for four months. The defendants had pleaded not guilty to charges of highway obstruction.

I do not comment upon the charges, as they are sub judice. Indeed, the House is aware that I am not exactly a supporter of CND. However, I am concerned that a prohibition should be laid on people—one of whom is a constituent of mine — as a bail condition, that will prevent them from seeing or lobbying their Members of Parliament at Westminster. Obviously, this is not a matter of parliamentary privilege, but surely it is a denial of the democratic right of citizens of this country—who have not been convicted of any charge — to meet their Members of Parliament in the Palace of Westminster.

As I have emphasised, my constituent has not been convicted of any charge. It is perfectly true that she can see me in Cambridge or anywhere in London other than in the Palace of Westminster or its environs. I hope that you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that I have raised a serious matter that is deserving of your attention and that of the House, as the guardian of the rights of Members of Parliament and their constituents. Although I do not expect an immediate ruling, I should be grateful if you would give serious consideration to this matter.

Mr. Speaker: I am not certain whether this is a matter for me. Since the hon. Member has raised this point, I shall, of course, look into it and get in touch with him.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the five motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Companies (Share Premium Account) Regulations 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Inter-American Development Bank (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft International Lead and Zinc Study Group (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft EUTELSAT (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Amendment and Temporary Provisions Regulations 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the matter of Transport in Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for their consideration.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Local Government Bill (Hybridity)

3.56 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about the potentially hybrid nature of the Local Government Bill. As I explained to you privately, Mr. Speaker, I apologise for raising this matter at this late stage. I raise this point at this time not deliberately but simply because a Bill of this size and complexity has taken a great deal of time to scrutinise since its publication and because counsel's opinion on this issue was received only at lunch time today.

The metropolitan counties, acting together, sought counsel's advice and have been advised that there is a prima facie case on the hybrid aspects of the Bill, specifically affecting clauses 24 and 39 and schedule 10. Three substantive groups of points arise. I seek your guidance in this matter, Mr. Speaker, but I should be grateful if you would agree to meet my right hon. Friend the Opposition Chief Whip, my hon. Friends, myself and counsel to discuss this issue. I raise this matter quite deliberately before the Second Reading of the Bill has begun.

Mr. Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Member for having spoken to me while I was in the Chair, and giving me notice that he would raise this matter. I shall of course listen to anything he has to say. I have been through the Bill with the greatest care to consider the possibility of hybridity. I shall listen to what the hon. Member says, but any action that takes place afterwards will be a matter for the House and not for me. We must proceed to debate the Bill today.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State to move the Second Reading, I say to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Because of the large number of hon. Members who have indicated their wish to speak—more than 50—I intend to apply the limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. I ask those hon. Members who are called before 7 o'clock and after 9 o'clock—this debate can continue until midnight—to bear that factor in mind. In view of the pressure, this is a day for short speeches.

3.58 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill will abolish the Greater London Council and the six metropolitan county councils and devolve almost all of their service functions to the London boroughs and to the metropolitan districts.

To understand the need for change one must look at the present structure. Taking London, the Herbert commission's report proposed, and in the London Government Act 1963 Parliament enacted, that the boroughs were to be the primary units of local government. The GLC was made solely responsible only for ambulances, sewerage and sewage disposal, the fire service, waste disposal, structure planning and some major roads. The Inner London education authority provided education for one third of London's children.

The GLC was also given a strategic housing role, and took over the LCC housing estates, but the boroughs were established as the main housing authorities. The GLC inherited some of the LCC's open spaces. In 1970 it acquired responsibility for London Transport.

Since then, ambulances have gone to the health service, sewers and sewage disposal to the water authority and, thanks to the work of Lord Plummer and Sir Horace Cutler, most of the housing estates have gone to the boroughs. Under last Session's Act the GLC lost its responsibility for public transport. Therefore, virtually all the local government services affecting people's daily lives are now with the boroughs.

The new system established in 1965 never really settled down. The creation of powerful boroughs, the sharing of major functions between the tiers, the lack of a clearly defined role for the GLC, all made for conflict and confusion. To the GLC, Greater London is a single administrative area to be run from the centre. To most Londoners London is a series of separate local areas with very diverse characteristics. Camden has little in common with Croydon; Hackney has little in common with Harrow; Redbridge has little in common with Richmond.

I remind the House that it was a former Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, himself responsible for the creation of the London boroughs, who said in 1898, after the creation of the London county council:

"We might have obtained a much more efficient machine if we had been content to look upon London as what it is, not as one great municipality, but as an aggregate of municipalities".

Contrary to the GLC propaganda, the GLC does not run London; the GLC never has run London; the GLC has never been more than the minor partner in the provision of local government services in London. The major partners are, and since 1965 have been, the London boroughs.

Turning to the metropolitan county councils, no fewer than 33 of the 36 metropolitan districts encompass former county boroughs, they have always resented the loss of powers to weak and ineffective upper-tier authorities, people have never identified with the metropolitan counties. Of course, the metropolitan counties have run some services well, but that is not the point. They simply do not have enough major functions to justify their existence as a separate directly elected tier of government.

Most hon. Members, in all parts of the House, now agree that there has to be change. The argument, therefore, is about what change. Do we, as some suggest, give the GLC and MCCs increased powers? Do we keep them but with reduced powers? Or do we abolish them?

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No. Mr. Speaker, you said that large numbers of hon. Members wished to speak, so I shall press ahead.

Some have argued for more power for the upper tiers and for turning them into a regional tier of government. Some hanker for a so-called "strategic authority". The word "strategic" here means not just land use planning, but social and economic planning and social engineering—all of which are so dear to Socialist hearts.

We have also heard—and we shall hear further—similar views from the alliance. Mr. Livingstone also thinks that his authority should be given wider powers. What strange bedfellows. Leaving that group aside, I see little support for a form of government which would rightly be seen as sucking power upwards away from the people. "Regional government" has always been a minority cult in England, so we reject that view.

More vocal are the arguments in all areas, especially in London, in favour of keeping an upper tier, but in a weaker, slimmed-down form. Most such schemes, when examined closely—we have examined many of them closely—turn out to be little different from the present authorities. Talk of a "head office for the boroughs", a phrase that I have heard recently, has an ominous ring.

Where would it lead? Mr. Livingstone is brutally frank. He said that he would settle for a GLC with 80 per cent. of the present powers because a future Labour Government, he says, could easily give it back the other 20 per cent.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Quite right.

Mr. Jenkin: I look forward to hearing the Labour party's plans. I expect that we shall be told—or perhaps we shall not.

Anyone who favours a slimmed-down upper tier for its own sake has to tell us what such weak authorities would actually do. If they had substantive functions, how could they avoid the duplications, conflict and bureaucracy of which it is the Bill's intention to rid us? If they had no substantive functions, what sort of people would waste

their time serving on them? That is the dilemma facing those who argue for some new elected pan-London body. Of course, the Government will listen to the arguments but I have yet to hear a convincing case which resolves that dilemma.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend explain what is so different between London and the other capital cities in Western Europe that London should not have a city-wide elected body? Our provincial cities are still to have city-wide local authorities. What is so special about London?

Mr. Jenkin: I am sure that my hon. Friend has read the Institute of Local Government Studies report and its useful examination of municipal government in a number of cities. The report shows that there is no uniformity of practice. Systems vary from having no upper tier authority to having two elected upper tier authorities. There is no parallel between what might happen in other cities with different traditions and what happens here in London, which has a long and strong tradition of strong borough government.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is not the real truth about the Bill that it is about getting rid of seven Labour councils, that it will badly damage services and that it is a blow to democracy? Why does the Secretary of State try to throw dust in our eyes?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall deal with each of those matters in my speech.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the arguments that he has adduced so far could apply equally well to both the United States and Australia having no federal Government? Would that not be particularly ridiculous for Australia, the population of which is about the same as Greater London's?

Mr. Jenkin: We are talking about local government, not national government.

The third option is abolition. That is the one that the Government have unhesitatingly chosen. We believe that local government should be local. We see no place for a two-tier structure in London, or in the metropolitan counties. That was why, in our 1983 manifesto, we committed ourselves to abolishing those councils. As I said a moment ago, we have yet to hear which of those options the Opposition would choose. Why have they been so shifty and evasive? *[Interruption.]* Is it because they know that no Government would wish to live with a structure which would inevitably lead to the sort of conflict that we have seen? I have no doubt that they know that a slimmed-down upper tier would be seen as a rather futile device. Is the reason that perhaps they actually agree with much of the policy but have been afraid to say so?

Not all Opposition Members have been so ambivalent. After the last election, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) wrote:

"I do not intend to lift one legislative finger to stop the return of single tier local government in Birmingham."

We shall watch carefully what the hon. Gentleman does with his fingers in the next few months.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): As my right hon. Friend is so rightly suspicious of some of the devious designs of Labour Members, why is he taking to himself powers that he would not be happy for a successor Secretary of State of a different political persuasion to have? Why are there so many reserve powers in the Bill?

Mr. Jenkin: Later in my speech I shall deal briefly with my hon. Friend's point. My hon. Friends and I will be happy to deal with the details at later stages of the Bill.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who is not with us today, told a Labour local government conference in 1981 that he wanted a single tier of local government in London. He said that the present system was a recipe for conflict. He went on to say:

"We shouldn't regard the existence of the GLC as sacrosanct. In my view it is an enormous bureaucracy which has a dubious role to play."

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) will no doubt give his views to the House in due course. He has carefully avoided — indeed, resisted — giving any commitment to restoring the metropolitan counties and has taken some stick from his hon. Friends on that account. But he apparently has a commitment to recreating some kind of "elected authority for London". We wait with interest to hear the details of his proposals.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I must press on with my speech.

I will now deal with the Bill and with our proposals for the new structure. I want to dispel some myths. There was a suggestion, bandied about before the Bill was published, that it would be no more than an enabling Bill. Now that it is before the House, we can see that virtually all the substantive changes are dealt with in the Bill itself. Of course, there are — as there always have to be in legislation—order-making powers, but in this case they generally follow closely the precedents in the 1963 and 1972 Acts.

It is not a Bill to transfer wholesale local authority functions to central Government. Based on this year's budgeted spending by the upper tier authorities, only about 5 per cent. of the GLC's service functions will pass to Government Departments or agencies, including flood protection, some roads, historic buildings and major arts activities. About 95 per cent. of the GLC's service functions will be devolved directly to the London boroughs and the joint fire authority.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Jenkin: In the metropolitan counties, virtually all service functions will go to the districts and to the joint authorities.

There is no deep-laid plot aimed at a central Government takeover. Two clauses in particular — clauses 80 and 93 — have led the Opposition to formulate their conspiracy theory.

Clause 80 enables the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Transport or the Secretary of State for Education and Science to control the manpower of the joint authorities and the new ILEA for a transitional period of three years. Whatever the Opposition may say, I do not believe that the ratepayers would forgive us if we allowed a replay of the empire-building which happened after 1965 and 1974. Transitional controls — and clause 80 is transitional—are entirely justified to prevent that.

Clause 93 has also been seized upon by the Opposition. They have pronounced it to be "breathtaking" and

[Mr. Jenkin]

"unprecedented". They have over-reacted and they are wrong. The powers in clause 93 are precedented. Clauses in more or less identical form are in section 84 of the London Government Act 1963 and in section 254 of the Local Government Act 1972. Much more important, the orders which can be made under clause 93 are limited to matters that are

"incidental, consequential, transitional, or supplementary"

to the general purposes of the Bill. They could not be used to alter radically the main provisions of the Bill or subsequently to give effect to different policies from those in the Bill. In particular, they could not be used to take the joint authorities out of local authority control.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: Finally—this answers the point made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) — the Bill is not the end of local democracy in London and the metropolitan areas. Yes, 693 upper-tier councillors will disappear, but borough and district councillors, a majority of whom will come up for re-election in 1986, will run local government in those areas—4,395 of them.

Mr. Leigh: Before my right hon. Friend leaves this very important part of his speech, will he say something to those Conservative Members who feel that the GLC should be abolished in its present form, but that the residue of its powers, which, by their London-wide nature—main roads, for example — cannot be given to the boroughs, should be vested in a slim-line, directly elected, democratic body?

Mr. Jenkin: I have no doubt that that matter will be dealt with in detail in Committee. I did say that those who argue for such a course are caught on the horns of a dilemma. If such an upper-tier body had substantive powers, inevitably it would be in conflict with the lower tier. If it had no substantive powers, what would be the point of having it? That is an argument that we shall no doubt hear more about during the debates on the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I must press on. There are many hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate.

Part I of the Bill provides that the seven authorities will cease to exist at midnight on 31 March 1986. Part II, together with schedules 1 to 8, contains the arrangements for transferring most of the present upper-tier functions to the boroughs and districts.

Among the powers devolved to the boroughs and districts is structure planning.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way.

The Bill provides a new and simpler system of unitary development plans. It also gives increased freedom to local government, for there will no longer be a requirement for the plans — which will incorporate elements of current structure plans—to be approved by me.

Of course, there will remain the need for an overview of land use planning issues in the metropolitan areas. To meet that, I shall where necessary give planning guidance —under existing powers—to the boroughs and districts. That guidance will not be dreamt up in Marsham street. In the metropolitan counties I shall want to call conferences which will bring together all the planning authorities to discuss strategic issues and to produce draft guidance. In London I shall be advised by a planning commission established under the Bill.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: In all areas there will be an opportunity for public comment.

Parts III and IV establish the new authorities: A directly-elected Inner London education authority — a change from our original proposals that has been widely welcomed—and joint authorities to run the fire brigade and civil defence in London and fire, police and passenger transport in each metropolitan county.

Joint authorities are no strangers to local government. It was the Labour party which established passenger transport authorities in Tyne and Wear, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the west midlands and they were widely regarded as effective. There are also seven combined police authorities in England, and it is a matter of history that four of those were created by the Labour Government between 1964 and 1970. Neither the passenger transport authorities nor the combined police authorities have ever been regarded as quangos, and there is no reason why they should be so regarded. Nor will the new joint authorities be quangos. On the contrary, being made up of elected councillors appointed by the borough and district councils, they will be, and will clearly be seen to be, part of the local government system in those areas.

The Government are, of course, well aware that some district authorities would like to asume full responsibility for some or all of those services.

Mr. Harry Cowans (Tyne Bridge): Name them.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman can get the answer to that from his hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr.

The Bill therefore provides, in clause 40, for a power by order for individual authorities to take over the running of those services where they can make a good case to the appropriate Secretary of State for so doing.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): As one of those who originally helped to set up the metropolitan counties, may I ask my right hon. Friend please to answer the following question? Clause 40 provides power for him —no doubt in consultation with the Home Secretary—to break up the metropolitan police forces. Will he give an undertaking that he will embark on no such thing?

Mr. Jenkin: It is a power for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to respond to a request from one or more of the metropolitan district councils if they wish to take over part of one of the joint services. The Government have made it clear that such a break-up would not take place unless a case was made showing that it would be effective and efficient in the area concerned and would not have undesirable consequences for other areas, so I cannot give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No, I have given way a great deal.

Some authorities are anxious to use that power, but the discretion rests with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in the case of the police, and with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in the case of transport.

Mr. Rees: This is an important matter. Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: Part V deals with the arts and voluntary organisations——

Mr. Rees *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way. He is a former Home Secretary.

Mr. Jenkin: Part V deals with the arts and voluntary organisations. Again, for the most part, the functions will pass to the boroughs and districts, but there are a few cases in which special arrangements are needed. In particular the south bank complex in London will, after abolition, be run by the Arts Council. Many people in the arts world will welcome this move as the GLC, under its present administration, has shown itself quite unfitted to run this important national institution. In addition, we intend to establish a new trustee body under clause 44 to run art galleries and museums on Merseyside.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): What about the maritime museum?

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman had not been shouting so loudly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Raising questions from a sedentary position delays the Minister and will make it more difficult for me to call hon. Members who wish to speak.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would not the progress of the debate be helped if the Secretary of State gave way to a former Home Secretary on an important Home Office matter?

Mr. Speaker: It might, but that is not a matter for me.

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) had listened instead of shouting he would have heard me say that, in addition, we intend to establish a new trustee body under clause 44 to run art galleries and museums on Merseyside.

Clause 46 makes special provision to help voluntary bodies which serve a wider area than the individual borough or district.

It cannot be repeated too often that it is no part of the Government's purpose that worthwhile voluntary activity should suffer through the abolition of the seven authorities. I am aware, however, that there is concern about this. I shall therefore explain how we intend to help the voluntary bodies. There are four separate measures.

First, the boroughs and districts will have increased resources to match their increased responsibilities. They will no longer have to hand over to the GLC and the metropolitan counties the money that the upper tier authorities currently spend on support for voluntary bodies. Secondly, clause 46 provides for boroughs and districts to fund voluntary bodies collectively; so long as two-thirds of the councils in any area agree, all will be bound to contribute proportionally. Thirdly, for projects previously funded by the GLC and the metropolitan counties, the Government will give transitional help of £5 million in the form of 75 per cent. specific grants. Fourthly, urban programme projects funded by an upper tier council will be considered for renewal in exactly the same way as other urban programme projects. The Government are still consulting the voluntary bodies on the details of these arrangements. Let no one doubt the genuineness of our commitment.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No, I must get on.

Part VI deals with staffing issues. I have recently issued and placed in the Library a paper which explains in some detail the effect of these provisions and the way in which we intend to deal with other matters — in particular, compensation for redundancy—by regulations. We have already established an independent staff commission to safeguard staff interests. I urge the unions to start talking to the commission now as it is there to help their members. If they refuse to do so, it is their members whom they will be letting down.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: Part VII establishes a residuary body in each area. Those bodies are purely temporary——

Mr. Norman Atkinson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the point of order is not a cover for a question.

Mr. Atkinson: I have never been known to abuse either you, Mr. Speaker, or the rules of the House. If I wished to do that, I should appeal to the Minister not to let his own Back Benchers intervene so often. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) could then get up and deny the challenge being made to his sanity, as he designed the rules.

I ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker, in raising this matter before the Minister moves on to another section of his speech because the trade unions representing the members to whom the Minister has referred are at this very moment negotiating severance conditions and other matters. Is the Minister saying that, irrespective of rate capping, he will take into account the amounts now being negotiated? Will he address himself to that matter now?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I heard what the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Atkinson) said about his previous points of order to the Chair. However, I think that that question was somewhat wide of a point of order—if I may put it in a charitable way.

Mr. Jenkin: Part VII establishes a residuary body in each area. These bodies are purely temporary. The Bill imposes on them a duty to wind up their affairs as soon as possible. However, they will have an essential role to play in the transition. As well as inheriting any property, rights, liabilities, and so on, which do not go to one of the successor bodies, they will take over the administration of existing debt and superannuation funds—and even there there is a proviso. In any metropolitan county, the districts may agree among themselves before abolition that those functions should pass to one district council, in which case they will not need to go to the residuary body.

Part VIII deals with finance, including detailed transitional arrangements concerning GREs, block grant

[Mr. Jenkin]

and targets; and there will be necessary changes to London equalisation. It is our aim to secure that abolition does not fortuitously benefit or penalise any individual authority.

Mr. Speaker, the central purpose of the Bill is to provide a more local and a more accountable system of local government in London and the metropolitan counties. People in these areas will have only one local council to deal with. They will look to their local councillors to deal with complaints and queries. Decisions will be taken locally by strong, elected local authorities.

Mr. Merlyn Rees *rose*——

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: Of course there will be savings. They will stem from a system of local government which will be closer, and therefore more accountable, to the people.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain one thing to us, or tell us where we can obtain the information? I understand that the new combined joint police forces are to be funded for three years directly from Whitehall — not by the right hon. Gentleman's Department but by the Home Office. We praise ourselves in this country for having locally organised police forces. Will a Home Office spokesman give us some information on all these matters, including those raised by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), such as the splitting up of police forces? Will there be a White Paper? This is an important constitutional issue. It is a far more important matter than water or drains, and the Government are not giving us a fair amount of information on it.

Mr. Jenkin: With the greatest respect to a former Home Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the Bill. There is no suggestion that for three years the police forces will be funded by central Government.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): They will be controlled.

Mr. Jenkin: Indeed, there will be an upper limit on the total amount of the precept. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am sorry; the right hon. Gentleman said "funded". The police forces will be funded partly by Government grant and partly by precept. For the three transitional years, there will be an upper limit on the amount of precept that a police authority may charge. That is a perfectly reasonable provision.

Mr. Straw: Does the Secretary of State not also agree that he has powers to give detailed directions about the exercise of their functions by the new police authorities?

Mr. Jenkin: That is a matter for the Home Secretary, because it is police authorities that are involved. There will be a control upon the precept and upon manpower. That will be the extent of the control.

Returning to the subject of savings, I remind the House that I undertook, earlier in the year, to publish the Government's latest estimate of the savings that we expect and of any extra costs likely to be incurred. I draw the House's attention to the full written answer given last Friday to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey).

If anyone doubts the scope for savings, let him consider the GLC's spending record. Its extravagance has become a by-word. Its £10 million propaganda campaign, its women's committee which spends three times the budget of the Equal Opportunities Commission, its absurd forays into foreign policy—the list of its follies is endless. It would all be a great joke if it were not for the fact that it is the hapless ratepayers of London who have had to pay for it all.

The GLC and the metropolitan counties together are planning to exceed the Government's targets by more than £400 million. Their budgets exceed their GREs by £600 million. Of course, not all of this can be, or perhaps even should be, wiped out. There is plenty of scope for the successor authorities to make savings.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: Mr. Speaker, in opposing the Bill, the Opposition owe it to the House to come clean on what their policy is. If they have no policy, let them at least base their opposition on what is in the Bill and not on the myths that have been plastered over all the hoardings in London and the metropolitan counties.

The Opposition say that abolition is pure party spite —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Abolition has been and is supported by local authorities of all political persuasions. They say that abolition will destroy local democracy in the big cities. Nearly 4,500 local councillors will prove them wrong.

They say that, after abolition, Whitehall will take over. Wrong again. Only 5 per cent. of service spending in London, and virtually none outside London, will go outside local government. They say that the abolition councils will be replaced by quangos. Wrong again. Only two permanent new appointed bodies will be created—the advisory London planning commission and the Merseyside museums trustee body. They say that there will be no savings, only costs. There will be savings, and it is the ratepayer who will benefit.

Mr. Speaker, abolition of these seven authorities was a clear manifesto pledge on which this party fought and won the last general election.

Mr. Simon Hughes: And lost votes.

Mr. Jenkin: The Bill fulfils that pledge. I commend it to the House.

4.37 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Local Government Bill because of the centralisation of powers, attack on local democracy, threat to the quality of local services and employment prospects, and the additional costs to ratepayers inherent in its proposals, which are without any proper justification."

First, I warmly welcome the Secretary of State back to his duties after his unfortunate accident, and I wish him a complete recovery from his injuries.

The Conservative Government have an abysmal record on local government legislation. During almost six years in office, the Government have consistently undermined local government, eroded local freedom, diminished accountability, transferred powers to non-elected — sometimes closed—boards, given Ministers more and stronger controls, and given voters less say and less control over their own communities and services.

In making those shifts, Conservative Ministers have diminished the quality as well as the quantity of public

provision, and added to unemployment and inefficiency. In other countries there is movement towards broadening the foundations of democracy and the prevention of its erosion, by means of the devolution of power, more local decision-taking, and more involvement by communities in their own affairs. In Britain, however, there has been a clearly identifiable and dangerous—indeed, sinister—trend towards central control. As each policy failure is exposed, the screw is turned. In the process, the ability of our political democracy to place the welfare of all members of the community on the agenda of political discussion and debate has been frustrated.

The latter result—a deliberate aim of the Government—cheats people of redress, undermines confidence in the democratic process and stokes up the fires of social tension and disaffection. The Government have legislated to prevent local councils from tackling problems and from providing services of the quality that people desire. This miserable Bill is the latest example of the Government's failure.

A leading article in *The Times* of 24 November said:

"The abolition bill can be examined in vain for any expression of a general philosophy of the role of government in society, a doctrine of fiscal limits. It is a document lacking any sense of future . . . It is a document lacking coherent principles for local administration".

I could not have put it better myself. That conclusion does not surprise us because the Bill's authors, the Government and Department of Environment Ministers, are people who have demonstrated a complete lack of principles on these crucial issues, let alone any semblance of coherence.

For this Bill, the well-known author of "The Binding of Leviathan"—the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment—has been bound and gagged himself. He has been pushed to one side in favour of yet another author of words of high principle on these crucial local government issues—the Minister for Local Government. He is joint author of the now famous pamphlet "Maybe it's because we're Londoners," in which he wrote, among other things too numerous to mention, the following:

"The strategic role of the GLC should be enhanced . . . Far from the GLC being allowed greater independence Whitehall has, quite wrongly, interfered more and more . . . The GLC must become a proper stategic authority".

Of course, he was simply confirming the views of the Secretary of State for the Environment, who said identical things to the Marshall inquiry on London government. However, those were the days when Conservatives controlled the GLC and a Labour Government were in office in Westminster.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): Perhaps I could set the record straight for the hon. Gentleman. If the debates on this measure are to consist of quotations from my previous pamphlets, articles and speeches, the House is in for a rich diet. The pamphlet from which the hon. Gentleman quoted was a collection of essays by six Conservative Back Bench Members, of whom I was one. I wrote the introduction and chapter 1. I stand by those words. The hon. Gentleman has quoted from another section of the pamphlet, and the words that he quoted were written by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend).

Dr. Cunningham: Apparently the right hon. Gentleman now has not even the guts to stand by what he put his name to. Against that background, how dare he put his name to the introduction of this Bill? What perfidy that is. How was the Minister able to say on the BBC's "Today" programme on Radio 4 the day after the GLC by-elections:

"I believe and have always believed in the abolition of the GLC, consistently since I represented London back in the 1960s."?

Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is an author in another direction—he produced a book of satirical and abusive verse, an anthology of other people's works. Perhaps it offers some key to his thoughts because it was published when he was, to quote a phrase, between jobs. He was on the Back Benches at the time. No doubt that is why, on consecutive pages, he included poems about the wicked grocer and elderly discontented women.

Perhaps the best way in which to sum up this ministerial team of wordsmiths and head-standing artists—a kind of Flanagan and Allen bunch, every one of whom is now eating his words—is a quotation from yet more writing by the Minister. The quotation might well encapsulate the thoughts of the Secretary of State as he reflects on the Prime Minister's judgment of his performance:

"In time no doubt she'll glumly say
This lot could not be wetter.
She'll scrap us all and start next day
With something rather better."

In seeking support for the Bill, the Secretary of State is asking his parliamentary colleagues to live a lie. None of the claims made for the Bill has any basis in fact. Not one claim can withstand a cursory examination, let alone any searching analysis. The Government claim that the proposals will result in major savings for ratepayers, the return of power to districts and boroughs and greater accountability to electors. A simplified and more understandable structure of local government is promised. It is further argued by the Secretary of State that an unnecessary tier of administration is being removed. Not one of those claims is true.

Even now, after a deluge of evidence to the contrary—still disgracefully suppressed by the Secretary of State—and after an abject failure to quantify any significant savings other than by the deliberate creation of more unemployment which will cost the ratepayer and the taxpayer dearly, the Secretary of State persists in the pretence—because he must try to cover, disguise and hide the truth—that these proposals owe everything to political malevolence and vindictiveness and nothing to a coherent, planned or principled reform of local government under democratic control. He demeans himself and his party in the process.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman and the House that, as recently as February 1983—a few weeks before the Conservative manifesto was published—the Minister of State, Home Office answered a parliamentary question in which he said:

"My right hon. Friend"—

the then Secretary of State for the Environment, now the Secretary of State for Defence—

"considers the possibility of change in the structure of local government as part of his overall concern with providing an economical, efficient and effective framework for local government, but he does not at present plan to take any steps to change the existing system."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1983; Vol. 37, c. *459*.]

A few weeks later, cobbled together in the Conservative manifesto was a commitment, without any examination, inquiry, thought or preparation to abolish these seven councils.

[Dr. Cunningham]

Although the Bill is long and complex—it has 98 clauses and 17 schedules—it is full of holes and racked with internal contradictions. It is derived from the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities", but in no way does it reflect the views that were submitted on that White Paper. The evidence has been ignored.

I shall begin by examining the joint claims that these proposals will simplify local government and return powers to the boroughs and districts. In reality, the proposal is that the functions of each elected metropolitan county should be dispersed to more than one dozen different boards, joint boards, agencies and quangos—all non-elected. Some powers are given to the Secretary of State and only some—a few—are given to district councils. Is that simplification? Is that returning powers to elected authorities? In this process, one metropolitan county precept is replaced by at least seven precepts or direct charges on the district rate.

The pattern is the same for each metropolitan county and for London. In the counties, 82 per cent. of spending is to go from democratic control to non-elected joint boards and quangos—less than 20 per cent. will go to district councils. In London, 67 per cent. of GLC net expenditure goes to non-elected bodies and only 31 per cent. goes to the boroughs, and less than 20 per cent. of GLC ILEA services goes to elected authorities. How is that returning power to the boroughs?

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Does the hon. Gentleman regard the seven existing joint police authorities as non-elected bodies? Does he consider that the police authorities responsible for the policing of one third of the population outside the metropolitan areas are in the hands of appointed quangos? If so, he has never said so before. Why does he apply that description to these new ones?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not mind saying that the Labour Opposition have serious reservations about non-elected government and the provision of services. Another fundamental and major difference is that those budgets and precepts were never controlled and directed from Whitehall, as the right hon. Gentleman now proposes.

Do Conservative Members believe that such arrangements will simplify anything? Will people who pay the rate bills more readily understand the reason for those bills increasing, as they undoubtedly will? In the metropolitan county areas, there will be 18 new joint boards for police, fire and public transport. They will be responsible for the expenditure of £1·2 billion, which will be taken out of direct democratic control. There is no simplification here, nor are major powers returned to elected local authorities.

After a study of joint working, the institute of local government studies at Birmingham university concluded:

"It seems to us inconceivable that the new arrangements will produce a system which is more comprehensible and accessible to individual citizens".

Nor is it true — it is plainly untrue — to claim, as Ministers do, that an unnecessary tier of local government is being removed. Indeed, the Government's own proposals confirm the need for a strategic tier as they keep many of the services at a countywide level but simply remove them from democratic control. A change in the nature of the administration is proposed, not a change by removing administration.

First, the change will be made from directly elected accountable and strategic local government to appointed, and in some areas remote and obscure, boards and quangos. The administration will be less accessible to people as well as less responsive.

Secondly, the administration and management of important services is to be fragmented. Here again, there will be direction, and some cases control, from Whitehall. Far from removing administration, bureaucracy is likely to increase and duplication and waste will occur.

In a recent report on the proposals, PA Management Consultants concluded:

"The multiplicity of compulsory and voluntary joint working between councils is an unsound basis for an effective lasting structure".

It added:

"The central weakness lies in the failure to provide an effective method of resolving inevitable conflicts. Instead the proposed structure will tend to institutionalise conflict."

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman has concentrated on greater London and is now moving on to the proposals for the met counties. However, in the unlikely event of the re-election of a Labour Government in coming years, will the hon. Gentleman pledge that Government to restoring the met councils?

Dr. Cunningham: Let me say absolutely unequivocally, as was made clear at the Labour party conference a few weeks ago, that the Labour party is committed to preserving under democratic control the achievements and strategic functions in the management of local government services. That is quite specific—*[Interruption.]* Lest the Conservative Government be in any doubt, let me add that there is no chance that the Labour party will cobble together some last-minute attack on local government, even Tory local government, and include that in its manifesto without a proper review and study of the functions and contributions of local government — *[Interruption.]* If there are roses on the Opposition Benches, there are bloomers on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman now answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey)?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall, and the answer is the same for London as for the conurbations. We shall recreate an elected authority for London's strategic policy and service delivery, and we will return to democratic control management and responsibility for services at a strategic level in the conurbations in England. I am sorry if that is not clear to the right hon. Gentleman, but that is party policy and that is what Labour Members stand by.

When these proposals were announced, they were said to be necessary to eliminate councils which were expensive and wasteful overspenders. In May 1983, the Conservative party considered savings as the primary reason for abolition. At that time, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) claimed that £120 million would be saved annually as a result of the sacking of 9,000 people employed by the councils. However, by the autumn of that year, the present Secretary of State had begun to sidle away from any such promise. He said during Question Time:

"It is not possible at this stage to do other than make assumptions which may or may not be justified".—[*Official Report*, 26 October 1983; Vol. 47, c. 267.]

When the report prepared by Coopers and Lybrand was published, the Government failed, and have still failed, to

provide any proper response. The Government assert major savings but produce no evidence. They have quietly reduced the claim to £100 million, but will not — because they cannot—substantiate the claim.

The truth became clear when, in October this year, a document reporting a Government interdepartmental meeting was leaked to *The Guardian*. Those minutes record that even the Treasury no longer believes that savings will result from abolition, other than from sacking people, thereby adding to the unemployed. The minutes state:

"They"—

the Treasury—

"saw manpower control as the only way of delivering the savings promised from abolition".

Sacking people was the only way to deliver savings.

There is, of course, another way, which even the Treasury dares not mention, at least on the record. It is feared and dreaded by thousands of people who so depend upon them. That would be further to undermine the provision and the quality of services provided by the GLC and the metropolitan counties. We reject that as strongly as we reject unemployment as a solution to local government.

No wonder the Secretary of State refuses to substantiate his claims. He promised to

"place more information before the House before we come to consider the main abolition Bill".—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1984; Vol. 59, c. 924.]

He has signally failed to keep that commitment and to honour that promise. Last Friday's eleventh hour parliamentary reply tells the House nothing new. The right hon. Gentleman cannot keep that promise, and he knows it. It is impossible to discern from the Bill what the outcome will be, but "savings" seem the least likely result.

The most likely outcome of these proposals is an increase in costs to ratepayers. Boroughs and districts will be denied necessary expenditure to sustain services and will be forced either to increase rates or cut services. The reticence of Ministers about all this is understandable, especially because even their tiny band of supporters can stomach these proposals only if savings result.

The Confederation of British Industry stated:

"Our support for abolition is given on the assumption that it will lead to substantial savings."

It has gone very quiet lately. Some months ago, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce stated:

"It has become urgent for the Secretary of State to provide a detailed breakdown of the savings expected and clear guidance on where and how economies should be obtained. Only if such evidence and guidance is forthcoming can the continued support of the business community for abolition be counted upon."

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy was more direct. It stated:

"We argue that the proposed structure will lead to less effective management than at present, and will lead to higher rather than lower cost—we have no doubt that efficiency will suffer."

The Minister for Local Government now says that savings were never the primary objective in introducing the reform. On 29 November, he said that the case rested on the provision of a more local and more accountable system of local government. Who is in charge of the Department of the Environment? The Bill has few friends and little support. University departments, professional bodies, industry and commerce have seriously questioned its manifest inherent contradictions, its weaknesses and the glaring anomalies, which so amply demonstrate that it has been cobbled together without forethought or preparation.

In addition, the Bill is an enabling Bill. It gives wide-ranging and massively important powers to Ministers. It is a Bill for centralists. It provides more than 40 new powers for Ministers, many of which are unprecedented and some of which are astonishing. All joint boards are to be controlled by the Secretary of State, who will fix their precepts and budgets for three years. Ministers will be able, without an inquiry, to break up proposed police, fire or transport undertakings. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) asked a question about that, to which he did not receive a straight answer.

Clause 21 gives the Secretary of State for Education and Science power to abolish the Inner London education authority at any time, either by breaking it up completely or by hiving off its duties. In answer to that point, the Secretary of State said:

"The hon. Gentleman is evidently yet another person under the illusion that the ILEA, or its replacement as a unitary education authority, was at risk. There was no threat to it."—[*Official Report*, 5 April 1984; Vol. 57, c. 1131.]

Despite that, the Bill contains an explicit power for Ministers to abolish the ILEA. It is clear that the Tory promise of a directly elected education authority for London is yet another heavily qualified commitment which could be rescinded as the Bill stands, simply on the basis of a one and a half hour debate in the House.

The Bill even creates a new category of designated roads at the whim of Ministers in the Department of the Environment. Not content with making himself the planning officer for London, the Secretary of State even has powers to decide what should happen to particular roads both in the GLC area and in areas presently under the control of London boroughs. The range of powers is staggering. In clause after clause, 64 types of statutory instrument, of which parliamentary scrutiny can only be limited, are set out.

The Bill leaves unresolved the future administration and support of policies for sport, recreation and leisure, the future of enterprise board policies and the crucial issue of support for voluntary organisations, about which the right hon. Gentleman belatedly had something to say this afternoon. We view with the gravest alarm the absence of any Government plan for sport and recreation in the event of the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan councils.

The only tentative proposal which was mentioned in the yellow document relates to the future of the Crystal Palace national sports centre, but there is no commitment to that in the Bill.

The stock answer to other vital issues relating to sport and to wider issues of recreation and conservation is that the responsibility will be devolved to the London boroughs and district councils. For many sport bodies and for thousands of people and teams there can be no comfort in such an answer. In future, they must look solely to borough and district councils for support.

It is obvious that the constraint on local government expenditure will make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for such councils to replace the money spent on sport and recreation by the GLC and metropolitan county councils. The size of the problem is illustrated by the fact that the GLC will spend about £41 million this year in the GLC area. The Government's proposals constitute an attack on sport and recreation, which will diminish the quality of life.

One of the supreme ironies in this respect will be in the Secretary of State's own constituency. It appears that a

[Dr. Cunningham]

GLC golf course will be divided so that nine holes will be in Redbridge, eight in Havering and one in Epping Forest. It is rumoured that Conservative Members are only concerned about the destination of the 19th hole.

This year, the GLC and metropolitan county councils are funding voluntary organisations to the tune of about £60 million. The organisations help many of the most disadvantaged people in areas of high social and economic deprivation. The Bill puts their work at risk. The Government pretend to recognise the valuable role of the voluntary sector, but their proposals to safeguard those organisations after abolition are inadequate, unjustified and unworkable.

Firstly, the Government expect individual borough and district councils directly to fund grants to voluntary organisations. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has already been in touch with the borough and district councils about that. Only one in eight of the councils can confidently predict that it will be able to fulfil the majority of its new responsibilities for voluntary organisations. For London, where more than 200 voluntary bodies have been represented, the London voluntary service council has calculated that boroughs will have to double their present levels of funding. That would bring them into conflict with targets. Penalties could then be imposed and there would be the possibility of designation under the Rates Act, 1984. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations describes the proposals as unworkable, inadequate and a cause for great anxiety. The Opposition share that anxiety.

The work of the councils for equal opportunities, ethnic minorities, industry and employment will also be undermined by the Bill. That has an all-too-familiar ring about it. It is typical of the plethora of legislation introduced by the Government to attack local government. It is another measure of centralisation. More and more powers are given to Ministers. It is another measure to undermine local democracy. It is another measure which pretends to do one thing but does another: it pretends to give back or devolve power, but virtually removes it and concentrates it. It is a classic example of a Government living a lie.

The Government's proposals have few friends and have been roundly condemned by many Tories in local government. Certainly the people of London and the metropolitan counties have made no secret of their distaste for the proposals and for the fact that their votes on these crucial issues are being removed. One can imagine the reaction in Paris if Mr. Chirac were told by President Mitterrand that he and his council were to be abolished, or in New York if President Reagan announced to Mayor Koch that the administration of the city of New York was to be summarily dismissed.

The Tory party in Parliament is asked to give the Bill support. Those backing such proposals demonstrate all the symptoms of having been infected by the political equivalent of AIDS — acquired indifference to democracy syndrome. The Bill contains a fraction of the promises that the Government made about returning powers. If a fraction of the time the Government have devoted to undermining local councils had been given to promoting constructive capital investment, and if half the effort Ministers put into preventing councils from tackling problems had been directed towards improving the quality of services, Britain and the British people would be in a much better position.

What relevance do the Bill and these policies have to the real problems of this country? Far from helping to resolve the economic, industrial and social policy failures of the Government, it will add to them. We are committed to the democratic control of public services and to improving their quality and hence the quality of people's lives. We believe that a genuine partnership between central and local government, with an expanding role for the latter, is an essential element for economic recovery.

The Bill is a disaster, a shambles with no intellectual, philosophical or economic merit. We reject it with contempt.

5.11 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I confine my brief remarks to the government of London because the government of London is a unique problem and has been for many years in our national history. It is a pity that the continuing debate on the role of local government and the government of London and its future has become entangled with the subject of the metropolitan county councils—those great artificial creations for whom few tears will be shed when they finally go, as is rightly proposed, under the Bill.

When some months ago we were discussing the paving Bill to the present Bill, the House was kind enough to hear my words on the case for more power being given to the boroughs in London. I believe that to be the right direction in which we should go, and to the extent that the Bill achieves decentralisation and the delegation of powers to the London boroughs in the Greater London area, it is wholly right, and that trend gives me no problem. It is in line with the principles upon which the Government were founded and for which many of us argued for many years. We argued that we should decentralise authority and power and minimise the need for an overlay of overblown, pompous bureaucrats and unnecessary administration. If I felt that all that was intended by and included in the Bill was in that direction, I should have no anxieties. The question that must be asked is whether the Bill, or that part of it which deals with Greater London, goes in that direction.

However the argument may be presented, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has spoken of only 5 per cent. of the service expenditure—I believe that that was his phrase — of the GLC going upwards rather than downwards, the fact remains that a range of functions goes up rather than down, and the functions are going to the centre rather than being decentralised. We are seeing the power going to the boroughs and that is welcome; but we are also seeing power going to the Departments of Whitehall and to committees and other unelected bodies. Some of us are bound to be worried that by any definition and whichever way one slices the argument that is not decentralisation; it is centralisation. It is a considerable accretion of state and official power.

When we move so firmly and plainly against the principles upon which the Government were founded, we must be careful and perhaps we should pause and not do so. It was Montesquieu who said:

"The deterioration of every government begins with the decay of the principles on which it was founded."

So why have the Government been forced to move in that direction and allow the centralisation of powers over the government of London in central government and in the state? They have been forced to do so because, having rightly abolished the Greater London council—that is a correct move and one that will be regretted only by those who have narrow and often selfish political aims to pursue — they cannot bring themselves to accept a new, smaller, Londonwide body. They question, as my right hon. Friend did, whether such a body would have any useful functions.

If I feel otherwise, I should, for a few moments, answer the question why we need any Londonwide body, even of a more limited and far more carefully circumscribed kind than the GLC with which we have been afflicted over the years.

With regard to the transport utilities and the London transport organisation, I do not believe the need is for some kind of democratic control over the overground and underground railway system and the bus transportation system of the Greater London area. The management and organisation not just of the Greater London area transport but of the surface rail transport in a wider area than the Greater London area should be integrated into an undertaking that should be as free as possible from constant political interference and will be best run as freely as possible. I want to see that rather than the more limited London Regional Transport board that we now have.

Other issues are bound to remain Londonwide. I am thinking of traffic management guidelines, tourism, some of the parks that cross borough boundaries, and the future of waste recycling, which will be a vastly growing and highly technical citywide activity in the future. I am thinking also of historic buildings and the arts, for which places have admittedly been found in the Government's plan, but I wish to know why they do not belong properly in some Londonwide body.

The worry must be that those arguments have not been refuted. They have simply been put down. Of course, these practices can be done centrally for a time. They can, for a time, be organised through Whitehall and the Departments, but my right hon. and hon. Friends must know that such an arrangement that removes from one of the world's vast megacities any citywide administration must be a temporary arrangement. It will not endure. I do not believe that it is wise to proceed with the legislation knowing full well that there will be forces at work from the moment of the inception of the legislation which will aim to replace it and reform it yet again.

We must pause before we proceed in a way that leaves this huge city, our capital, without a citywide government when throughout the world vast cities of the kind that we are talking about have citywide governments of one kind or another. I do not know of any city—I do not believe that my right hon. Friend meant to suggest otherwise—of the size of London that does not have a citywide government. The metropolitan and other cities of Britain will have, after the reforms in the Bill have gone through, city governments and probably much more effective city governments than they have now, but London will not.

As you wish us to be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall end now by re-emphasising the point. This Bill will be an impermanent solution. It will not endure, and therefore it is not wise to push through this part of it, although there are many other excellent parts. It will be bad for our capital city and bad for England. If my right hon. Friend will bring forward plans for a way in which the Londonwide functions, which are there, can be gathered together and can provide the framework within which more decentralisation and effective borough government can proceed, much can be salvaged from the wreckage of the Government's judgment on this single point.

5.20 pm

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): For many months to come, and possibly a good deal longer than that, we in this Parliament and many thousands of elected and professional people in local and national Government will be squandering our resources on what is an ill-conceived Bill and was an ill-conceived idea from the start.

There is no doubt in my mind, and there have been no doubts for some years past, that reforms are needed, but abolition will not provide them. We know the real reason why this Bill was introduced. It was because the Prime Minister, at five to eleven in the drafting of the Conservative party manifesto before the last election, having lost the battle to abolish rates to which she had twice committed herself, had to come forward with something as an alternative. That is why we are suffering today in metropolitan and Greater London government and in this Parliament, and why we are wasting resources on this issue.

Unless the Government change course, as they could yet do, the Bill will usher in at least a decade of instability in local government, and in our urban communities, which will continue to decline, while social tension will increase. The Bill will be a major contributory factor to the growing tension in our large urban areas, and in particular in the Greater London area.

There has been too much political posturing and, by some, abuse of metropolitan government for personal and political aggrandisement. It did not start in 1981. The Prime Minister, with, I regret to say, some help from some notable people in my party, is just finishing off the destruction of the GLC that Sir Horace Cutler started when he was in office, with the backing of many Conservative Members.

Personal and political manipulation for purposes not to do with local governance, the corruption of political and financial patronage, the subordination of politics to sectarian interest groups, the extremism and authoritarianism at national level should concern both sides of the House. I am completely opposed to what the Government are doing. I hope and trust that many Conservative Members who, rejecting the crude extremism that has come to dominate their party, will work to get the Government off their present course. Equally, Labour Members who wish to defend and advance democratic Socialism have to put our house in order. There are things going on in local government today that should raise grave anxieties in our party and demand our attention, just as the conduct of the Government demands our attention and our opposition.

There is a smell of the Weimar republic about what has been going on in local government, as there is elsewhere in British politics, and it is not confined to any one particular party. The metropolitan authorities and the Greater London council have done many good things in the past 10 to 20 years, in architecture, environmental reclamation, housing, the arts, industrial development, community and voluntary efforts, research, and economic and social problems.

[Mr. Reg Freeson]

However, for all this, these authorities have not measured up to the expectation of them as strategic authorities that they had at their creation. Despite the multi-million pound campaigns, electoral support for local government, in Greater London at GLC level and in metropolitan county authorities at their level, is still minimal—the range is about 30 per cent. at elections. Functions, boundaries and relations with district authorities are ill-defined. Problems of finance, urban renewal, planning, roads and transport, housing, environment, education and training, youth and community services, have often, although not always, been inadequately tackled.

Let us take one notable example. In London, we have been without real strategic road planning for over a decade. Many housing sites take even longer to develop. Integrated transport is non-existent, and is now being made worse by what the Government have done recently in their legislation. Many other parts of management can be accused of having been inefficient and inadequate, and it is not simply a question of resources.

As a result of this, the inner-city areas have continued to decline inexorably. This is due just as much to inadequate management, by Government Departments as well, as to inadequate resources. Communities and neighbourhoods have continued to wither. There are some notable exceptions—Tyne and Wear and west Yorkshire are among them—but the inadequacies of action are widespread.

I repeat what I have said often in the House and elsewhere. The abolition Bill will not resolve any of this. Most Conservative as well as Opposition Members want elected local government for Greater London and the other metropolitan areas. I suspect that most Ministers do as well. The Prime Minister is unpersuaded yet, but the Government can expect even more serious embarrassments, Back-Bench rebellions, humiliation in the Lords, losing the argument, if not the vote, in the Commons. The Secretary of State has said, to quote from a statement he made in July in the *Local Government Chronicle*, that:

"We need to win over staff affected by abolition—or it will be delayed by lack of co-operation."

Given that he has neither won over staff nor obtained co-operation, we have a recipe for chaos in April 1986, if the Bill goes through and has to be implemented.

What is to be done? The Bill is here, and the Government are stupidly committed to it—I suspect that I have much Conservative support for saying that. It is still not too late. All of us, Ministers included with Members of Parliament and those outside the House, should decide now that within two years at the most, the quangos, joint boards and committees could be brought under coherent democratic city government.

By the time that the House has finished with the Bill, I believe that it should provide for the necessary review and machinery to this end. I suggest that possibly a commission on the future of metropolitan government should be established with all-party support even while the Bill is being considered in Parliament, with the remit to create a new and more effective elected structure with county and districts within the metropolitan authorities, to concentrate on structure planning, transport planning and co-ordination, urban renewal, co-ordination of complementary functions and services, applied research, and little else, with the backing of the district authorities accordingly. Such bodies might be smaller than at present and would not have the general powers of other local authorities at district level.

There should be a major overhaul of the ill co-ordinated machinery which has characterised so much of metropolitan government over the past 10 to 20 years. Perhaps committees and departments should be limited in number according to major statutory functions, which could be defined. Borough and district authorities might have rights of elective representation within any such new democratic machinery.

I urge that such a commission be set up, that it should report within one year and that there should be a commitment by all parties to legislate promptly on the basis of its report. The commission should thereafter have a continuing role to oversee the future of metropolitan government, possibly overseen in turn by a parliamentary committee. Its remit should cover boundaries for both metropolitan areas and the districts within them, departmental machinery and committees and many other functions that could be decided in the future. I have in mind the importance not simply of the transfer of those functions that could be suitably transferred to the districts and boroughs but also the encouragement if not the outright creation of what has been described in the past as urban parish councils within what I consider to be the over-large boroughs created by the 1963 Act setting up the new machinery.

These are some of the activities that I believe should be engaged in by that commission, assuming that the Bill proceeds through both Houses of Parliament.

The commission should also concern itself with financial reform. I wonder from time to time what one of the national vice-presidents of the Conservative party, Sir Frank Marshall, thinks about all that the Government are doing. I recall the Marshall report, not that I necessarily agreed with all that he put forward in that report, and I recall his desire to see an enhancement of the GLC's position and of its financial role. We have not heard anything from him in recent times. But I suspect that if Conservative Members have the good sense to consult someone such as Sir Frank Marshall at national level in their party, as well as other national local government leaders, they will get some sensible advice on how to deal with the Bill.

Mr. Martin Stevens (Fulham): Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that the fact that the Labour party at county hall declined to give evidence to the Marshall committee ought properly to inhibit Opposition Members from praising that report?

Mr. Freeson: I see no relevance in that observation. I am commenting on the report that Sir Frank Marshall prepared. With respect to the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Stevens), he should pay more attention to the views expressed by Sir Frank Marshall and by other members of his own party at that time inside and outside county hall, including one or two Ministers who are now on the Treasury Bench supporting the Bill.

All of us, both Government and Opposition parties, should be reflecting further this winter and in the spring, even while we are engaged in the battle over the Bill. Clearly there will be no going back on this fight. But whatever changes may be sought in the Bill, with the

Government's huge majority the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan authorities may be steam-rollered through Parliament. If it is, it will be done for the wrong reasons and will set in train many years of instability in local government, it will undermine democratic politics, it will risk centralised chaos and it will perpetuate divisiveness and tensions in society where there should be a healing of the tensions. For the sake of democratic politics, effective renewal and good city management, basic common ground between the parties for an elective system of city-wide government for the future must be found. Among Opposition Members, and I suspect among many Government supporters and outside the Chamber, the will exists to move in that direction. We want only a commitment from the Government to save elective government for London and the metropolitan areas.

5.36 pm

Sir John Osborn (Sheffield, Hallam): As the one Conservative Member of Parliament not only in Sheffield but also in the whole of south Yorkshire, I welcome this chance to represent my constituents and Conservatives elsewhere in south Yorkshire in supporting the Bill. My comments will add to the remarks that I made on the Third Reading of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill.

My contribution will relate to south Yorkshire—not to the GLC—where the minority position in which I find myself is a curious one, for not many years ago no one could find a good word for the South Yorkshire county council. In 1972 I supported my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), when what has been said about this Bill today was said by Labour Members about the Bill that he introduced then. The House knows the capricious nature of Ken Livingstone's support for the GLC. So it is with the support for the South Yorkshire county council expressed by the Opposition.

For a number of years after the county council was formed the Socialist-led Sheffield city council was in favour of abolishing it. In 1979 it passed a resolution to that effect. The reason was that all sides thought that it was inefficient—it was then, and it must be now. Right from its inception it was easy to see that there were few clearly defined tasks for the county council and that it was to be handed the left-overs. Districts felt that the county served no purpose and that it created duplication and confusion. As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) described the council during our last debate, it was a "dog's dinner", although apparently he put it right, as he also said in the same debate.

A close look at the Department of the Environment's yellow book reveals the frequency with which the word "concurrent" is used to describe the powers of the two tiers in so many services. The result is confusion. This has been put to me ever since the passage of the 1972 Act by business men, industry, commerce in south Yorkshire and in my constituency. The volume of objection to two-tier local metropolitan counties demanded a response from a Conservative Government, and they have given that response today.

There are a number of examples of confusion involving Conservative county councillors on district matters simply because people do not know where to turn. People are confused about who is responsible for what. This is true of the county's consumer protection department and the districts' environmental health departments. Frequently the county is unaware of things that are technically its responsibility. Last year, a milk cycle race took place in Doncaster which necessitated the closure of certain highways. Obviously it is a council matter, but the county did not discover that this had taken place. This sort of confusion has been brought out time and time again. Today South Yorkshire is holding a meeting of its policy committee anti-nuclear working party. It has been unable to find a true role in local government and has moved into foreign affairs. South Yorkshire county council is a nuclear-free zone. So are all the districts. On the boundaries of some such nuclear-free zones motorists drive through two sets of notices, some put up by the districts and some by the county, within a few yards of each other pointing out that they are driving into nuclear-free zones. What an extravagance. It is bad enough to have one, but to have two within a few yards of each other is an extravagance that ratepayers cannot tolerate.

Sir John Page (Harrow, West): What my hon. Friend has said about the nuclear-free zone is interesting. If the notice said "violence-free zone", would it be equally effective?

Sir John Osborn: I would be pleased to see a violence-free zone, but I do not believe that it would be very effective. Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to continue with my speech, because we are being called to make short contributions.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I shall listen with interest to the rest of the speech, but is it the case that south Yorkshire is not only a nuclear-free zone but also almost a Tory-free zone?

Sir John Osborn: I thank the hon. Member for making the point I want to stress in my speech. If I may continue with it, we might have a mutual area interest in and around what is known as Pomono Street, where our two constituencies converge. It used to be in the Hallam constituency. The city council permitted considerable development to be carried out in that area, which led to traffic problems. Ever since, I have had to correspond with the county council. Similarly, when there are bus problems, particularly in Dore and Totley, an area with which the hon. Member is familiar, ironically these have to be dealt with from Barnsley. They cannot be dealt with from Sheffield. The county council is responsible for a small percentage of local services—for 20 per cent. of that expenditure—but it does not prevent it from being expensive. It is budgeting to spend at present £172 million. However, the county has been rather reckless in its transport policy. I learn from county councillors that it is costing £80 million a year. The Secretary of State mentioned a figure of £59 million for last year. The support for local transport in south Yorkshire is costing £45 per head against nearly half that figure, as an average, in the metropolitan counties.

Only this week was I approached by a local branch of the Institute of Advanced Motorcyclists, which complained about the poor standard of the roads. The high subsidy for buses unfortunately proves to be detrimental to the maintenance of roads in the city. Neither this Bill, nor rate capping, will overcome the fundamental malaise of local government in the districts which make up South Yorkshire, including the Sheffield district, called the city council. All the people in the metropolitan counties,

[Sir John Osborn]

certainly in Yorkshire, know that in their heart of hearts they cannot have "owt for nowt". For GLC people, that means anything for nothing. In my region, due to half a century of Socialism, the majority of the population are dependent upon benefits — either subsidised council housing, or subsidised public transport, or costly public services, besides such state services as health, social security and education. This majority therefore depends upon others in the region to pay rates and taxes as well as others outside the region to sustain their standard of living. This majority is therefore dependent upon the seed corn of Socialism and invariably at local elections vote for Socialist councillors, and in general elections for Labour Members, because their standard of living depends upon substantial subsidies from other people, whether from outside the region, or alone within it.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Is the hon. Member able to say that that is actually the case? In 1974, when the hon. Member was an industrialist in Sheffield, the number of people being supported by the state is the same as it is today. Does not the hon. Member believe that the economic policies that are being pursued by the Government, of which many of the industrialists to whom the hon. Member referred in his speech are highly critical, have got something to do with our problems?

Sir John Osborn: I was going to mention that in January I am reporting to the Council of Europe on the latest work of the OECD on the economic situation facing all western countries, in particular Council of Europe countries. There is concern in ali western countries that the level of public expenditure is too high. Today the House is dealing with local government expenditure, which is 25 per cent. of all public expenditure in this country. The House will be debating this matter on Thursday. If there is optimism that the standard of living will rise—and there is hope of economic growth of 2 per cent. to 3 per cent. in both this and other countries — there are regional disparities, as we learned last Thursday. South Yorkshire is the scene of such disparity. It is a case of the chicken and egg. There is obduracy by the Socialist leadership on the shop floor, in town hall and city hall. The fact that Socialists have been in power for 50 years is surely the cause of this disparity, not the result of it.

My reservation about the Bill is that it is not a substitute for rating reform, or even for more fundamental reforms. I have listened with interest to the contribution from the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson). However, the Labour majority in south Yorkshire and its districts continues to oppose the Government's moves towards a property-owning democracy through, for example, the sale of council houses. The South Yorkshire county council is made up of many trade unionists, including county councillors who are sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers.

The members of the police force whom I have met and the approaches I have received from the Police Federation —I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) is in his place—make it clear that the police do not believe that they are gaining the support, for a variety of reasons, of the police committee of the county council. Responsible citizens in Sheffield would like there to be more fundamental reforms than are before us today, and I accept this. Therefore, I accept that the Bill will not solve all the problems that local government currently presents. The inconsistencies of the financing of local government will remain and the inadequacies of the rating system and lack of local authority accountability will not be removed.

My constituents in Hallam and the Conservatives in south Yorkshire as a whole will be relieved that the Government are fulfilling their election mainfesto pledge. If they were to read the manifesto of the Labour party for the last general election they would be surprised to find that the Opposition today are against these proposals, because the Labour party manifesto made it clear that they believed that two tiers of local government were unnecessary. The selective amnesia that Labour Members indulge in undermines their arguments. It is the irresponsible behaviour of Socialist local government that threatens the balance of power. The Bill has not been introduced too soon, and I support it.

5.49 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Many people have realised that the Bill is a vicious attack on local government, but few recognise that it is also an attack on parliamentary democracy.

Most people accept that the Bill has been born of political spite, but few understand that it also reflects a continuing trend of civil servants who want to take powers from local democracy and confer them on Ministers or, as cynics might say, on themselves. They are certainly unwilling to submit those powers to proper, effective parliamentary scrutiny.

It is sad that the main thrust of the Bill is to deny local democracy its opportunity to control and influence local events and effectively to deny the House the power of scrutiny over many of the decisions that have been taken away from local government and in which we have a right to be involved.

For the first 40 years of this century, the big cities, particularly places such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Sheffield, demonstrated how effectively local democracy could run a wide range of services. It is amazing to see how we have retreated in recent years from many of the services that local democracy, at least in the big cities, ran so effectively. Services such as water, sewerage, gas, electricity, transport and parts of the Health Service were run by local authorities. Major areas of municipal enterprise were carried out extremely effectively. Some of the small authorities may have been open to criticism, but the record of the big cities was outstanding. They showed that local democracy could provide a high standard of services and do the job effectively.

Since that time, there has been a steady removal of powers from locally elected, democratic bodies. Functions have been transferred to unelected quangos, and the Bill takes that process much further. An increasing number of bodies are appointed by Ministers, or, as in the Bill, at second hand by local authorities. They are not directly accountable to local democracy or effectively accountable to the House.

We have to ask whether we have been giving Ministers too much power of patronage. If the trend is to continue, perhaps we should look at the United States system, under which the President at least has to get congressional approval for many of is appointments. There is growing evidence that Ministers are abusing their power of patronage. It ought to be under the control of the House.

Not only does the Bill erode local democracy, but it takes major steps to erode the power of the House. Major legislation has always been scrutinised by both Houses through debates on Second Reading and in Committee. That process has usually involved many hours of debate over many months. There have been effective opportunities for arguments to be deployed in the House and opportunities for a parallel debate to take place in the country.

We have always said that only minor changes should be made under the delegated powers that enable Ministers to make orders or regulations. In the past 20 years, there have been substantial changes in that area. Ministers have increasingly taken powers to make regulations, and the powers of the House to scrutinise those regulations have been drastically reduced. The open-ended debates that used to take place on statutory instruments have been restricted to one and a half hours. More of the debates are taken in Committee and our powers to scrutinise regulations have also been reduced because of the sheer volume of regulations in recent years.

Increasingly, matters that would have been included in primary legislation only a few years ago are now pushed through in regulations which provide no opportunity for a proper debate in the House or outside. We should be jealous of the way in which those powers are being taken away from us.

The Bill includes powers to make regulations for a wide range of purposes. We should be extremely worried about that. The most clear-cut power is that to abolish the Inner London education authority or to change it in any way. Parts of ILEA could be taken away and the whole structure of education, under which everything from nursery education to further education has been the responsibility of the local authority, could be varied by regulations. In any other circumstances, the House would demand a major Bill to implement such a proposal and we would also demand the opportunity for a debate in Parliament and outside.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend has made an important point. Will he also emphasise that a Bill, however short, is subject to amendment, but a statutory instrument can be given only a yes or no decision?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend takes my argument a little further. Let me ask Conservative Members a simple question. What would be their reaction if a future Labour Government announced soon after coming into office that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would present a short Bill including powers to nationalise by regulations any industries that that Government wanted to nationalise?

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): That is a good idea.

Mr. Bennett: That view has been canvassed by many of my hon. Friends and it has some attractions. Some people are dissatisfied with the time that it takes to get things through the democratic process. However, if Conservative Members think that such a Bill would be unreasonable, how can they believe that it is reasonable to abolish the ILEA, in exactly the same way? ILEA, in terms of the children that it serves and the number of its employees, is far bigger than some of the industries that might be considered for nationalisation.

As I said, I can see the attractions of such a Bill, but, attractive as it may be, the duty to give the House the power to control legislation is stronger than the attractions of a short nationalisation Bill. Conservative Members should think carefully. They may be impatient, but they should remove the ILEA provisions from the Bill and say that if the Government want to change the position of the education authority they must bring primary legislation to the House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) pointed out, regulations cannot be amended. We have either to approve or reject regulations. That changes fundamentally the relationship between a Minister and the House. It is easy to bring forward a package with a series of attractive measures and one unattractive measure and to ask the House to accept or reject the whole package. It is much harder for Ministers to bring forward legislation in which they have to justify each clause and line of the measure. The regulation-making powers in respect of ILEA are unacceptable.

There are nearly 60 other areas in which the Government will have power to make regulations. They seek to deny the House the opportunity to make amendments on any of those matters. Why is the Secretary of State taking power to act by regulations, rather than putting his proposals on the face of the Bill? Does he want to hide his real purpose from Parliament or does he want a free hand for the future so that the Government can do whatever they like?

Anyone who has been a Member for even a short time will have come across examples of powers being taken in an Act to do certain things and, two or three years later, a new Minister using those powers in unexpected ways. We are all told that what matters is not the promises given by Ministers in the House, but the words in the statute. That is the danger of regulations.

A particularly absurd example is before the House at the moment. During the passage of the legislation which brought about our membership of the EEC, the present Foreign Secretary repeatedly assured the House that regulations ancillary to the main purposes of the legislation would not be used in all the sorts of ways that my hon. Friend envisaged. The Foreign Secretary gave categoric assurances about that from the Dispatch Box. Now the Foreign Secretary is using those very regulatory powers to get through the inter-Government regulations on raising funds for the EEC. That is a clear example of the danger of this House allowing that sort of opportunity into regulations.

We should also remember the sheer volume of statutory instruments. Often the Government produce about 30 statutory instruments a week. Following the recess, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, of which I am Chairman, had to go through about 80 sets of regulations for each of four weeks. We are now down to having to consider about 30 sets of regulations a week. No hon. Member can claim that the Committee carries out its scrutiny effectively. We are fortunate to have Mr. Speaker's counsel to help us, but it is an extremely difficult task to ensure that all that legislation conforms with the Acts which give it powers.

Under this Bill, that scrutiny may be easier but it will be much harder for the House effectively to scrutinise such proposals. The House has only an hour and a half's debate. Each Front Bench has half an hour and hon. Members have the remaining half an hour. If it is a negative order, we

[Mr. Bennett]

may well have less than half an hour. Therefore, the opportunities for the House to scrutinise regulations are completely inadequate.

Take the present controversy over student grants. Hon. Members are looking for parliamentary opportunities, but that measure will be achieved by a statutory instrument which will come before the House in about 11 months' time, with only an hour and a half's debate and not subject to any amendment. Therefore, the House will have to accept the whole of it, or none of it.

I believe firmly that we should reject the Bill because of the way in which it erodes local democracy and also takes away from the House many of its powers to scrutinise legislation and to control Ministers.

The Bill will disqualify local councillors who work for such organisations as the fire service. That is particularly mean and petty. The Government claim that the Bill will reduce the confusion among the electorate between one tier of local government and another. However, the Bill is a recipe for confusion. How will strategic planning be co-ordinated with strategic transport in a region? That will be extremely difficult.

I served on Oldham council for 10 years. While I was on that council many fine speeches were made about the way in which we should preserve and develop the Medlock valley. In 10 years nothing was done because that work was shared between the Oldham council and the old Ashton authority. During those 10 years, we also had a duty to record footpaths and to ensure that they were free from obstruction and open. Again, virtually nothing was done, despite the good speeches that were made.

Since the Greater Manchester council has been in operation for the past 10 years, there have been major achievements in the Medlock valley, the Tame valley and many of the other lungs running into Manchester. Its achievement in setting up county parks and ensuring that footpaths are opened up, made easier to walk and well signposted is remarkable. The council's small section which deals with footpaths and their recording has had a remarkable record for removing paths with obstructions and recording paths on maps.

If we try to break up those functions between all the authorities in Greater Manchester, I fear that it will be impossible for the job to be done as well, as effectively and as cheaply. We shall be taking a step backwards in opening up the countryside around our large cities.

Therefore, if we are anxious about local democracy, we should reject the Bill. If we are concerned with our rights and duties as Members of Parliament, we should also reject the Bill because it takes away our right to scrutinise major decisions which will be taken in Britain. We should not give that power to Ministers, of whatever party.

6.5 pm

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): One of the bravest speeches that the Chamber has heard today was that of the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson), who rightly and unreservedly condemned the party political tactics of members of his own party in the GLC. I noticed that the right hon. Gentleman's speech was welcomed with stony, coward-like silence from his hon. Friends. I venture to suggest that if more hon. Members had his courage, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) would not have needed to remind the House that many city councils since the war have gone far to the Left and have come into the clutches of the Marxist-led Labour party and my right hon. Friend would not have found it necessary to introduce the Bill today to protect ratepayers. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Tony Banks: That is the reason.

Mr. Heddle: Labour Members may laugh, but they will be voting tomorrow night on an amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition which says——

Mr. Banks *rose*——

Mr. Heddle: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He has had many opportunities in the past nine months to table an interminable number of questions and to make an interminable number of interventions. No doubt today or tomorrow he will make an interminable speech.

The amendment that the House will be invited to vote upon tomorrow night says that the Bill will centralise powers. No Labour Member has yet proved that case. It says that the Bill is an attack on local democracy. No such case has yet been made out. It says that it will harm employment prospects. No such case has been made out. Indeed, by the raping of local government and by the rapacious and imprudent use of ratepayers' funds, commerce and industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir. J. Osborn) rightly pointed out, have been forced out of the inner cities and metropolitan counties into the shire counties and areas of the prudently-led local authorities. That has had a direct effect on employment opportunities in the cities and in the metropolitan areas.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). The Bill is exercising the minds of my right hon. and hon. Friends because it seeks to do two things in one fell swoop. It would be wrong to suggest that we are all in agreement with all parts of the Bill without reservation. But the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) smiles too soon. Surely the purpose of a Standing Committee is to refine a Bill and to bring some parliamentary sandpaper to some of the clauses and schedules that do not entirely meet with hon. Members' agreement.

The future of the GLC is to some extent different because it found its birth in the old London county council. To some extent, it must be different from the future of the metropolitan county councils, which were born out of a legislative promise in the early 1970s, from, I admit, the Conservative party. The two cannot be taken as one. Therefore, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considers the detailed points that my hon. Friends and I put forward, I hope that he will accept that there is a case for some fine tuning and the use of some parliamentary sandpaper.

How can Opposition Members talk about taking power away from the people, "centralisation of powers" and an "attack on local democracy"? The Bill's central core must be to devolve power, responsibility and services back to the people, to the ratepayers and the local voters.

The London boroughs elect 1,914 councillors to represent them. The GLC has merely 92 councillors, many of whom have no direct contact with their electorate on a ward by ward or district by district basis. The metropolitan districts elect 2,500 councillors who no doubt have a much

closer appreciation of and more contact with their electorate than the mere 600 metropolitan county councillors.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Given the hon. Gentleman's case, would not it be logical for the Government to retain the borough representatives on the Inner London education authority instead of abolishing them, as proposed in the Bill?

Mr. Heddle: The hon. Gentleman has made a point that has been debated elsewhere and will no doubt be debated in Committee.

Many of my constituents in Mid-Staffordshire work, and have commercial and industrial interests, in the West Midlands metropolitan county area. They believe, with me, that the abolition of that authority will mean lower rates, better value for their money as ratepayers and taxpayers, no more expensive time-consuming county hall bureaucracy, more local control of services, and local policies that are determined by local people for local people and that are not borne out of mongrel party political dogma. They believe that the policies of the successor authorities will place an emphasis not on politics but on services.

It should perhaps be recorded that only two members of the alliance are in the Chamber and that there have been only two here for the majority of the debate. But it will be interesting to find out how they vote tomorrow night. After all, only last year they had the following manifesto commitment:

"We propose . . . abolishing one of the existing tiers of local government. This will be done by stages against the background of our proposals for the development of regional government. It would inevitably involve the eventual abolition of the Metropolitan Counties and the GLC."

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that manifesto contained two commitments of principle: one to democratic local government and the other to the abolition of the present system only where there is a better replacement for it. On neither of those grounds are the proposals in the Bill acceptable, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

Mr. Heddle: The House and the electorate at large look forward in eager anticipation to discovering the cost of regional government and the closer contact that it will have with the electorate.

My hon. Friends will be interested in the way that several Opposition Members cast their vote tomorrow night, particularly in view of the commitment made from the Dispatch Box by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)——

Dr. Cunningham: Honourable, not right honourable.

Mr. Heddle: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I am sure that it is only a matter of time one way or the other. He gazed into his party's crystal ball and gave a firm commitment about the way in which his party would decide at the next election to restore some form of strategic and accountable tier to local authorities. *[Interruption.]* It is worth reminding hon. Members what Mr. Livingstone said not only in 1979 but in 1982. In 1979, he said:

"I do not conceive of the GLC as local in any sense. I feel that the boroughs are the major instruments of local government in London. I feel in a sense a degree of regret that Marshall did not push on and say 'Abolish the GLC' because I think it would have been a major saving and would have released massive resources which could have been put into far more productive use . . . I very much regret that Mr. Cutler has not been the really ruthless Tory that he likes to project and come forward with the biggest axe of all and axed the whole appalling show."

In 1982, while addressing a conference of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the same Mr. Livingstone said:

"I believe that we should in principle have a system in which government is done at the lowest possible level, the level closest to the people. People would be better served if it was provided by the borough councils and not the metropolitan areas. I have always at heart been committed to the borough council rather than to regional government."

We look forward with interest to the way in which some Opposition Members, who have the conscience and the courage of the right hon. Member for Brent, East, cast their votes tomorrow night.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider a matter that concerns me, and that involves a quango or one of the consultative boards. I have written to him and his right hon. Friend the Minister of State about it. In the GLC area, particularly in docklands, and in several industrial estates in the metropolitan county areas, overriding leases of industrial premises have been taken by the first-tier authorities, or in docklands by the Greater London enterprise board. After abolition, the covenants of some of those factory estates will be called into question by the pension funds, the institutions and others who have invested in them. The answer that I have received so far from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is that the leases for Greater London will be vested for the time being in the Greater London residuary board. But we learn from the Bill that that body will be in existence for only five years. Leases may well be set to run for 21, 42, 66 or even 99 years. I hope that my right hon. Friend will seriously consider to whom those powers and responsibilities should be transferred on expiry of that quango.

I support the Bill in principle because I believe that it will abolish the pure party political spite that sadly resides in many of the first-tier authorities. I also believe that it may well restore prudent finance and move local democracy to the people whom local government should serve and is really elected to serve.

6.17 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Like other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I cannot claim to be an enthusiastic supporter of the existing two-tier local government structure in the metropolitan areas. From my probably prejudiced standpoint as a former London borough council leader, my experience is that the two-tier system has confused the electors, who can seldom remember which tier does what, and has built-in duplication, bureaucracy and conflict, as problems and paper shuffle between two tiers of local government.

Therefore, I do not approach the Bill on the basis that the GLC and the metropolitan counties are perfect institutions that should be preserved at all costs. But in examining any proposals for change, four criteria are significant. First, will the changes produce a system more accountable to local people? Secondly, will they reduce the domination of local affairs by Ministers and civil servants in Whitehall? Thirdly, will they produce a system of government that is easily understood by ordinary voters? Fourthly, will they mean more efficient and less costly administration?

I submit that, on the first three tests, the Bill fails miserably, and that on the fourth issue the prospects are

[Mr. John Cartwright]

far from encouraging. Let us take, for example, local accountability. It is a fact that elected councils are to be replaced by an intricate spider's web of quangos, agencies and joint boards. It is a fact that GLC powers will be given to the regional water authorities, the Arts Council, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, the Sports Council and to the delightfully entitled "residuary body". Of course, all those bodies are appointed by Ministers and are not elected by ordinary people.

The Secretary of State argues that the joint boards are somehow different, that they are part of a genuine system of local government. It is a fact that members will not be directly elected to those bodies. They will be appointed, presumably by party caucus meetings. The policies of the joint boards will not be directly before the electors. I suggest that the Bill is retaining a two-tier system of local government, in which the upper tier is hidden and is not directly accountable.

The Secretary of State referred to the Herbert commission whose 1960 report paved the way for the reorganisation of London government. The commission looked specifically at special bodies and agencies, which it called ad hoc authorities. The commission was pretty contemptuous of them. It stated:

"the idea . . . need not detain us long. There are two fatal objections to any attempt to deal with London problems by the creation of further *ad hoc* bodies. . . .

The first objection is that these bodies are either the creatures of central government or they are responsible to no-one. The problems of London require the responsible exercise by local authorities of their powers. If *ad hoc* bodies exercise separate independent powers they present problems to both central government and local government."

The Herbert commission continued:

"The second objection is that, as we have shown, so many of London's problems are interlinked. What is needed is some means of considering them as a whole and dealing with them. It is no solution to separate them still further by giving each to some specially designed *ad hoc* body."

The Secretary of State may argue that joint boards are not ad hoc bodies, but they are certainly specially created and, in their initial stages, they will be the creatures of central Government. Clause 80 gives the Secretary of State sweeping powers to control the activities of joint boards and the new Inner London education authority during their first three years of life.

I cannot believe that bodies that do not have the power to control their own staffing levels, budgets, management and internal organisation can accurately be described as part of local government. The Secretary of State argues that he is justified in taking the initial powers over the joint boards because he wants to ensure that their functions are, in the words of the Bill,

"discharged economically, efficiently and effectively".

We would all subscribe to that admirable aim, but the problem with the Secretary of State's approach is that it is not local people who will be deciding on the performance of those joint boards but civil servants in Whitehall.

Just to guarantee that the Secretary of State has a belt and braces coverage of the problem, clause 64(6) automatically rate caps the new joint boards and the Inner London education authority for their first three years of life. I repeat: to regard bodies that are subject to such detailed central control and direction as examples of genuine local government is to do violence to the English language.

Apart from the detailed control over joint boards, hon. Members have already referred to the growth of direct Whitehall controls over existing boroughs and districts which appears in the small print of the Bill. On planning, the Secretary of State has the right to issue strategic guidance to which boroughs and metropolitan districts must have regard in drawing up their own local plans.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: At the other end of that process, the unitary plans which the local authorities will draw up will give more power at the local level and less at the central level. The authorities will not be required to submit those plans to the Secretary of State for approval, as happens at present with the structure plans. This is a devolution of planning powers to the local level.

Mr. Cartwright: I accept that that may be what the Secretary of State is seeking to achieve. I believe that most people would regard the fact that he begins the exercise by issuing strategic guidance as something that inevitably limits the freedom of local authorities to draw up their own local plans. That is the point I am trying to make. The same sort of situation arises with road traffic in Greater London. Again, the Secretary of State can give guidance to the London boroughs. If they act contrary to the guidance, the Secretary of State can direct an individual authority to take specified action in a specified period. If the authority fails to comply, the Secretary of State can undertake the work himself and charge the local authority for what has been done.

Ministers are given sweeping powers to intervene through directions, approvals, consents and guidance on 59 different occasions in the Bill. There are 64 opportunities for Ministers to introduce statutory instruments. I suggest that all that adds up to a third tier of metropolitan government—a tier in Whitehall whose powers are immensely strengthened by the Bill.

What is the ordinary citizen of London — or the metropolitan counties — to make of this confusing patchwork quilt of quangos, joint boards and ministerial power? He simply will not understand it, unless, of course, he has a PhD in political science. If ordinary people do not understand how they are governed, accountable local democracy is inevitably undermined.

The explanatory and financial memorandum accepts that abolition will involve "some transitional costs" and puts the figure at about £40 million in 1986-87 for both the GLC and the metropolitan counties. Redundancy payments are the major element in that sum. The GLC officers have a different calculation, putting the costs for the GLC alone at £65 million in 1986-87, with an additional cost of £32 million a year thereafter. There is a clear conflict of view about that assessment.

When it comes to savings, about which we have heard so much but have had so little detail, the explanatory and financial memorandum claims a figure of £100 million. There is, however no detailed breakdown to justify the figures. There is no estimate of the cost of establishing the successor authorities and of splitting up central services between individual boroughs and districts. It is a great pity that in seeking to make an assessment we have no impartial calculations on which to base our judgment. I suspect that my constituents, like those of other right hon. and hon.

Gentlemen will say that any reorganisation of local government costs them money. I suspect, too, that they will be right in this case.

I object also to the way in which the Bill builds in uncertainty. Reference has already been made to clause 21 which empowers the Secretary of State to undertake a statutory review of ILEA by 1991 and at any time subsequently. That could mean that all of ILEA's powers could go to the inner London boroughs. Individual functions could be hived off — for example, adult education, nursery schools or primary schools. This power could bring about the dismemberment of ILEA by the back door.

Equally worrying is the fact that the Inner London education service will be subject to a permanent review and continuing public debate. That is hardly likely to produce the sort of stability that is necessary for an effective education service in a difficult area such as inner London.

Clause 40 gives the same sort of sweeping powers to the Secretary of State to scrap the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority which is set up under clause 26. The Secretary of State can totally reorganise police authorities and passenger transport authorities, so there can be no firm future for those bodies either.

Clause 59 enables the Secretary of State to give the residuary bodies any of the powers and functions previously carried out by the GLC and the metropolitan counties. That measure holds out the extraordinary prospect of the abolished authorities having some sort of ghostly life beyond the grave, but a life directed by the Secretary of State who appoints and has power to control the residuary bodies. Throughout the Bill Ministers are given the powers to change, vary and amplify the distribution of functions and powers and the properties of the bodies involved. Hon. Members cannot be sure that the proposals in the Bill will last long and, more importantly, that what we see is what we will get.

There is wide agreement that the Government should have commissioned an impartial study and analysis of the system of government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties before embarking on legislation. I do not believe that the GLC and the metropolitan counties should be retained indefinitely. They are too large to be genuinely local government and many of their powers are wrong. In some cases, their boundaries are too small to make them effective strategic authorities.

I believe that the aim must be one tier of local government in which boroughs and districts carry out genuinely local powers and provide genuinely local services. Beyond that, there will be a continuing need for a wider tier of elected government to be responsible for the powers, duties and functions that must be carried out across a city region. I refer to powers for major planning, economic development, transport, fire services and major leisure and recreational facilities. Such regional bodies would not be sucking powers up, as the Secretary of State suggested, but would have the ability to pull powers down from Whitehall closer to ordinary people. None of that will be available from this Government, of that we can be sure. However, if the Bill goes through, it is only a matter of time before the House will have to return to this issue to create order out of the chaos that will flow from this legislation.

6.30 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). He may be surprised to learn that I listened with intermittent agreement. Perhaps that is not entirely surprising, because while Mr. Livingstone has been hiring London's hoardings at the ratepayers' expense and plastering them with contentious political posters, the real argument about the future of the GLC and the metropolitan counties has been carried on within the Conservative party. Occasionally that was evident during the Secretary of State's speech today.

In some ways during the past few months, the most effective opposition to the Government's plans for London has come, not from Mr. Livingstone, but from Alan Greengross, the Conservative leader of the GLC. Alan Greengross has largely accepted that a wide range of powers should be transferred from the GLC to the London boroughs, but he and most of his Conservative colleagues at county hall argue that there will still be a need for a directly elected body to provide an effective and financially disciplined voice for London as a whole.

In this plan, Alan Greengross has been supported by a number of non-partisan, non-Socialist voices. For example, on 24 November *The Times* put it rather well when it said:

"The citizens of Mr. Heath's constituency in Bexley, and those of Mrs. Thatcher in Barnet, belong to the same urban mass; it is a nonsense to deny that they are not mutually involved in the same set of London-wide issues, too big and too general safely to be left to the Councillors respectively of Bexley and Barnet."

That view has been echoed by Lord Marshall, who was quoted by the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) in his attack on the Government and Ken Livingstone. Lord Marshall is a Conservative with impeccable local government credentials. He has served for years as the Conservative party's vice-chairman with responsibility for local government. He carried out a detailed survey of local government in Greater London.

Mr. Gorst: Does my hon. Friend believe that the unity of interest in the two constituencies to which he referred will necessarily lead to the two representatives agreeing?

Sir Philip Goodhart: I doubt it.

I agree with Lord Marshall when he says:

"I share the view of those who maintain that the sum of local needs and aspirations falls short of the wider interests of London as a whole".

Lord Marshall is right when he says that a number of issues — such as public transport and traffic — need to be discussed on a Londonwide basis. Indeed, in my view, a gaping gap in the centre of the Bill, and to some extent in the Secretary of State's speech today, is the failure to make any provision for the sensible discussion of Londonwide problems.

Do we need a special directly elected body to fill that role? I am particularly well placed to understand the Government's reluctance to establish "Son of GLC" because for a couple of years I was Minister with special responsibilities for Belfast in the Northern Ireland Office. I had to deal with a directly elected council which had almost no powers. It could have been worse. We had a good working relationship, but I understand why the Government think that such a formula is not desirable for London.

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

Some people suggest that the London Boroughs Association should become a suitable forum for discussing Londonwide issues. I am sure that the association should play an increasingly important role in the life of the capital, but I do not think that anyone who is not already a member of the LBA believes that it can be the principal forum for such discussions.

Hon. Members representing London constituencies will have to play a greater role in debating Londonwide issues. In the 20 years since the GLC was established we have been pretty casual in the way that we, as a House, have dealt with London issues. We hold a couple of debates each year in private Members' time on London money Bills and the Greater London Council (General Powers) Bill, but too often they are long on political knockabout and short on serious discussion of London's problems.

In the last few years we have also had an annual debate on the report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. They have been good debates, but there is a limit to the time that can be found for regular debates on London issues on the Floor of the House. With the departure of the GLC we need a London Grand Committee, open to all London Members, to discuss London's special problems and to monitor and scrutinise the workings of such executive agencies as London Regional Transport.

Many experts agree that the day-to-day political interference from county hall politicians in the working of London Transport has cost London ratepayers and travellers many millions of pounds. At last the politicians' fingers have been prised from the driver's wheel of London Transport. We do not want those political hands back. But our constituents have a vital interest in the policies and performance of London Regional Transport, and it is right that we should scrutinise and monitor its performance.

I know that the chairman of London Regional Transport would welcome such debates, and that a London Grand Committee would be an ideal place in which to hold them. The responsible Minister and the board of London Regional Transport would be bound to pay attention to what was said in those debates.

There are issues of less immediate importance that might also need some scrutiny. In part II of the Bill I note and approve of the Government's proposals to put the GLC's admirable historic building section under the wing of the Historic Monuments Commission. That seems to be a logical step. But perhaps unexpected difficulties will arise. It may be that the arrangements will not work out as well as we hope. There again, a London Grand Committee would be the ideal forum with which to probe and discuss any difficulties that arose.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that, in general terms, such a toothless watchdog—that is what a London Grand Committee would be—would have the same problems as the Scottish Grand Committee and the Welsh Grand Committee, giving rise to great frustration and little satisfaction? Further, those Committees each have a whole Department with which to deal, whereas we would have a small sector of part of a Department, and no real control whatever.

Sir Philip Goodhart: I do not accept that the Scottish Grand Committee and the Welsh Grand Committee are wholly ineffective. If the Government were to introduce proposals to do away with the Scottish Grand Committee or the Welsh Grand Committee, I have no doubt that Opposition Members — including Scottish and Welsh Members of the Liberal party—would be loud in their condemnation of the Government's action. I believe that a London Grand Committee could be a better voice than the GLC has been in recent years for the problems of London as a whole.

In recent years, the agenda of GLC monthly meetings has been confused and its debates have been largely chaotic. I note that at one particularly long session in 1983 the debate on the GLC's capital allocations for the following financial year lasted just 35 minutes, while 36 minutes in the same session were spent on discussing whether Shell U.K. Oil had exported oil to South Africa.

Incoherent debates are difficult to report properly and, as a result, responsible London media such as *The Standard* or the London Broadcasting Company devote little space or attention to them. A London Grand Committee could provide a forum for Londonwide debate, which would be better than anything we have at the moment.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Philip Goodhart: I hope that my right hon. Friend, in replying to the debate, will tell us how the Government intend that the Londonwide issues should be monitored, scrutinised and debated. I hope that his reply will be sufficiently forthcoming to encourage me to continue to support the Bill.

6.43 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I wish to establish three points: first, that the Bill is a wicked act of political vindictiveness; secondly, that it is a direct attack on the democratic process; and, thirdly, that it is an affront to the people of Tyne and Wear. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) almost made my case for me on my first point, and my hon. Friends will have noted carefully his introductory remarks.

There is no moral, economic or sociological reason why the Bill should be introduced, so it must be concluded that it is for purely political reasons. It is no coincidence that the Tyne and Wear county council, like all the other local authorities that are under threat, is Labour-controlled. The Labour party has been the clear choice of the people in the Tyne and Wear area at every election since the authority was formed. That political majority is mirrored in the district councils in the Tyne and Wear area and also by the Members of Parliament who sit in the House of Commons.

It is logical that the people of the area should vote in the way they do. It reflects their aspirations for a higher standard of living. Yet the whole northern region is in turmoil, due exclusively to the policies of the present Government. Unemployment in the region has consistently been the highest since the Government were first elected in 1979. The living standards of young and old have been eroded. The basic industries in the area are under severe attack, and their very existence is threatened. That applies particularly to coal, shipbuilding, steel and heavy engineering, each of those industries having shed thousands of jobs. Only last week the Minister, in this very House, announced horrendous cuts in regional aid, which will further damage the northern region, threatening more jobs in the Tyne and Wear county council area.

A lengthy list of measures has been introduced by the Government since 1979 affecting the people of Tyne and Wear. No wonder the people have looked to local government for protection from the damage done by the Government. However, regrettably, damage limitation is all that has been possible. The Tyne and Wear county council has an excellent record in that respect, and I have received many letters of tribute from companies for what the authority has managed to achieve.

Among the successes achieved by Tyne and Wear—I do not wish to minimise its efforts in other areas while I concentrate on industrial and economic matters—is the attraction to the area of the Nissan company. Although we all recognise that the Nissan company had its own good economic and financial reasons for choosing the north-east, nevertheless the company will create about 250 jobs in the short-term. By the end of the 1980s, it should be producing about 2,500 jobs directly, and perhaps twice as many in the spin-off. But we should need 1,000 companies, each bringing 250 to 300 jobs, to solve our unemployment problem. That is the magnitude of it.

Our hope and expectation is that other companies will follow Nissan. If the hard-headed business men from Japan can be convinced that we have the skills and the management ability in the north-east that they need, other companies are bound to take note.

However, the point that I wish to underline is related not to the Nissan company but to the officers and elected local authority councillors in Tyne and Wear who were instrumental in attracting the jobs to the area. I recognise that it was a team effort—an equal partnership with Sunderland borough council and Washington development corporation. However, despite that success, recognised throughout the land, the Government have the stupidity and ignorance to threaten two thirds of that partnership —Tyne and Wear county council and the Washington development corporation.

I spoke about the threat to the Washington development corporation in the recent Second Reading debate on the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill. To break up the industrial attraction group is nothing short of madness. People in the region cannot and will never understand how any Government could act with such blatant vindictiveness. People in the north-east are crying out for jobs. They want to be rescued from the dole queue. Yet the Government seek to plunge them even deeper into the morass of unemployment. For the people whom I represent, the decision to abolish the Tyne and Wear authority is clearly political, vindictive and wicked.

In this direct attack on the democratic process the Government are set on a course which will lead, if it has not done so already, to the United Kingdom having the most centralised Government in western Europe. From the Cabinet to outside bodies, all opposition has to be eliminated. Local authority spending is to be limited through rate capping. That process, with the penalty system, will bring enormous problems for local government. Local authorities will be unable to carry out the many statutory functions required of them by central Government and at the same time keep within the law. Local authorities with a strategic function are to be eliminated altogether.

Two matters could have been tested at the ballot box —first, that people in the districts were happy for extra money to be raised to pay for essential services and, secondly, that people wanted the metropolitan counties. On the first matter, Tory candidates had the opportunity to campaign against rate increases in the 1984 elections in Tyne and Wear. I need not remind Conservative Members that Tory leaders in Sunderland lost their seats in that election. In my constituency the Tories did not even put forward any candidates. No doubt the House will draw the correct conclusions from that.

Attitudes to the Tyne and Wear metropolitan authority could also have been tested at the ballot box, but the Government took the cowardly decision to abandon the elections altogether. When democratic processes are available to test policies, they should be used. Yet the Government, clearly and deliberately and in full knowledge of what they are doing, are eroding the democratic process and removing, brick by brick, a wall of protection built over centuries, often at great cost to individuals.

In a democracy, one must listen to and weigh evidence from reputable and independent authorities. This may be a painful process, especially when one's prejudices are challenged, but although an individual may remain stubborn and unflinching, a Government cannot do so without threatening democracy itself. Yet the Government have consistently refused to justify their claims through an independent inquiry.

I have considered the main arguments in the studies commissioned by the metropolitan authorities. I have noted the conclusions of the Coopers and Lybrand study into the finances of abolition. There is also the study of joint boards by the highly respected Inlogov and a study by PA Management Consultants of non-financial matters. The PA Management Consultants study concluded:

"The proposals represent a significant enlargement of the powers of central government in local affairs."

The Government are also blatantly undemocratic in their proposal to replace the directly elected Tyne and Wear authority with a series of quangos. The official stated purpose of the Bill is to

"Abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils; to transfer their functions to the local authorities in their areas and, in some cases, to other bodies".

That is highly misleading as at least 70 per cent. and probably 80 per cent. of the spending will be transferred to bodies directly controlled by Whitehall—a further significant shift to the centre.

Finally, the Bill is an affront to the people of Tyne and Wear, who have consistently voted for a Labour-controlled authority because they prefer the priority given to essential services by that council. Our integrated public transport system, for example, is visited by people of many countries and is respected throughout the world. If the many services provided by the council had not been what the people wanted, they could have given political control to another party through the ballot box. People in the area want the right to elect and to sack their representatives. They want their local authority to be free of interference from central Government. They want elected representatives who are accountable to them. They want all that because they are democrats. We are the true protectors of democracy. By introducing the Bill, the Conservatives have abdicated any right to call themselves democrats.

6.55 pm

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): I do not know whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, share my view

[Mr. Eldon Griffiths]

that we are at the beginning of a long, hard slog. I express my sympathy to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, whom we are all glad to see back in his place. My sympathy extends also to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), as I suspect that the rose in his buttonhole will have wilted and that his humour, which gave us pleasure today, will be much needed in the long debates in Committee that lie ahead of him and my right hon. Friends.

I approach the Bill with a sense of apprehension but also of déja vu, as I was one of those who commended the last reorganisation of local government from the Dispatch Box in 1973, with my right hon. Friends the then Secretaries of State for Defence and for Energy and the then Financial Secretary, now Secretary of State for the Environment — all of whom have since done rather better than I have. I commended that reorganisation to the House with the same confidence that we were entirely right as my right hon. Friends will doubtless display today. There was just one difference. At that time we were proposing to set up the metropolitan counties. We are now proposing to destroy them. Such is the wisdom of the Conservative party, however, that on both occasions we were right.

We are right to get rid of the metropolitan counties for the following reasons. First, they perform very few useful functions which would not be better performed by the proposed successor authorities, although there are certain responsibilities that the Bill fails to cover. Secondly, the performance of some of the metropolitan counties and certainly of the GLC in recent years has been such that party and ideological considerations have been put first and the interests of ratepayers and the community have been lost in the process. On balance, therefore, I believe that the metropolitan counties and certainly the GLC should go. Nevertheless, I must express certain doubts about the way in which the Bill will turn out.

I very much doubt whether abolition will save money. I have been involved in the whole subject of legislation affecting local government for far too long to imagine that the sanguine expectations of money being saved by reorganisation will be realised. I agree with the late Patrick Hutber, who stated in Hutber's law that

"most legislation intended to make things better and cheaper generally makes them worse and more expensive."

I believe that that process will operate to some extent with this legislation.

Having observed the fall-out of the 1973 legislation in local government, it is clear to me that at that time we made a fundamental error that the Government are now in danger of repeating—we reformed the structure but not the finance. One of the big problems for local government ever since that time has been that such is the demand for services at the local level that rate arguments, rate-capping arguments and arguments about rate support grant and grant-related expenditure allocations have continued apace —simply because we reformed the structure but did not provide the new structure with an adequate revenue-producing financial base. With the present Bill, too, we shall change the structure but not provide a satisfactory financial base for the new authorities.

One specific area in which I have an interest is the impact of the Bill on the metropolitan police services, which is contained in clause 40 and clause 80. For all practical purposes, clause 40 means that the Secretary of State can reconstitute any of the metropolitan district police forces if he wants to. Inevitably, towns such as Sheffield, Rotherham, Liverpool and Birmingham will demand their own police forces back. There may be something to be said for that. I shall consider the substance of the case in a moment. However, once this power is on the statute book, nothing can prevent the great cities within the metropolitan police areas demanding that their police forces be returned to their own control. Hon. Members representing those cities, on either side of the House, will join their local councillors in supporting that demand for the local police forces to be returned to accountability— if that is the right word—to the new district authorities.

I understand that the present Home Secretary has no intention of agreeing to this. He will not be easily persuaded, and the Bill makes it clear that unless he is persuaded that the new city police forces will be better and that in setting them up there will be no countervailing damage done to other areas of the police service, he will refuse. However, that is only the view of the present Home Secretary. Once the provision is on the statute book, future Home Secretaries may take a different view, and the House must examine the impact on the police service of the power in the Bill, not the statements of Ministers.

Few people in the police service will weep any tears over the disappearance of those metropolitan council members of their own police authorities who have lost no opportunity to condemn, or even to impede, the work of the metropolitan police forces. However, that is not an argument for opening wide the door to the prospective dismemberment of the efficient metropolitan county forces that have come into existence over the past 10 years. Whatever view we take of, for instance, the miners' strike or the crime wave, we can all pay tribute to the efficiency of the Merseyside, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire West Yorkshire, West Midlands and Tyne and Wear police services. The Metropolitan police services are a success. It is, therefore, a brash step for any Government to open the door to their potential dismemberment. Too much time and trouble have been invested in building them up over the past 10 years for us now to run the risk of breaking them up and handing over the pieces to 20 or more successor authorities, few of which will have the size or the resources to do the job as well.

I know who wants the change to be made. First, although they would deny it, a proportion of senior officers within the police service would love this because of the prospect of another 20 or 30 chief police officer posts. I cannot blame them. There is not much blue sky in the police service, and the prospect of more jobs at senior level is bound to be attractive.

Secondly, and more important, there are several hundred ambitious local councillors in the cities who relish the thought of getting hold once again of their own city police forces under their own police authorities.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): A good idea.

Mr. Griffiths: It may or may not be a good idea. In future, many of my hon. Friends — reflecting the pressures within their cities—may demand that they too should have control over their own police services. The Government of the day will then say that they are simply

returning the police service to more local accountability. That would be the argument, but there are three fatal flaws in it.

First, such a move would usher in a period of confusion and scenery-shifting, not to speak of a scramble for jobs, at a time when the police service needs stability above all else. Secondly, it makes no sense to have within the same bricks and mortar area two or three different police forces, with all the danger of overlapping jurisdictions and different attitudes to equipment, public order, training or recruitment. Police operations no longer can be run on the basis of separate police forces within the same area. Such matters as mobile equipment, radio telecommunications, recruiting and attitudes all need to be handled on a strategic basis within the same conurbation.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Griffiths: I have nearly finished my speech.

So, first, there would be a period of confusion. Secondly, it makes no sense to have overlapping jurisdictions. Thirdly, the change for city forces would cost a bomb, and the money would be far better spent on recruiting more policemen and on equipping and training them better.

I know that the Government hope that this will not happen. I am glad to see that the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw), is here tonight but I can tell him that, once one opens that door, there is no way in which political representatives at the local level, or in the House, will not immediately start to knock and to condemn the existing metropolitan police forces, because that will pave the way for the demand that they should be fragmented.

That is the political issue and the danger to the police. I shall do my best to ensure that clause 40 is thrown out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is now in operation. I appeal to hon. Members for their co-operation.

7.7 pm

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): The speech to which we have just listened, with other speeches and interventions from the Government Benches, must have convinced the Secretary of State that his support on those Benches is at best partial and unenthusiastic and at worst minimal and grudging. One should not be surprised about that. Seldom in my long years in the House have I heard so distorted and insubstantial a case as the Secretary of State put for the Bill.

There were times when I could hardly believe my ears. There stood the right hon. Gentleman, saying that the object of the Bill was to decentralise power to strong London boroughs. Yet we all know — the right hon. Gentleman must have known it as he spoke — that no one has done more than he to centralise power, taking power away from the London boroughs and absorbing into the Department of the Environment more and more, every day, of their decision-making powers. No one has done more than the right hon. Gentleman to weaken the boroughs, to reverse the process of decentralisation and enhance the process of centralisation, and yet he talks about decentralisation and about strengthening the boroughs. I suppose, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if I said that it was a piece of hypocrisy, I would be out of order; so I will not say that it was a piece of hypocrisy. If I could think of another word that described it adequately, I should use it. The Secretary of State sounded like King Herod appointing himself president of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It was a monstrous piece of role reversal in rhetoric. He already has many powers and, as successive hon. Members have observed, there are more than half a hundred additional powers in the Bill, and he still talks about decentralisation.

The right hon. Gentleman's arithmetic was at fault as well. The powers now exercised by the GLC and other metropolitan counties are to be dispersed in three ways — first, to lower tier local government, secondly, to the Government and, thirdly, to other bodies or quangos. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned some of the powers that are to go to unelected bodies. He said that only two new bodies are being set up, but there are plenty of old ones that will get more and more to do. One of the new ones will be set up to advise him on planning. He will choose its members. It is pretty clear that he will not choose to advise him anyone who is unlikely to give him the advice that he wants. I see no point in that quango.

A large proportion of the decisions that affect the welfare of all citizens are at the moment made by people whom they have elected, who are accountable to them and whom they can sack. Such decisions will increasingly be made by people the Minister chooses, who are accountable to him and who he can sack. Many important functions will be performed in that way. We do not have to speculate about the effect of that as there are two parts of the country — the east end of London and Liverpool — with river side areas where local people have been ruled by a quango for the past three years. Such people know only too well how they suffer as a result of being run by people who are not accountable to them.

The London Docklands development corporation controls an area which includes 50,000 people, half of them in a densely packed part of Tower Hamlets. Those people do not matter tuppence to the LDDC. The only people that the corporation cares about are property developers and anyone else who can produce a fast buck for it, irrespective of the social and environmental consequences. Local people therefore lose recreation sites, amenities and access to the riverside. I can illustrate the point no better than by reading part of an advertisement — time does not permit me to read all of it — inserted by a riverside tenants' association in an east end newspaper last week. They said:

> "Thank you LDDC from the people who live at St. Katharine's Dock. Thank you for sometimes listening to our views and always ignoring them . . . Thank you for your promises even though you break them . . . Thank you for reneging on your written commitment about public walkways in St. Katharine's Dock . . . Thank you for not enforcing your decisions when developers flout them . . . Thank you for the illegal builders' yard which caused nine months of misery . . . Thank you for a planning policy which creates traffic chaos and noise . . . Thank you for blocking out the daylight from our homes . . . Thank you for robbing the public of a riverside walkway . . . Thank you for not preserving the two remaining historic buildings in St. Katharine's Dock . . . Thank you for putting development profit above the quality of our lives. Thanks for nothing!" nothing!"

The thing that makes those tenants most sore is that the corporation keeps them in the dark about what it is up to and planning to do. The LDDC board meets in secret. It does not publish agendas or minutes. That is much worse

[Mr. Ian Mikardo]

than the secrecy of any local authorities of which some of us complain. It never enters into consultation with local representatives until after it has finalised its decisions. Once, joint working parties were set up to deal with local issues on the Isle of Dogs. They collapsed because the corporation's representatives never turned up.

Mr. Gorst: I believe that the hon. Gentleman does not understand that all of the complaints about lack of interest in the docklands will, under the Government's scheme, be well taken care of because borough councils in places such as Hillingdon and Barnet, where I am, will have an abiding interest in what goes on in the docklands and look after local interests.

Mr. Mikardo: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will go and tell those chaps in St. Katharine's that they have nothing to worry about because the hon. Gentleman's Hillingdonites will look after them. To be perfectly honest, they will say, "Come on. Pull the other one."

For the benefit of the many hon. Members, such as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who are interested in water sports, I should like to give a typical example of the LDDC's behaviour. The Shadwell basin in Wapping is the last seven acres of open water in the London docks. Every planning proposal since 1976 has been committed to the development of Shadwell basin as a public water recreation area for the people of the east end of London. About 2,000 people use it each year for all forms of water sports and for training. Much money has gone into it, given by many statutory and voluntary bodies, including the corporation. Suddenly, the whole thing is threatened because the corporation is proposing to put high walls all around the basin in the form of four-storey luxury housing, which all the experts who have examined it say will destroy the basin's wind pattern and thus render sailing difficult and board-sailing impossible. What is the corporation's reaction to the anxiety of local people at this loss of a treasured amenity? For 11 months the people who run the Shadwell basin project have written to the corporation asking for a discussion. Not one of their letters has been answered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he would conclude his speech.

Mr. Mikardo: I am on my last sentence. There is much more to say, but my point is that, as many of the functions performed by elected authorities are to go to quangos, the conditions that I have described will multiply a dozenfold as a result of the Bill. If there were no other reason for voting against it—and there are many—that is reason enough.

7.18 pm

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): Some of us will recognise the behaviour of councils in the description given by the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) of the London Docklands development corporation, but I shall leave consideration of the river Thames because there is more in England than London and more in this debate than the GLC. The metropolitan counties cover nearly 5 million more people than the GLC, have six times as many councillors and employ 60 per cent. more people.

For the 10 years they have existed, the metropolitan counties failed to attract either public loyalty or much awareness. I do not recognise the creature which is now brought out for me to see. For years people have ignored these authorities. It is rather like bringing out an old retainer from the kitchen and dressing him up as prince for the occasion. These great metropolitan councils, which we are now asked to defend, have had 10 years in which to develop a new role to which people can attribute loyalties, but they have not done so. We are now asked to believe that to abolish them is an exercise in smashing democracy.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) quoted from *The Times* and said that there was no philosophy behind the Bill. I question that. My own view — this was referred to by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and others—is that, if we could, we should run the country on the basis of single-tier authorities. That phrase emanates time and again from all quarters of the House, and there is clear agreement about it. Democracy is not only about voting but about accountability in the context of "get-atability". It is about being able to recognise and identify those to whom one turns.

We recognise Parliament as the place for dealing with nations. We recognise some of the old counties—in Manchester, we still drink to the Queen as the Duke of Lancaster. We recognise our old towns and cities. But the metropolitan counties, however much we may wish that they had done so, have failed to achieve anything like that identifiable purpose.

In addition, as ordinary citizens we can recognise single-purpose bodies. It is easily understood that if a problem relates to water, one goes to the water authority, and if it relates to the police one goes to the police authority. That is quite different from saying that there should be a second lot of general purpose people. Such people start with a limited range of functions and seek to add to them. They then begin to overlap, thereby giving rise to confusion. Therefore, there is no difficulty in ordinary people understanding that for the greater bulk of their local services they will go to the town hall and that for a service which is necessarily carried out in common they should go to the authority named as delivering that service.

Personally, I should like to see some of these combined services broken down into smaller units. I do not have the same fear about clause 40. I appreciate that it will not always be possible to have single-tier authorities, but, if we can, it would be desirable to have groupings on the narrowest basis.

I do not believe that once a councillor serves on a joint authority he ceases to be democratically elected. At present, on the Greater Manchester police committee there are four Labour councillors from the city of Manchester. Under the new proposal there will be five councillors from the city of Manchester, and as representation will be on the basis of party, that will presumably mean four Labour councillors and one Tory councillor. Therefore, there will be an adequate representation from each area on each authority. Such representation will be much more related to the population and spread through more parties. Consequently, it will be possible to identify the person whom one should approach to deal with such a matter. This is a question of identification, not necessarily one of having a direct vote.

It is perfectly possible to have a democratic input by a nominated person from a democratically elected council. That has happened before, and it can happen now. Many joint committees already exist, even in the metropolitan counties. Those who rush to serve on the joint authority which controls Manchester airport — one of the most popular bodies on which a councillor can serve—do not complain that they have been nominated.

I accept that these councils have done good work. It would be perverse to suppose that 600 councillors, sitting for 10 years, have done nothing but bad work. The people whom they employ have done many good things. However, it is wrong to suppose that they are essential to our lives. The three essential functions of the metropolitan counties are police, fire and transport. The Bill provides a proper authority for controlling those. There has been a gross over-inflation of the other functions which they undertake.

There is, for example, great talk about the extent to which arts and voluntary bodies will be done down by the process. That is not true. In Manchester, some of us have tried for many years to secure a greater recognition of the city as a major regional centre for the arts. This is not simply a question of putting more local money into the centre. It is a question of noting that national institutions do not exist solely within London, and that national money and policies should affect institutions in the provinces.

Therefore, it is of great importance—for me a great pleasure—that some of the institutions which have been locally funded will get on to the national list. That applies to the Royal Exchange theatre, the Manchester museum, the Whitworth art gallery and the Hallé orchestra. The Hallé Concert Society, which has backed that orchestra when many others have not contributed, says that it is pleased

"to be funded centrally as a national organisation".

It is important to recognise that the change in the funding of these bodies is of great value.

Unfortunately, much of this debate has been conducted to stimulate fear about what will happen. Some of the comments have been disreputable, just like the leaflet which asks, "Do you want a state-controlled police force?" That was put out by the GMC. No one could justify the statements in that document—*[Interruption.]* No doubt in Committee we shall have much pleasure listening to what Labour Members believe to be justification.

There has also been the suggestion that people will lose because there will be fewer resources. That confuses two arguments. There is a case for arguing that the resources devoted to some local government services have, to put it mildly, been over-constrained. That is perfectly reasonable, but it does not follow from the Bill. Either the existing system or the new system can have more resources put in or more resources taken away, and it does not follow that a change in the system which is now proposed will necessarily reduce the resources available.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spoke of the time when local authorities were responsible for a great range of activities, such as health and water. We also heard reference to the grand old cities and the county boroughs. I share that view. The time of great municipal enterprise was wonderful. But that is not achieved through the metropolitan counties. We must find other ways of doing that, and we must aim to drive more and more on to the district councils.

7.28 pm

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) dismissed in a cavalier fashion the well-founded fears of many people in the regions about these proposals, as have many Conservative Members. They do not care how their constituents feel. However, there is great anxiety in the west midlands about these proposals. I have received a considerable number of letters, especially from pensioners who are worried about the integrated bus service and the possible removal of their privileges on the west midlands bus routes. We cannot overlook those expressions of anxiety.

I am astounded and shocked that a Government, especially one who call themselves democratic, should consider introducing such a Bill, and be determined to steamroll the measure through the House in the face of united and determined opposition of hon. Members from all parties, all groups, all organisations and all elected representatives without consulting those who are most involved. It is an insult to all who believe in democracy and a slap in the face to all who spend time, effort and money helping disadvantaged people in our constituencies and regions, and other people who rely on the services that the regions provide.

The enormity of the proposals is further compounded by the evidence from Coopers and Lybrand. That firm is well known to the Government. Even the miserable sum of £100 million which the Government claim could be saved by this mayhem cannot be substantiated. The firm claims that the likely costs of the exercise in the six metropolitan county councils will be almost £70 million a year. The alternatives to the metropolitan councils are to be no fewer than 18 new joint boards for police, fire and transport. Those services now consume 67 per cent. of current metropolitan county council expenditure. The Government propose to transfer police, fire and transport, which take 67 per cent. of a £1·2 billion budget, from directly elected councils to Government quangos. A further 15 per cent. will be transferred to other agencies. That means that 82 per cent. of spending will be taken from elected councils. By any standards, that is highway robbery.

What will district councils get from the deal to finance the extra services that they will have to take over? They will get less than one fifth of present expenditure. The West Midlands county council has allocated £280,000 to equal opportunities organisations, mainly to ethnic minority groups. Hon. Members know that we have a large number of ethnic minorities in the west midlands. Who will fund such work after dissolution?

The Government praise the voluntary sector from time to time. We all do, but voluntary bodies cannot meet the mounting demands for help by collecting pennies in the street. Who will give them the funds to carry out the important jobs which have already been placed on their shoulders?

With the Government's continuing attack on social services there is now greater need than ever to support voluntary bodies, yet the Government expect the boroughs and district councils to take on the responsibilities of providing grants to voluntary organisations. None can guarantee to do that, unless they receive additional resources. To replace the £60 million now being spent by the Greater London council and the metropolitan county

[Mrs. Renée Short]

councils, the Government are offering only £3·7 million a year for four years to ease the transitional period. That is nowhere near the present sum that voluntary organisations get to carry out their responsibilities. It is totally inadequate. Many organisations will fold and thousands of disadvantaged people, who now get help from voluntary bodies, which are supported by the metropolitan county councils will suffer. What will the Minister tell them?

The Secretary of State will become a dictator of the joint boards' finance. He could dictate about jobs, services, management, the block grant that they will receive, planning, highways, traffic powers, and airports. He could break up, without an inquiry, joint boards for police, fire and public transport. He could regulate salaries and interfere with all staffing levels of the district councils, and not just with the staff involved in the services that the councils are to inherit from the metropolitan county councils. The Bill provides a freeway for the Secretary of State to become an absolute dictator in local government.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State could create dozens of quangos. Conservative Members say that they do not like quangos, so the Secretary of State calls them residuary bodies. They will operate a wide range of other services at enormous additional cost, which will be borne by the wretched district councils, whose resources will be cut when the metropolitan county councils are abolished. The Secretary of State could amend primary legislation by order. What about the poor bewildered citizens on the receiving end? They will be utterly confused and frustrated by stifling, top-heavy bureaucracy. There will be umpteen different precepts, levies and charges, which will bewilder our citizens.

The Bill is a recipe for conflict. It is undemocratic and a huge step along the road to fascism. It will demolish locally elected bodies and replace them by non-elected quangos. What word other than fascism can describe that? In Germany, before the war, local authorities were abolished and Nazi quangos were installed to make it easier for the Nazi takeover. Such are the dangers we face in the Bill.

The Government's proposals are opposed by every democratic, academic, professional and environmental body. Many bodies that co-operate with the West Midlands county council have expressed their opposition to these proposals. Ten years ago a Tory Government created the metropolitan county councils. Now they seek to strangle them, when in every other democratic country regional problems and responsibilities are being resolved by regional authorities. Nevertheless, the Government seek to put the clock back.

If a Labour Government had proposed such a Bill, I can imagine the rage that Tory Members would have expressed in the House. I can hear the voice of the Prime Minister who, as Leader of the Opposition, would express her anxiety and fulminate against the killing of local democracy. She would stand at the Dispatch Box and call on her troops to fight the legislation every inch of the way. I promise the Government that all of us who care about the survival of local democracy and who share the views that have been expressed in plain terms by the metropolitan county councils will fight this legislation every inch of the way.

7.38 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): One point that has emerged during the debate is the feeling expressed by some hon. Members that the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils should have been dealt with separately. Despite the hammer blows received recently to the belief that the House of Commons can still sometimes produce good legislation, this is undoubtedly a sad day. It gives me no pleasure to assert that this is undoubtedly one of the rather dubious Bills that the House has seen presented in recent years, irrespective of the party in government.

Although many keep quiet, it is widely known that this rather crude and unconsidered Bill was originally born from an abrupt and primitive political decision arising out of the worst kind of sudden-whim, sudden-hunch politics that Governments in Britain would not practise if it were harder for them to get bad Bills through this place.

It is staggering to reflect that a near 100-clause, hugely scheduled Bill such as this has never been properly discussed in the various party and Government circles since it was promulgated as a surprise insert tacked on to the last manifesto. An enabling Bill abolishing a whole tier of local government cannot possibly be examined properly from now on—as the guillotine will have to be applied. The whole measure rests on no outside, independent, searching expert inquiry as has always been the case in our United Kingdom tradition, and, as far as I can see, as was requested after the Marshall inquiry set up by the last but one Conservative GLC leader in 1977.

I am given to understand that the reason given in 1977 by those in the party resporsible for such matters was that no more upheavals were justified and that people were tired of change. What a supreme irony. It is above all disturbing that our Tory colleagues at county hall were never consulted or warned that such a proposal was to be officially launched, and, as one said privately, that there was not even a single telephone call.

I am sad that our Cabinet colleagues at no time insisted upon a proper examination of this hugely complex matter before the die was cast in the creation of a thoroughly bad, ruthless Bill which has left the Civil Service smarting and furious and the Conservative party divided and miserable as never before.

We are always lectured by the Whips about loyalty. That is their job so I do not complain. But loyalty is a two-way thing. In a system where Governments elected on a minority popular vote can literally legislate anything they want, and where there are no checks and balances, no supreme court to declare something unconstitutional, the only restraint can emanate from the Govenment. It is a fiduciary, political responsibility not to push the party too far down a path which is widely regarded as wrong, silly and unjust, and not to push Parliament too far, especially when the seats majority is artificially inflated and not genuinely increased. In other words, they must not push the whole system of consent and restraint too far lest it breaks under the strain. Political wisdom and self-restraint are in many ways more important than convictions, politics and action.

There are many things wrong with this proposal, and the time is so limited that I do not know where to begin. The shortness of the time means that I can only cite a number of main drawbacks. The whole background is the total chaos of local authority financing.

This is an enabling Bill with excessively sweeping powers. It does not genuinely return powers to the boroughs as many would like. It is much more a centralisation measure and a number of clauses, from clause 83 to 90, give drastically sweeping discretionary powers to the Secretary of State that would be unacceptable whichever Government proposed them.

The London planning commision as proposed is a rather objectionable shadowy body, and I should hate to think what would happen in the future if it were in the wrong hands. It is wrong for Ministers to try to condemn the existing GLC set-up for excessive spending and then assert that it should be scrapped anyway, as county hall accounts for only 1.1 per cent. of total local service spending.

The whole aim of a strategic planning and co-ordinating body should be to operate on a modest budget even if it has primordial powers. The Bill is intrinsically unconstitutional. I hope that the House, and perhaps their Lordships, will have the courage to stand up to it and insist on sweeping amendments.

Even our normal supporters in the press have universally condemned these proposals. I am grateful for their support in other matters. They have certainly got it right. I quote from *The Standard* of 23 November:

"When the legal jargon is translated it allows Mr. Jenkin, the Environment Secretary, or his successor, to add to, subtract from or otherwise tinker with the system in just about any way he please — up to and including abolishing the Inner London Education Authority or dispersing the fire service. And all without the tiresome bother of passing a further law through Parliament. Such sweeping central power ought to worry every London MP—and most of all even Tory MPs. It illustrates exactly why there is a continuing need for London to have an authority of its own to counter and contain Whitehall's inbuilt appetite for power."

On 20 September 1984, the *Financial Times*, hardly a Left-wing revolutionary newspaper, said:

"The principle of unitary local government where it can be created without loss of efficiency or accountability is a desirable general objective. But London is different. It is both a collection of villages and small towns strung together by in-fill development and traffic jams and a cohesive capital city of international importance. The boroughs cater for the first, a city-wise authority — directly elected, with independent taxation revenues and powers to match its functions and status — is required for the second."

Those aspirations, coupled with the need for London to be a strong and authoritative strategic planning authority —of which my hon. Friend the Minister of State was in favour some years ago when we all wrote the pamphlet about collective responsibility — in general must represent a strong slice of overall parliamentary opinion in all parts of the House. That is why it is difficult or impossible to support the Bill as it stands, because the principle and detail are not merely wrong but profoundly disturbing in every way. The Government will, I am sure, see the wisdom of accepting later amendments to that end.

7.45 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) who has turned the knife that was inserted by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). I agree with every word of the hon. Member for Harrow, East. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) and others made some interesting points. I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Withington praising the city of Manchester. It has been Labour controlled for many years. He usually criticises it. I did not think that I would ever hear him advocate that it should be given more powers.

I used to be a councillor in Manchester, and I witnessed his colleagues in the city voting consistently against supporting the Hallé orchestra and the Royal Exchange theatre. The orchestra was born out of the 69 Theatre and we fought for funds for it through the city council against the opposition of his supporters and Conservative councillors. I am pleased that he has been converted to support his Labour-controlled local authority and the work that it has done over the years.

Of course, in an ideal world, in theory everyone is in favour of unitary local government—one-tier authorities — if it is practical to have all services run by one unitary authority. The Redcliffe-Maud commission realised after a Royal Commission and public inquiry that it was not possible to run all regional and metropolitan services upon that basis. The Bill does not propose one-tier unitary local government. It will establish and keep in existence metropolitan regionally-run services. The only difference is that they will not be run by democratically-elected councillors.

The hon. Member for Withington spoke about a matter of identification, not election. The authority is easily identified, but so was Franco. Many people can be easily identified. Bureaucrats who run services are easily identified. People know who to go to. However, the nature of democracy is that once one has identified them and does not like what they are doing they can be got rid of. One cannot get rid of quangos or, by an election, a joint board that has been appointed by separate district authorities, because district authorities are elected on their record and not on the record of the joint board. That is nonsense.

The other argument that has been advanced by Conservative Members is that suddenly there is a difference. We must get rid of democratically elected local government because Left-wingers have been elected into power. That is what we have heard consistently from Conservative Members who support these abolition proposals. They are in favour of elections only if the people whom they like are elected.

The way to get rid of those councillors with whose political views Conservative Members disagree is through the ballot box, but that is not to be the way. I can imagine the anger — it emerged in the debate — of many hon. Members as they drive into the Merseyside or Manchester county council areas and see the nuclear-free zone signs. They are in favour of abolishing the metropolitan counties one way or another. If the Secretary of State for the Environment will not do it, they seem to fancy the idea of the nuclear bomb doing it. They are angry that there are people who run Labour-controlled metropolitan councils who want to abolish nuclear weapons, and they want to get rid of them. If they do not like it, they should re-elect Conservative councils in Merseyside and Greater Manchester. There used to be Conservative councils there, but the Government have been creating unemployment on such a massive scale that that is no longer possible. The abolition proposals were based on a misguided belief that they would prove electorally popular. The Government were obviously guided by short-term gains that were unrealised.

It is important to highlight the function of the threatened authorities in making a case against abolition. Merseyside county council has been so successful in carrying out its

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

statutory functions that it would be a mistake to get rid of it. It spends more than £118 million, 40 per cent. of its entire budget, on protecting the public through the police, fire, trading standards, and coroner's services and prosecuting solicitors. The Conservatives claim that they are the party of law and order, but their policies are creating mass unemployment and civil unrest, increases in burglary and crime on Merseyside, and a massive increase in hard drug taking, particularly among young people. The Labour-controlled county council spent £94 million alone on the police service, and has provided the Merseyside police service with modern headquarters, equipment and communications services and eight new police stations, all of which have helped to increase efficiency and all of which are the kind of thing that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), who is paid by the Police Federation, mentioned earlier. The county council devotes much of its expenditure to crime prevention and protection of the public.

That background of increasing unemployment, and cuts in social, education and community services, is causing an increase in the crime rate. Police pay is one of the council's highest costs, and abolition will not reduce that. For the hon. Member for Withington to say that the claims of a possible police state were exaggerated, when he has Mr. Anderton, who is a cult figure of the Right, as his chief constable, proves that there is no democratic accountability as there was with the old watch committees. The only argument against the Bill from the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds referred to the one part of the Bill that I support—the possibility of returning police forces to democratic accountability and elected control.

The Merseyside county council has also ensured that there is adequate investment in the fire service. It has the busiest fire service outside London. It costs £22 million to run, and that will be taken out of democratic control. Since 1964, the council has created an integrated transport system, and completed the loop and link network to the underground rail system in the centre of Liverpool. It has invested £16 million in rolling stock on the Merseyrail northern line, and £20 million is planned for replacing the rolling stock on the Wirral line. It has continued massive improvements in Liverpool airport, and maintained the Mersey ferries, which are part of Liverpool's history and which will go if the Merseyside county council is abolished. The airport will also be under threat.

The services provided by the county council are many and I do not intend to list them all. There is one, however that is of fundamental importance—the council's role of economic and job creation in an area that has been hit with massively high unemployment. I see that in my Bootle constituency every weekend. Acting as a catalyst, the county council has co-ordinated the efforts of the public and private sectors in exciting, innovative ways, which I should have thought that even Conservative Members would have welcomed. It has set up companies responsive to the needs of the private and voluntary sectors, to provide both economic and environmental initiatives.

Where it has been possible to further the policies of urban regeneration, the county council has exploited the potential in Government programmes. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) was chairman of the committee that did this for many years, and I pay tribute to the work that it did. It was successful with such things as the maritime museum and a variety of urban regeneration programmes such as the redevelopment of redundant docklands, which I wish was happening in my constituency. It may be possible for the county council to develop policies to move out into Bootle, but it cannot do that if it is abolished. Many other things have been done.

The Government should realise that the value for money of Merseyside county council is recognised by the people of the area. Costs will not diminish with joint boards and the quangos. The reorganisation will cost a fortune. Those Conservative Members who secretly have their eye on the GLC building as offices for Members of Parliament after abolition should say where the joint boards and quangos are to go. There will be no space across the river for offices. We should do better to abolish the House of Lords and use its offices.

The Bill will not make local government more local. The biggest and most costly services—police, fire and public transport — are to be put into the hands of unelected joint boards. Those services represent 67 per cent. of current Merseyside county council expenditure. It is a recipe for bureaucracy, for increased inefficiency, for the public being unable to identify who is responsible for what. The Bill is motivated by political spite. Labour councils have taken the initiative, in the tradition of previous Labour councils, which pioneered gas, water, electricity and the first police force. This time, with limited resources and the Tory Government pressing on them, they have pioneered policies against discrimination in support of blacks, Asians, women, gays, the handicapped and the peace movement, to develop co-operatives, to organise tenants and residents' groups in a way that is changing the nature of our society and challenging the crime of the get-rich-quick-spiv society that the Conservatives support. As a result, these bodies are to be abolished.

7.55 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Before I launch into my remarks on the Bill, I should iike to take the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) to task for including the Merseyside development corporation in his remarks about the London Docklands development corporation. I am not qualified to talk about the LDDC, but I am qualified to talk on what the MDC has been able to achieve. I do not think that anybody would take anything from the outstanding achievement of that body in 1984, and the international garden festival.

Mr. Mikardo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is misquoting me. I did not say a word against the MDC. I merely said that these are two quangos, which is undoubtedly true.

Mr. Thornton: The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) referred to the Redcliffe-Maud commission, which reported in 1969. Before 1968, I was one of the members of a council that made submissions to the Redcliffe-Maud committee. Overwhelmingly, the consensus among politicians of all parties was that unitary local authorities were preferred. It is now a matter of history that the 1972 Act, which was brought in by the Conservative Government of that time, went against the wishes of myself and many of my fellow councillors of all political persuasions, and set up the metropolitan county councils.

I opposed that move then because I thought that it was wrong, and nothing that has happened in the intervening period has made me think that the views that I held then are wrong today. However, it was an Act of Parliament, and in 1974, when that Act became effective, we tried our best to make it work. As one of the local government leaders on Merseyside, I can honestly say that I did all that I could to try to make the Merseyside county council work. I do not think that anybody who knows my record at that time would dispute that. However, I feel that it is not just a coincidence that, since the change in 1974, we have also seen an over-politicisation in local government, which I deplore. As much as anything, that is because today councils are too large.

I remain unrepentant in my belief that the county boroughs were an ideal vehicle for local government. They were innovative, responsive and identifiable. Therefore, I welcome this attempt—we shall have to see how it works out—to devolve some of the powers back to the primary authorities which were split by the 1972 Act.

We have lost the word "local" from local government. We have to try to put it back. But I am not so naive as to believe that we can ignore what has happened in the last 10 years and even before that.

We have heard much criticism of joint boards. Joint boards are nothing new. In 1968, the passenger transport authorities were created. They were joint boards. I was a member of the Merseyside passenger transport authority. The authorities were set up because it was recognised that there was a need in certain services for a slightly wider area of control than that operated by the county boroughs. They worked well, although they had their limitations. But to pretend that a joint board comprised of elected councillors who are nominated by their sponsoring authorities is somehow undemocratic is to misunderstand the nature of joint boards. They are subject to the democratic control of democratically elected councillors who are there to make decisions on behalf of their respective conurbations.

We have to accept delegation to our colleagues, which we all do every day in the House. If we cannot accept that same delegation to our colleagues in local councils, we show that we have precious little faith in local government.

Although I believe that the Bill is an important step along the road, I do not believe that it is or should be the end of the road. We have heard already from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that a review is under way and that its remit is extremely wide. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) spoke of the need for a broad approach to the services being operated. It is also important to recognise, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) said, that we have not got it right in the past because we have limited the scope of the reviews that we have undertaken.

I make no apology for saying that the time has come —I hope that this review will do it—to look at the structures, the finances and the functions — *[Interruption.]* I refer hon. Members to my earlier comment. I was referring to the review set up by my right hon. Friend to look at local government finances and structures.

I agree that we have to look at the elements together, but for all the reasons that my experience as a local councillor gives me, plus the critical examination that I have made of the part played by the metropolitan county councils since their inception in 1974, I cannot believe that there is any justification for continuing with these authorities for one moment longer than necessary. In my view, they have failed totally to create the sort of role for themselves that the proponents of the 1972 Act envisaged.

The county councils have had some successes—how could they fail to, with the massive resources available to them?—but are we seriously suggesting that we need this tier of bureaucracy to run a joint board for a police force or for transport? I cannot believe it.

The hon. Member for Bootle paraded the successes of the Merseyside county council. I have not time to go into the excesses of the county council save to mention one. One of the excessive acts of the county council meant that, for the first time in its history, Merseyside was effectively split in half when the county council managed to close the Mersey tunnel. That has done more harm on Merseyside than any other action that could be suggested. It gives me no satisfaction to say 10 years on, "I told you so." All that I was saying and was supported in saying by many of my colleagues in 1972, 1973 and 1974 has been proven abundantly.

Let us give the Bill a Second Reading with a big majority. Let us get rid of this upper tier of local authorities and put the "local" back into local government.

8.5 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I represent a constituency in west Yorkshire, and the West Yorkshire county council, under the administration of its Labour group, has a great deal of which to be proud. Since the reorganisation of local government in 1974 the county council has been controlled by both the Labour party and the Tory party. With each change of control, the case has been made for the continuation of the county council.

My constituents support the continuation of the county council. That is demonstrated by the number of people who have taken the time and in many cases the trouble to write to me as their Member of Parliament asking me to defend the county council and to vote against the Government's proposals to abolish the metropolitan district county councils. I have received hundreds of such letters, and I feel that the Minister should take note of the wishes of the people of west Yorkshire.

On no occasion has anyone suggested, either by making representations at advisory meetings or by letter, that the Government's proposals are bona fide for the West Yorkshire metropolitan county.

I want briefly to highlight some of the work of the county council. In the mining areas of west Yorkshire a number of collieries have closed. One of the outstanding features of the county council is its land reclamation schemes. In my constituency I have the former West Riding and Whitwood collieries, the latter adjoining the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse).

The land reclamation work done by West Yorkshire county council is a remarkable achievement, and it has been well received by the people in the area. According to the proposals contained in the Bill, the authorities that will be taking over responsibility for land reclamation will not be sufficiently large to carry out the work that west Yorkshire has been doing. I fear that we shall lose the valuable contribution towards land reclamation which is made by the county council. On the other side of my

[Mr. William O'Brien]

constituency, which borders the Dewsbury constituency, reclamation work has been carried out on the former Shawcross colliery site and also on the site of a disused railway and tunnel. The work which has been carried out by the county council has been excellent. I fear, as do the people in my constituency, that we shall lose that kind of service and the valuable contribution which is made towards improving the areas. It is on that premise that I ask for the Bill to be rejected.

Furthermore, West Yorkshire county council has been instrumental in providing job opportunities and the resources to develop further job opportunities in the area. If we do not allow the county councils to continue to provide that kind of back-up and service to people who want to develop job opportunities in the area, I fear that there will be further additions to the vast numbers of unemployed people in the area.

The Secretary of State impressed neither me nor anybody else on this side of the House by the way he presented the case. At no time has any proof been produced by the Secretary of State or any of the Government's supporters that what they propose is valuable and will work. The proposed savings are arbitrary. The county councils have said that there may be problems, but until there is some justification for the proposals this Bill cannot be justified.

You are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as are other hon. Members, that there have been calls for an inquiry into the operation of the county councils. They have been rejected in total by the Government. They fear that if they had to hold a genuine inquiry into the operation of the county councils they would lose the argument. The county councils are doing a worthwhile job. This can be proved. The Government are afraid to allow an inquiry to be carried out, because there is no foundation for any of the points which they have made both in the paving Bill and in this Bill.

We believe that the policies of the county councils have been successful. We have witness of that success, in transport, land reclamation, job opportunities, planning and a number of other areas. The six metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council have had huge successes. We are aware of the frustration caused by the repeated inability of the Government to find an acceptable alternative to the present rating system. We are aware of the promises which have been made by the Prime Minister and other members of the Government to abolish the domestic rating system. We are also aware that, after a time, they have had to admit that it is not possible to abolish it. To provide some appeasement, they have introduced a local government Bill to abolish the county councils.

Having worked with the county councils and noted the contributions they have made, one can only say that abolition will leave a great void which cannot be filled by quangos or by joint committees. The hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) referred to the work of the joint boards. Before coming to this House, I served on the Yorkshire water authority. If these quangos are to operate like the Yorkshire water authority, I foresee increased charges and no savings whatsoever. Little information will be made available to the people who will be paying for the service. This is happening now. The meetings of the regional water authority in Yorkshire are held in secret. Nobody is permitted to listen to its deliberations. One can readily foresee that when the quangos are formed they will be only one step away from that situation, which could develop when providing the services listed in the Bill. If the practice of the Government is going to be to set up quangos so that they can be controlled by the Secretary of State, I hope that the electorate will take note of it.

Finally, we were advised by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) that in his opinion the Bill would create single-tier authorities. If that is the philosophy being fed to Conservative Back Benchers, they are being misled. There is no foundation for the creation of single-tier authorities in the Bill. I hope that Conservative Members will take note of the constructive points which have been made as to why the Bill should not be accepted. I appeal to hon. Members to reject the Bill out of hand.

8.17 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I begin by paying tribute to the undoubted hard work and success of many of the talented people employed by the metropolitan counties. There is no doubt that in Tyne and Wear, the county which covers my constituency, much has been achieved with services over the last decade. The officers and local government civil servants running some of the provisions on the ground — consumer advice, trading standards, archives, the fire service, the mending of roads, transport, and so on — have undoubtedly rendered good public service. To denounce all of them, as some people have done, is not just churlish, derogatory and personally insulting to many but highly dangerous to the whole edifice of local government. Whatever else, we must be very wary that we do not throw out the baby with the bath water.

My first concern is that essential services should be preserved at effective levels and not disrupted or rendered less effective by reorganisation. My second concern is that any reorganisation should happen only if those services can be provided more democratically and efficiently and with better value for money. If that is not achieved, my right hon. Friend and all my hon. Friends will rue the day that this move was ever contemplated. Nevertheless, it is evident that such services can be provided perfectly well under a variety of structures. It is the service that matters far more than the edifice itself, so long as that is democratic. There is clearly no point, and certainly a great cost, in constructing unnecessary tiers, with all the bureaucracies and administrative red tape such structures tend to attract. Remoteness, complexity, bureaucracy and centralisation are all enemies of democracy. This is not just a bland assertion. It was overwhelmingly demonstrated in 1974 and afterwards. Everyone saw the massive cost to the public of that 1974 reorganisation, which was a disaster in conception, but an even worse calamity in practice.

The case for the different metropolitan counties was of varying strengths. The case for Tyne and Wear was the weakest. There was no political demand for the county and certainly no public demand. There was little rational justification for the geographical unit. Tyneside and Wearside were lumped together in an uneasy conglomeration, where areas of common concern were outweighed by a diversity of interests, aspirations and traditions.

From the word go, the districts regarded the county as less democratic, more remote and a centralisation rather

than a devolution of power. They registered their opposition. By 1975, every district council in Tyne and Wear had registered its opposition to the county tier.

The then leader of Newcastle city council wrote to the then Prime Minister:

"My council believe that the Local Government Act 1974 has created a considerable amount of duplication in Metropolitan areas; greatly increased costs of administering Local Government services and in many areas seriously reduced the effectiveness of these services and I would urge you to give careful consideration to the Sheffield resolution."

That resolution said that metropolitan districts could administer all local council services more efficiently, economically and viably than could the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is the hon. Gentleman worried by the fact that some of the architects of what he calls the disastrous local government reorganisation—and other reorganisations, including the health authority reorganisation — are sitting on the Government Front Bench? Indeed, one of the main architects of the bureaucratic muck-ups is to wind up the debate tonight.

Mr. Merchant: I am pleased by that, because it shows that my right hon. Friends have the flexibility of mind to be able to recognise their own political mistakes, which is more than can be said for many Labour Members.

People realised that the few services that could be provided by a larger local government unit than the already very large metropolitan districts were certainly not sufficient to justify a new structure and tier. Even Tyne and Wear county council soon realised that. The result was a rapid search for work to fill idle hands.

In the 1970s, when, as a journalist, I attended most of the county's major committee meetings, I found it entertaining to see the spawning of new responsibilities, self-appointed units and more tasks, in a frantic striving for self-justification. While the chief executive for the county gathered titles, varying, from time to time, from secretary to the joint police authority to chairman of the transport executive, to secretary to the joint airports authority to secretary of the North-East County Councils Association, his chief officers became directors and later took on the grand titles of executive directors, with even grander salaries to match.

Meanwhile, council leaders created one new committee after another, with a plethora of sub-committees and panels and a strange familiarity of faces appearing each time. As the international committee promised to be the foreign affairs arm of the county, promoting goodwill trips abroad, and the economic planning committee sought to build collectivism on Tyneside, more and more planners sought to intervene in the lives of ordinary people by deciding what they thought was best for people, rather than freeing the people to decide for themselves.

The county's response to the inevitable criticism of its inflation of activities was not to moderate, but instead to become less accountable and more dictatorial and to shrink behind closed doors, banning the public and press from a host of important decision-making committees. By 1979, that process had given Tyne and Wear county council one of the worst reputations for closed government, inaccessibility and lack of accountability. No one can seriously believe that decisions taken by a cabal of about half a dozen machine politicians, behind closed doors, amounts to democracy.

The defence of Tyne and Wear has nothing to do with democracy and everything to do with vested interests and defending the accretion of power by a few headstrong men — super bureaucrats in the administration and senior political apparatchiks in the elite of County Durham Socialism, who have manipulated the genuine and good men lower down the chain of command.

However, in the past few years, there have been some changes. The idle hands have turned themselves from self-aggrandisement to mischief-making. Tyne and Wear has been infected by the political and financial irresponsibility that has rotted other parts of this tier of local government.

Mr. Cowans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Merchant: No. Time is pressing. If it were not for the 10-minute rule, I would give way. However, the hon. Gentleman may be interested to hear of the latest example of irresponsibility. It is the "Anti-Leon Brittan Campaign", which said in a recent leaflet:

"Boycott Brittan. Why? Because, as Home Secretary, he has engineered the new Police Bill which is designed to contain and suppress social unrest, especially among the 4 million unemployed."

That committee is indirectly funded by the ratepayers of Tyne and Wear, via the so-called Centre for the Unemployed.

Other examples abound. The most instructive occurred just a few months ago when the county donated over £250,000 to the miners. That decision paid no regard to democracy or to public opinion in the area. There was a massive and immediate response from the public through petitions and objections to the decision.

My support for the Bill does not stem from political vindictiveness. It is not because Tyne and Wear is Labour-controlled. Conservatives knew that that would be the case when the county council was first set up, yet it was still set up. It is not only because of the examples of abuse that I oppose the council, because they could be dealt with by amending legislation. I support the Bill because I believe that democracy, specifically local democracy, is best served by bringing government down a tier and closer to people, which the Bill, although not perfect, will generally achieve. Services will be brought closer to the people, enabling greater communication and consultation. There will be closer scrutiny and greater efficiency, springing from the removal of an unnecessary level of administration.

Tyne and Wear is a failed experiment. It is not a monument to democracy. It is a monument to centralisation and to self-interested bureaucracy and rule by a small and remote power elite. I believe that I speak for the vast majority not only of my constituents, but of the population of the Tyne and Wear area when I say, abolish it.

8.28 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I never expected to see the day when I would rise in the House to speak about a Bill whose provisions, when combined with earlier rate-capping measures, seek to destroy local government as an independent democratic force. Those measures can be understood only as part of a process in which the modern corporate state first moves towards and then elides with the authoritarian state.

Increasingly, the Government are saying to corporate interests, among which I include local government

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

interests, that it is so difficult to run a complex modern industrial society that those interests can no longer remain part of the decision-taking process and can no longer be allowed to help fashion the corporate consensus.

The GLC and the metropolitan counties have shown themselves so uninterested in consensus politics that they are regarded as positively subversive. My brief intervention will support the subversives.

I wish to concentrate on only one aspect — the damaging effects on art and culture in Britain that will result from the Bill. I shall start with Hackney and move outwards. This morning, I asked the GLC for a computer printout of all the bodies in Hackney to which it gave grants. I was amazed at the breadth, depth and freshness of it all.

Important artistic centres such as the Hoxton hall, Chats palace and the Rio cinema receive grants, as do innumerable theatre groups such as the Little Women theatre company, Theatre of Thedelma, Theatre of Black Women, Inner City theatre company and the British Asian theatre company. Music groups receive considerable grants, including the Jenako rhythm group and the Triangle music workshop. Mural painting is helped through the Ray Walker memorial committee and some 15 other community arts groups receive grants from the GLC.

Most of those groups will be at risk if the GLC is abolished, and a number of them will certainly die. With rate-capping, there is no question of the London borough of Hackney stepping in to help. There is no question of clause 46, headed "Grants to voluntary organisations", being able to help either.

It seems a wanton waste of local talent and energy to destroy what has been built up over the years. It is an insensitive denial of artistic imagination and cultural responsibility that will render barren the hopes and aspirations of many people in the inner city area. Tonight and tomorrow, and for God knows how long, the philistines will have it in the House.

I could not help contrasting the "stuff the people of Hackney" policy with the attempt in the Bill to save high and prestigious art. I cannot express my unhappiness that under clause 45 the South Bank complex — the Royal Festival hall, the Queen Elizabeth hall, the Purcell room, the National Theatre, the National Film Theatre and the Hayward gallery — will be handed over to the Arts Council.

I do not agree with Lord Goodman when he says that the Arts Council is a "wholly successful English institution". An analysis of its operations and the ideology behind them shows it to be a disingenuous hypocritical provenor of art that is restrictive and elitist, oligarchic and discriminatory. Is it not odd that the Government should be seeking to hand over this vast swathe of British cultural life to the Arts Council at precisely the time when the Labour party is on the verge of coming forward with proposals to abolish that institution?

The GLC has sought to make art in London popular, accessible and capable of commitment and an expression of the aesthetic needs and wishes of all the people of the capital. That is not and never has been the role of the Arts Council since it was founded by the great Keynes. Nowhere is the attitude of the Arts Council better exemplified than at the Hayward gallery.

To its eternal shame, the Arts Council, as ideologically motivated a body as I know in Britain, has encouraged and developed the notion of an exclusive Mandarin art as the only good art, and it has backed the notion through a network of administrators, dealers and cultural entrepreneurs. When it puts on shows it does not go to the artists' studios where the work is but to artists' addresses where artists represent some great but ill-defined new god called Taste. Then it takes us one step further down the road and encourages us to believe that art itself, and not the world, should be the focus of the artist's imagination.

It was partly to break free of those concepts that the GLC decided to evict the Arts Council from the Hayward gallery, although the truth is that the chairman of the Arts Council, Rees Mogg, had been trying to hand over for some time to the British Film Institute for a museum of moving images. That being so, the current legal actions by the Arts Council against the GLC is an abuse of the due process of law.

If the Arts Council claims that it supports an art that is universal, timeless and free, surely the GLC and the rest of us have the right to ask why the Hayward gallery and other galleries supported by the Arts Council have persisted in the notion that great art is a male activity in which male genius communes itself with nature. Why has the Arts Council tried to marginalise, reject and define as bad the work of women artists?

The disgraceful facts of the last 12 years are these. In 1972 the New Art exhibition at the Hayward gallery and the British Sculpture 72 show at the Royal Academy failed to include any work by women. Two years later, the exhibition British Painting 1974 at the Hayward showed works by 106 men but only 16 women. The first Hayward annual show, designated to present the accumulated development of British art, had just one woman exhibitor and 32 men. In 1977 the British Painting 1952-1977 exhibition at the Royal Academy had works by 172 men but only 22 women. Finally, of 28 one-person shows in the past 16 years at the Hayward gallery, only three have been by women. It is no use saying that one Hayward annual show was sponsored by six women, particularly when the art establishment responded with such snide jibes as,

"Ladies night at the Hayward"

and

"No deadlier than the male".

Of course the GLC is right to criticise the Arts Council and the Hayward gallery. Anyone who has read that monumental work "Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology" by Rossita Parker and Griselda Polock and, more recently, "The Subversive Stitch" by Rossita Parker will see how justified are the attacks of the GLC and the rest of us on the art establishment and the Arts Council for constantly denigrating women's art.

It all reminds me of that terrifying phrase of Mrs. Hugo Read:

"Woman is taught to believe that for one half of the human race, the highest form of civilisation is to cling upon the other, like a weed on a wall".

I am bound to tell Mrs. Read, as she stirs uneasily in her grave, that if clause 45 is enacted it will continue like that — with the sublimation, subjugation, oppression and sheer nasty contempt shown by the Arts Council towards women artists.

As with women, so with blacks and other ethnic minorities which the GLC has tried to help. Raschid Areen has written eloquently of 10 years of an attempt to get one black person to put on an exhibition at the Hayward and he failed miserably. Of 128 shows put on by the Arts Council at the Hayward, only 11 have dealt with art outside the United States and Europe. Even the very globe itself shrivels in the hands of the Arts Council.

I do not know why the Arts Council does not follow the GLC and admit that all art, in its creation, in its meanings and interpretations, and in the uses to which it is put, is political. That applies as much whether we are talking about a 15th century Italian Renaissance painting by Filippo Lippi or a modern abstract painting by Mark Rothko.

Is it not significant that a few weeks ago the GLC sponsored an exhibition by Amnesty on the theme of torture? Is it not significant that next October the GLC at the Festival hall is sponsoring a major exhibition organised by Anti-apartheid, backed by Hugh Casson and Peter de Francia, the distinguished Communist professor of painting at the Royal College of Art. Who can conceive of the Arts Council backing that kind of approach? Like Pontius Pilate, it prefers to wash its hands clean of the problems of the world it purports to serve.

Let there be no mistake, there will be an enormous loss to our cultural heritage if the GLC is abolished, precisely because that artistic and cultural drive which creates and protects our civilisation is the first thing that barbarians the world over, as well as on the Conservative Benches, seek to destroy. On the forty-third etching of Goya's Los Caprichos is written the words,

"The sleep of reason produces monsters".

I believe, and I am sure that the people of Britain believe, that it is better to reject the monsters of the Bill and to support the imagination and vision of the metropolitan authorities and the GLC.

8.38 pm

Sir John Page (Harrow, West): All Conservative Members must be extremely grateful for the passionate and well-informed speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). I am not sure who has the reproduction rights of that speech, but if I could play that speech in Harrow the large number of people who are now deserting the "Save the GLC" campaign would turn into a torrent.

One thing shines out from the speeches of all Opposition Members bar one like a lighthouse on a clear dark night and that is their lack of faith in local borough councils. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is not in the Chamber, because I thought that he made the wittiest and most well-turned speech from the Opposition Front Bench that I have heard in many a long year. But it was full of hatred of the boroughs. He had no trust whatever in them. He said that the only safeguard lay in the GLC and the metropolitan counties — *[Interruption.]* I listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech and it was full of criticism. He said that what the GLC and the metropolitan counties had done was good, and that it would not be done by the boroughs. But I believe that it will be done by the boroughs, because the Bill brings local government to the people.

I am grateful for the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and my right hon. Friend the Minister are on the Front Bench to listen to me, because I want to tell them of my wholehearted support for this excellent Bill. But in case anyone should think me unguardedly sycophantic I shall make one major criticism. I cannot think why the Government did not take this opportunity to abolish ILEA. That would have completed the circle and returned responsibility for local people to the boroughs where it belongs.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): If the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill he will see that in clause 21 the Secretary of State will have power to abolish ILEA.

Sir John Page: I am extremely grateful for that erudite information. In due course my right hon. Friends may have the wisdom to activate the clause. But so far I have not seen the willingness on their part that I had hoped for.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Page: The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) is the next door neighbour of the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), and I shall refer to the speech of the hon. Member for Normanton first. *[Interruption.]* If I am wrong about their being next door neighbours, I apologise. But I shall give way to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford when I have finished my joke. It is a joke with a twist in the tail for my right hon. Friend the Minister. The hon. Member for Normanton spoke about water authorities putting up prices. But the Thames water authority, which is efficiently run by the new organisation, is dying to reduce the water rates. However, it tells me that by some complicated means my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is trying to make it increase them. Nevertheless, that is the subject of a different debate and I shall not cloud the happy water between us now.

Mr. Lofthouse: The hon. Gentleman spent many hours in my constituency on behalf of his son, but he has demonstrated tonight that, although he spent time there, he knows as much about my constituency as he does about the Bill.

Sir John Page: My son was the hon. Gentleman's opponent during his campaign, but he always had great respect for him and, indeed, still does. I have always reciprocated that goodwill, especially when there has been any pairing in the offing.

About six months or a year ago I received many letters from voluntary organisations that were worried about the future of their funding. But my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was then very properly consulting all those organisations. Those arts groups, ancient historic buildings and archaeological societies are now happy and relaxed about the new means that my right hon. Friend has found in order to look after them.

But the criticisms of those people are far less uncomfortable to me—this is the sort of Oxford group stuff—than the attitudes of my old Conservative friends who have served on the GLC for many years. They are sad about the demise of an organisatiion that they have served well, and for which they have great respect and affection. Hardly any of them want the GLC to continue as it is. They would be happy to have a much smaller residual GLC mark two—*[Interruption.]* It would be directly elected. But it would be a big waste of time and money to elect some new organisation just to wash up what is left after this Bill is enacted. Indeed, I think that my right hon.

[Sir John Page]

Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) also said that there might be a small elected GLC mark two. I should be very happy if my right hon. Friend and his right hon. Friend — there are so many right hon. Friends about tonight that I almost get bewildered — felt that the London Boroughs Association could be invested with a greater authority and perhaps be given some ceremonial aspects to its work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker wants me to conclude my speech, and I have only just——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. As the hon. Gentleman and the House know, the 10-minute limit is in force, and he has had his 10 minutes.

Sir John Page: I entirely agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the applause of Opposition Members has lengthened my speech rather unnecessarily. London does not need a great central figure, because it already has one — the Lord Mayor of London — *[Interruption.]* I speak as a liveryman of the Grocers Company. If there has to be a great ceremonial spokesman for London, the Lord Mayor is the man.

I shall now conclude by referring to the Bill. The GLC has been the greatest flop and disaster that this country has ever known when it comes to our highways. I made a very interesting speech about 15 years ago in an Adjournment debate when I tried to get a road put right outside Northwick Park hospital in my constituency. If that road had been the responsibility of Harrow, Brent or the Ministry of Transport, it would have been widened and would not have been a tremendous danger. The danger remains, and we must rectify the problem——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has exceeded his time.

Sir John Page: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will tell us more about GREs and how the money is to be reallocated when he winds up tomorrow.

8.51 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Thank you for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in these trying circumstances. I am glad that, some 10 minutes after he began his speech, the joke by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page) has finished. I return to the reality of the Bill.

We are talking about a sustained attack on our democratic structures. This is a particularly bitter pill to swallow for those hon. Members who come from the metropolitan county areas. The Government, because of the knee-jerk ideological responses from Conservative Back Benchers, had it in for the GLC. Because the Government could not sustain the arguments about the GLC's abolition, they had to cotton on to the metropolitan counties to give the legislation a veneer of respectability. It is a shame that tonight we have heard an attack by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) on members of local authorities, especially in the north-east. He attacked people who had served local government honourably for many years. We heard personalised attacks because they were the only possible justification for an attack on the metropolitan counties which are generally recognised as successful in metropolitan areas such as Greater Manchester.

I shall briefly follow the lines discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) in talking about the arts. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester), who represents the Greater Manchester area as well, is satisfied with the provision for the arts after the abolition of the Greater Manchester council. He suggested that the Government have agreed already to underwrite the GMC's arts programme. It must be clearly understood that, should the Government agree to fund what they describe as the major performing bodies—the Royal Exchange theatre, the Hallé orchestra and the Northern ballet—there is no guarantee that bodies such as the Whitworth gallery will receive any support. The Government have given no undertaking to find well over £750,000—more than half the GMC's arts budget—for those bodies. That concerns me and many other bodies, including North West Arts. We feel strongly that the boroughs, despite the defence by Conservative Members, will not provide the necessary service.

I was once a councillor on the Trafford borough council — Trafford falls within my constituency — and that council has never been notorious for spending. In fact, the council has been notorious for avoiding spending, whether on social services, housing or any other service. It is inconceivable that that council will gratefully accept the possibility of taking on responsibility for the services that will be transferred to it. That is consistent with the report produced by PA Management Consultants, which was asked to examine the non-economic cost of abolition. The consultants stated:

"overall we have been unable to find a single service where the quality of service to the local elector is likely to be improved as a result of the change in structure. In many cases we believe there will be a marked decline in quality".

That is the view of most people in the Greater Manchester area. That is why people are worried about what will happen to public transport. They are concerned about the police committee and fire service because there will no longer be adequate democratic access to those bodies. Conservative Members kid themselves that indirect democracy is the same thing.

At the moment, if I wish, I can speak to my local councillor about the problems of the police committee and the fire service. Even if he is not a member of the particular committee involved, my councillor can have an impact because he is a member of the county council. Once the indirectly elected bodies come into being, the individual local authority councils will have no greater impact on the indirectly elected bodies than I will. The ordinary members of the public will not have the necessary access to that body to make an impact.

The legislation cannot be equated with an extension of democracy when we note that 70 per cent. of the work of the metropolitan counties will be passed not to the boroughs or to groups closer to the public, as Conservative Members pretend, but to the plethora of indirectly elected bodies—joint boards and committees—most of which mean little to me and even less to my constituents who will face the problem of ascertaining how to put pressure on those bodies.

Mr. Nigel Spearing: We will.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend says that he will, and who am I to argue? The burden will fall on Members of Parliament to sort out the problems, because the public

will not have access to those who make the decisions. People will come to Members of Parliament because they will have influence. Hon. Members will not, however, have greater influence over the joint bodies, and that is the tragedy. There will not be increased democracy, accountability and closeness to the public. In fact, these bodies will move further from the public's ability to influence and to translate their aspirations into the policies of those bodies.

Many hon. Members who have served in local government organisations have had experience of indirectly elected bodies of one kind or another. When I was a councillor on the Trafford borough council, I served on bodies to which I was nominated by the council. In general, they were disastrous bodies on which to serve because of their remoteness from the public. Even bodies such as the district health authorities are remote from the public and local councillors. The public do not believe that they can adequately influence any indirectly elected councillors or the organisations' behaviour. As a local councillor I never fought an election saying, "I shall have an interest not only in housing and education but in the NHS." That does not happen. Conservative Members believe in a myth if they pretend that that is what happens.

Many hon. Members are worried about the cost of abolition. On many occasions, the Secretary of State has been pestered to come clean and give his estimates of those costs. What really is the cost of abolition and the ongoing costs of financing the new quangos, which will be unrepresentative of the public and which can, therefore, more or less please themselves about their costs? Not only the Opposition but the Manchester chamber of commerce are worried about the effects of this measure. Some months ago, the Manchester chamber of commerce wrote to all hon. Members who represent Manchester constituencies pointing out that if it does not have adequate cost figures it will be suspicious about and feel jaundiced towards the whole proposal for the abolition of the metropolitan councils. The chamber of commerce and the Opposition believe that the abolition decision is based purely on ideology and bears no relation to the cost structure. Amounts of £50 million are bandied around. Such a figure is frightening when we consider that that is the initial cost of abolition of the counties. We must consider the many years over which the interest payments will accrue. Economically, this measure cannot make any sense.

I return to my original theme. The public in the Greater Manchester area recognise that the decision to abolish the metropolitan county councils was an act of political spite that saw its birth the moment Conservative Members lost control of those metropolitan counties. It is an act of political spite that the Government will deeply regret. The public will not understand the diminution in the quality of service. They will not understand why they are forced to make sacrifices to pander to Government Back Benchers or the backwoodsmen on the more narrow-minded district councils throughout the country.

8.59 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Today's debate is one small step for this Parliament, but it is one giant leap for Birmingham. This is a great day for Birmingham, but 1 April 1986 will be greater still because we shall get back that which was taken from us 10 or 11 years ago when the West Midlands county council was set up.

It would be wrong for me to pay too much attention to the goings on in the Greater London council. The only information that I have read is what I have culled from *Private Eye*. If what I have read there is the tip of the iceberg, the rest does not bear thinking about.

There may be arguments for and against plans for the other metropolitan counties such as Tyne and Wear, Manchester, Liverpool and elsewhere, but there is no case for the West Midlands county council. There never was a case and there is even less of a case today. If one asks any true Coventrian, any Brummie or Wulfrunian they will all say the same. They will say that they are prepared and want to stand on their own to meet the challenges of their society and of their future, with their own resources and using their own democratic process.

The arguments for the metroplitan counties have been well rehearsed but the two-tier system has led to confusion among the electorate and difficulties for all involved. For instance, snow-clearing and road-gritting in the west midlands cause problems because the county clears the main roads and the local authorities the minor roads. Gritting teams cross each other, unable to grit certain roads because it is the other authority's responsibility.

The problem with local government reform in the 1970s was that only one target was in mind—how big it could be made. The philosophy was that big was beautiful and big spelt efficiency. I with others fought long and hard when the Maud report came out. We did not like the result in 1974 and we have campaigned against it ever since. Many hon. Members will recall the words of the late Sir Frank Griffin, the leader of the Birmingham city council, who spoke at innumerable Conservative party conferences saying that Britain's second city demanded its own authority back.

All political parties in Birmingham are behind restoring authority to the city. Few words have been spoken against the Government's policy by any political party in Birmingham. Birmingham has over 1 million inhabitants who can run their affairs efficiently and properly. It is the right size.

Since 1974, Birmingham has steadily declined as a second city as a result of strategic influence being lost and because the West Midlands county council has had too wide an area to control and look after. No account has been taken of the districts.

All political parties are generally of the opinion that once the total local government authority is back in the city's power we shall be better able to face the challenges of the next decade.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I assume that the ignorance displayed by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) arises from his arrival in Birmingham being so recent. If he knew the city better he would know that his claim is false. The Labour party was critical of the original settlement in its detail but it never favoured the abolition of democracy — the retention of a second tier with no democratic accountability. That is the view of the Labour party in Birmingham.

Mr. King: The answer is that I have lived in or around Birmingham for about 41 years. Some of my family were

[Mr. King]

born there, and my father ran a shop in Corporation street for 44 years, so I think that my credentials are impeccable. I was educated in the city and spent a large part of my life working there. I think that I know the city as well as anybody else, and probably a good deal better than some other Members of Parliament.

The arrangements for the transition of power back to the constituent authorities—the district councils and the city of Birmingham—perhaps leave a little to be desired, but it is still a significant step forward.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Before my hon. Friend leaves his point about the Labour party's attitude to the reforms in Birmingham, may I ask him whether he has read the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) in the *Sutton Coldfield News* of 23 September 1983? He said:

"I do not intend to lift one legislative finger to stop the return of single tier government to Birmingham. That was the view of all the City councillors and it was clearly the view of all West Midland MPs before the election."

Mr. King: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I did not want to bring up that point because I do not like to put a fellow Birmingham Member of Parliament on the spot.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: In a moment. I feel that the House requires an explanation from the hon. Member as to why he will not raise his legislative digit.

Mr. Rooker: Where in the Bill does it say that single tier democracy is to be returned to Birmingham?

Mr. King: It is in part II, which refers to the transfer of functions. Much of the work now undertaken by the county council in regard to roads, strategic planning, and so on, will be handed back to the local authorities, and rightly so.

In referring to the police service, I am slightly at odds with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths). The chief constable of the west midlands is on record as saying that the city of Birmingham could well manage its own police force. He has, in proposals to the Home Secretary, said that the West Midlands police force could be split into three separate authorities, although Coventry and Solihull could well go back into the Warwickshire constabulary, where they were originally. There would be a new black country force, with Birmingham retaining a separate force, as it once had.

I welcome the provision in the Bill that after a certain time proposals can be made by the new authorities. The city of Birmingham in particular could have the opportunity once again to run its police force. Equally, there is a hope that the fire service can be returned to the city of Birmingham.

I agree that, where cities can take over responsibilities, they should do so, particularly in regard to the local police force, as soon as it is practically possible. At present, problems arise from having a very large west midlands constabulary. According to the chief constable, it is too large and too remote. Those of us who live within the west midlands are aware of the difficulties that the police force has in relating to the constituent authorities within the region. Within a short time the opportunity will arise to renegotiate the structure of the police force in the west midlands. I look forward to that happening so that true answerability can return to the city of Birmingham.

Like many Conservative Members, I have received a large number of letters referring to the threat of local government being taken over by Whitehall and faceless men in bowler hats running everything. It is alleged that central Government control will creep into every facet of our lives. We have now started to receive letters referring to abolition of bus passes and disruption of bus services as consequences of the so-called bus Bill. It is said that further safeguards are needed, that the county council has a major role to play in bolstering democratic activity in the area and that if it does not continue to do that Whitehall will get its hands on everything. That is not true. The consequences of that Bill may well be that local bus services will once again be the responsibility of the city, which ran them so efficiently not so many years ago. Many people in Birmingham would welcome that change, despite all the rhetoric and propaganda for the existing system from the preservationists.

I should make it clear that, personally, I have always had very good service from the officials of the West Midlands county council. One cannot take that away from them. They have a job to do and one expects them, as professionals, to carry it out to the best of their ability. It is not their fault that problems arise because the system does not work very well.

A city the size of Birmingham can and will run itself. I am sure that the people of Birmingham and all the political parties there share that view. I am sure that no Labour Member would dare go back to Birmingham and say that he had rejected the chance of Birmingham once again having the democratic right to run its own local government. All Birmingham Members should support the Bill.

9.12 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I am still a member of South Yorkshire county council and proud of it, so I know of the problems that county councils throughout the country have sorted out. There has certainly been a difference in my area, and I am sure that the same is true of all metropolitan areas. One has only to mention the success of the south Yorkshire transport policy, which has been operating for many years. Its success is clear in terms of passenger mileage, efficiency and all other aspects. It follows the pattern of other countries in western Europe, where it is recognised that an efficient public transport system run by county councils or similar authorities is essential. Our consumer protection service, which was initially regarded as possibly a waste of time, has proved highly successful. Many clients have been satisfied and south Yorkshire now has international recognition and international standards in this respect.

The county council helps the entire area that it serves, not just people at county hall. Having served as a district councillor until May this year and having been a district and city councillor for 15 years, I can look at the matter from both points of view. It has never been argued, and it is certainly not argued by me or by my colleagues in south Yorkshire, that the system of local government must never be changed. It has consistently been argued, however, that in considering any changes we must not fall into the trap into which the Tories fell in the previous reorganisation. It is vital to assess the needs, the financial

implications, the job losses, the cuts in services and the threat to democracy before any decision is made. The Government should not make the decision, and then suggest that we should have a review. That would be a marvellous thing. First, one passes the legislation and then one reviews what that legislation does to the community.

The Opposition argue that, before any change is made, there should be a proper assessment. Otherwise, the Bill will be simply another case of central Government meddling in local democracy. I use the word "meddling" because the measure has not been thought out. As has been said in the debate, the Bill has nothing to do with saving ratepayers' money or with introducing more democracy at a lower tier. It is a case of political spite, no more and no less.

We should ask whether there is a possibility of saving money. It has been claimed that up to £100 million is likely to be saved. However, that has not been proved by the Government. I understand that the Government have taken no steps to seek out that information or to produce it in evidence. The Coopers and Lybrand report of 29 November suggested that the new system is likely to cost much more than the present local government system.

The contents of the Bill make it clear that, instead of increasing local democracy, it will increase centralisation. It is a centralising Bill. The Secretary of State will have powers to rate-cap 18 new joint boards as well as to influence the number of people employed by those boards and the levels of services and management provided. In other words, the boards, which will inherit over 67 per cent. of the activities of the metropolitan counties, will be under the direct control of the Secretary of State. Once again, the democratic Conservative Government plan to ignore the ballot box because they do not like the political results of its use.

There will be less accountability. The set-up in the joint boards may be similar to what exists in the case of water, gas and electricity. There has been a press campaign, which many of us have supported, to insist that the water boards should provide more information, yet it now seems that we are to increase the number of such boards with little accountability to the public and the press. That seems odd, when the same Government say that local government should be more open to the public. I am sure that the Government will put more and more pressure on local government to become more open, but they are prepared to remove services such as the police and fire services from local government's control altogether and to make sure that no one knows how they work, what the manning levels will be or what they cost. That is a contradiction in terms. It is hypocrisy.

Last year, the Central Electricity Generating Board rightly came to the conclusion that there was no need to increase electricity prices in that year. However, central Government told the board that it must do so, so electricity prices were increased. That was part of the Government's hidden taxation. The boards are not democratic or accountable; they are subject to tremendous pressure from the Secretary of State.

The proposals in the Bill have prompted local government associations to make their points. I have read the reports of the town councils and parish councils, which fear that the abolition of the county councils will make their position worse. Members of those bodies appreciate the work done by the county councils and feel that they themselves have played a valuable part in partnership with the county councils and that the abolition of the councils will be a step towards their own areas having less choice and less influence on affairs.

Time presses. I could speak for hours about the virtues of local government. I have served on both tiers of local government. I am proud to have done so and hope that both tiers will be retained. The quality of the service has been matched only by its continual endorsement, in no uncertain terms, by the electorate. That is why the Government want to remove the metropolitan councils.

9.19 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I speak as an hon. Member who has many constituents who work in Greater London and as the only Conservative Member who is still a serving member of the GLC, to which I was first elected in 1977.

There have been quite a few changes on the GLC since 1977. One of the most interesting is the Pauline conversion of Ken Livingstone. What has persuaded the man who called for the abolition of the GLC in 1979 only five years later to spend £10 million of ratepayers' money on a campaign to prevent just that? The answer is to be found in the activities of the Labour majority on the GLC since 1981.

After the GLC elections of 1981, *London's Labour Briefing*, the magazine of the far Left which controls the GLC, proclaimed, "London is ours." The far Left's trouble was, as it found out, that it was not. As compared with the 32 London boroughs, the GLC had little to do with the running of London. Labour's response was to expand the GLC mainly by inventing new functions for it. The vast majority of them encroached into areas that were the responsibility of other bodies and they were always politically motivated.

For most Londoners there has been no benefit, just larger rate bills. The facts of the expansion are there for all to see. There are now twice as many committees on the GLC as there were in 1981 and the budgets of committees which existed then have been increased greatly. It is not enough for the Labour party to claim that, because the GLC has been expanding, it is somehow indispensable. Parliament has set limits to the duties of local government and, in the case of London, the boroughs are at the forefront. Few statutory functions now remain with the GLC. A great deal of its time and resources are now spent beyond the limits that are normally accepted for local government. I shall refer to two areas.

The first concerns a committee of the council and the second concerns a body created by the Labour-controlled GLC that contains no directly-elected councillor. Hon. Members will be aware that policing in London is the responsibility of the Home Secretary. As police authority, he is accountable to the people of London through Parliament and London's Members of Parliament. That did not deter the GLC. Under the slogan of democratic accountability, words that the GLC uses only when it suits it, as I shall demonstrate, it created a police committee to examine policing in London. Its budget for this year is £1·8 million—by GLC standards a small sum—but the GLC has no responsibility for policing, so the £1·8 million does not go into the fight against crime. Most of it goes on wages for the committee's support unit and grants to monitoring groups.

Such groups spend their time and ratepayers' money collecting hostile information about the police. When they

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

report verbatim to the committee, no attempt is made to corroborate any evidence that they produce. The committee, with its support unit, has spent thousands of pounds opposing the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, preparing reports on the future of policing and leading the official Labour party into a policy advocating political control of the police. It has just completed a report on policing in the miners' dispute and has commissioned another on the courts' use of bail during it. Apart from the electoral difficulty that that has caused the Labour party nationally, what has it achieved? One thing is certain—the GLC has not helped to prevent or solve one crime.

The true nature and intent of the people involved is summed up by two quotations. The first was reported in *The Standard* and comes from the chairman of the police committee, Mr. Paul Boateng:

"We must now make magistrates accountable to the Party. That doesn't mean they will refer every decision to the Party but the quality of their justice will be measured . . . they will have to accept the Party line on justice".

A woman employed as a lawyer for the police committee support unit said at the 1984 Labour party conference:

"Mr. Kinnock said that the police were the meat in the sandwich. They are the salmonella poisoning in the sandwich. Neil says you should not break the law because the Labour Party needs legality. As a lawyer, I say to you its absolute rubbish".

It has been said, quite rightly, that the only good thing about the police committee is that it does not have any statutory responsibility for policing in London.

Ken Livingstone is fond of saying that the GLC has created 2,000 jobs in London at a cost of £4,000 per job, and that this has been achieved through the Greater London enterprise board, which is known as GLEB. He also claims that this figure is far less than the cost of a job through the Manpower Services Commission. Interestingly, the GLC had never used this figure in an advertisement. The reason is simple. First, GLEB has not created 2,000 jobs. It has assisted firms employing 2,000 people. Some were new jobs, others already existed and were jobs which GLEB felt needed preserving or enhancing. Quite simply, GLEB's figures cannot be compared with any other job creation programme. To do so, as Ken Livingstone has, is dishonest. The cost of preserving a job is a strictly unquantifiable sum which ignores later reality. Will someone still have to preserve these jobs in 10 years' time?

Secondly, the figures given for the cost per job are entirely misleading. The actual total cost per job, according to GLEB's own figures, is £16,037, which ignores return on investment. For the three months up to June 1984, investment income was £4,000 from 2,000 jobs. Over the same period the GLC provided more than £10 million. The shareholders of most private companies would not be satisfied with a return of a few thousand pounds on an investment of more than £10 million. No wonder that GLEB has no shareholders!

In its corporate plan for 1984-85, GLEB describes itself as an industrial development and job creation agency free from political control. Are we supposed to believe that the fact that the Labour party appoints the members of the GLEB board ensures that this is so? The truth is that GLEB acts in a way remarkably like the GLC. The Sheba Feminist Publishers, the Camden New Journal, and the Squeals on Wheels creche are not voluntary groups given grant by the GLC but are companies given loans by GLEB. Is it an accident that nearly every company helped by GLEB has an address in a borough with a Labour-controlled council?

This worrying state of affairs is exaggerated by GLEB's property dealings. By June 1984, GLEB had spent nearly £14 million in two years on acquiring 28 sites. Much of this money came directly from the GLC in mortgages. There have even been 11 cases where the GLC has lent GLEB money to buy property from the GLC. The GLC is providing GLEB with substantial sums of money, some of which is used to finance companies, but substantial amounts go towards building up large assets for GLEB which are often effectively passed over from the GLC. During each of the past three years the Greater London enterprise board has spent £8 million, £23 million and £20 million respectively.

It is curious that the Labour-controlled GLC, which is happily spending £10 million, describes itself as a defender of democracy. Yet it transfers assets to the tune of several million pounds a year to a non-elected unaccountable private limited company. The method of transfer has not always been obvious. Many of the deals were never placed on the open market, but took place privately under the seal of confidentiality, supposedly to protect commercial interests. The loans are repayable over 30 years, and in some cases interest will not have to be paid for the first two years. What would the Labour party say if the Government or a local authority controlled by a party other than the Labour party behaved in that way?

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Lady, who is a colleague of mine on the Greater London council, admit that her views about the abolition of the GLC do not represent the majority view of her Conservative colleagues at county hall? Secondly, she was disparaging about the GLEB's estimate of the costs of job preserving. Does she agree that £4,000 per job for GLEB compares favourably with £68,000 per job estimated for each job that the Government have saved in the enterprise zones, and £30,000——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is waiting to catch my eye. He has made two points. That is a long intervention.

Mrs. Roe: The majority of GLC Conservative members support the abolition of the GLC as it stands. Secondly, I have already qualified the £4,000 per job which Mr. Livingstone quoted. The cost is well over £16,000.

The GLC's extraordinary attitude to jobs is further highlighted by its attempt to impose a lorry ban at night and weekends in London. In Broxbourne a large number of people are employed in the horticulture industry. Such a ban would have a damaging effect on those jobs, which depend on London as a regular market for their produce. The GLC in its haste to pander to yet another pressure group did not think through the consequences of its decision. That is common to much of the GLC's work. The GLC is so far removed from the people of London that individual decisions affecting jobs often take no account of what individuals or firms want.

The GLC's refusal to see any connection between the level of rates and unemployment, and the fact that its remoteness prevents it from being accountable for this failing, underline the wisdom of these proposals. The level

of unnecessary waste, duplication and mismanagement goes beyond the few examples that I have time to give. Three further examples will serve to illustrate it.

At a council meeting on 6 November 1984 the chairman of the finance and general purposes committee revealed that the GLC would initiate an alternative review of the social security system, to be assessed by a panel made up of a number of people receiving social security benefits. The review would require the hiring of a consultant. No justification has been provided for that extraordinary waste of money. The Government are already engaged in a far-reaching review, which is being conducted by experts in that area. When it is completed, the necessary changes can be made because the Government have responsibility for the system. The GLC has no such responsibility. How much time and money will be wasted? How many reams of paper will be wasted as GLC officials work on a review that is pointless, can achieve nothing and is outside the council's responsibilities?

Mr. Lofthouse *rose*——

Mrs. Roe: I shall give way in a moment.

The antics of the GLC women's committee have been well documented in the press. The same criticisms—the lack of statutory responsibility for such a body and the huge sums that are being spent with no conceivable benefits—can be made. Unfortunately, the story does not stop there.

Mr. Lofthouse: Does the hon. Lady believe that the public of London should be given the opportunity to vote and show whether they support all those councillors who are responsible for all those horrible things?

Mrs. Roe: I remind the hon. Gentleman that four GLC Labour members caused by-elections but that only 25 per cent. of the electorate bothered to turn out to vote.

Because the GLC has so little to do, even the committees that have some statutory purpose have tried to extend their areas of activity beyond what is normally considered to be the province of local government. At the same time, the level of mismanagement is truly remarkable. The past two years have seen a running battle between Labour councillors and the GLC staff association, which came to a head last month. Ken Livingstone announced that the GLC would sack any member of the staff who gave information to the Government even when required to do so by law.

Although the past six months have seen any number of outbursts by members of the Labour party calling for the law to be defied, I do not believe that there have been any cases where a council leader has threatened staff in that way. That sort of dictatorial thinking lies behind much of the GLC's behaviour. It is a case of the devil finding work for idle hands. If the GLC had had sufficient work to do in London, would it have had time to invite the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) to county hall to help the GLC solve the problem of Northern Ireland; would it have had time to lecture us all on the problems of South Africa; and would it have had time to assess the applications from groups outside London—the National Union of Mineworkers, for example — to use its facilities to advance their causes?

There has been talk recently of a GLC in exile. What we have seen at county hall for the past three years is a bizarre Labour Government in exile. Five years ago, the GLC was described as a body which existed to "provide all the substitutes for those who have not managed to get elected to Parliament and have tried to model this building on the one across the road. That situation is an extremely expensive one for the people of London to bear." Ken Livingstone said that and he has proved it time and time again in the past three years.

I commend the Bill to the Opposition. When the GLC goes, Ken Livingstone will be out of a job. The Labour party should employ him. The success that he has had in creating the mirage of substance at the GLC is needed by Labour policy. It is time that Londoners had a proper say over their rates and how they are spent. It is time that Londoners received valuable services for all their money, and it is time that the most efficient and accountable authorities—the boroughs—did the job. The best way to "say no to no say" is to abolish the GLC.

9.38 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I shall also confine my comments to the Bill as it affects the Greater London council because, like the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), I am a serving member of the GLC, although I am considerably prouder of that than she appears to be. I look forward to seeing her a little more regularly at county hall after her contribution tonight, when she can perhaps explain it in more detail to her colleagues there.

When the Prime Minister wrote the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils into the 1983 Tory party election manifesto, I do not believe that even the most perceptive of the Ministers she had then—she had one or two at that time—could have envisaged what a political millstone this would become for the Tory party.

The country faces massive economic and social problems of appalling complexity, many of which have been created and compounded by Government policies, but here we are about to tie up the better part of the parliamentary year on a Bill which is about as relevant to those problems as medieval discussions about the number of angels who could dance on the end of a pin.

Most informed opinion is against the proposals contained in the Bill; both Ministers and their supporters know that to be the case. We are here tonight simply because one person, in May 1983, thought that the abolition of the GLC would be a good vote-catcher. Although it is painfully clear to the Tories that the reverse is the case, they cannot do anything about it, because prime ministerial face is very heavily involved. We all know how expensive this Prime Minister's face is to the country. The Tory party has decided that, whatever the cost in local government democracy or the chaos that will ensue from the Bill, that is infinitely preferable to the right hon. Lady having to back off.

Apart from the Prime Minister and a handful of parliamentary sheep who would cheerfully follow her over the edge of a cliff, hon. Members know that the abolition of the GLC is irresponsible and a classic case of party political vendetta being forced all the way to the statute book. Prime Ministers have become far too powerful and can force through legislation in defiance of all good sense and political justice. This Prime Minister is fast becoming a dangerous fanatic. She believes that only she knows best, seeing all opposition to her, whether inside the party or outside it, as tantamount to treason. She has no regard to the alarming build-up of social tensions and bitterness being created by her love of confrontation.

[Mr. Tony Banks]

When the Government set out their proposals for abolition in the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities", the reaction was one of general disbelief and opposition. Over 2,000 submissions about the proposals were received by the Government, but, despite repeated demands, Ministers have refused to publish the results, and we all know why. In much the same way that the Conservative party refused to contest those four by-elections because it knew that it would lose them, it has refused to publish the results of the submissions to Cmnd. 9063 because the vast majority of those submissions oppose the Government's proposals.

Contrary to Government disinformation, that opposition has not simply been the result of the GLC whipping up the payroll vote. A large number of trade associations, learned societies, academics, employers, churchmen and voluntary bodies have all condemned the Government's proposals. In their support of them, Ministers have been able to rely only on a ragbag collection of politically partisan councillors, led by Lady Tesco of Westminster, and the Institute of Directors.

The Government have also been aided and abetted in their campaign of deception by the Tory newspapers, and the liars, drunks and hacks who write for *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *News of the World*, the *Sunday Express* and *The Mail on Sunday* who have all done their utmost to discredit the GLC. However, I remind the hon. Member for Broxbourne that, despite all the attempts at misinformation by the Government and their poodle press, recent opinion polls show that over 70 per cent. of Londoners are opposed to the abolition of the GLC.

The Government have failed to camouflage their appallingly weak case. Putting over that weak case has been costly in terms of ministerial careers and reputations. Lord Bellwin's vulgar ineptitude earned for him the very concrete shoes that he predicted would be put on the GLC. The Secretary of State for the Environment has ended up as a sort of political wino stumbling around the place looking for a friendly face and a bit of relief.

That relief has come in the shape of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). The right hon. Gentleman has been quick to realise—I pay him a tribute that he may not welcome—that the only tactic to adopt with a lousy case is to speak in vague generalities with great confidence and a very loud voice. He is well qualified in all three respects, but even he must feel embarrassed by what he wrote about the GLC in his evidence to the Marshall inquiry in 1977.

The GLC has circulated copies of the pamphlet, "Yes, Minister" to all hon. Members, and it relates to the right hon. Gentleman's publication "Maybe it's because we're Londoners." In an earlier intervention, he complained that he did not write the pamphlet, that he had merely edited it. But he personally submitted that pamphlet to the Marshall inquiry, and I have it amongst my voluminous records of the proceedings of the inquiry. When he presented it, he made no attempt to dissociate himself from the views expressed in it.

In 1977, the Minister who is now primarily responsible for steering this abolition Bill through Parliament was calling for less Government interference in the affairs of county hall and the enhancement of the GLC's role as a strategic authority. In that demand he was joined by the present Secretary of State for the Environment, who gave oral evidence to the Marshall inquiry. At the panel hearing on 16 November 1977, the right hon. Gentleman said that he thought emphatically that GLC planning should extend to a positive socio-economic role and that local government had suffered a lack of autonomy.

The House is entitled to know what brought about such a Pauline conversion on the part of these two Ministers. Either they must admit that they were wrong in 1977, and if they do they call into question their judgment today, or they must tell the House the real reasons for the conversion. I believe that those real reasons are base. They are seen as placemen, a couple of circus performers ready to jump backwards through hoops on demand in exchange for the sugar lumps of political office.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Was the hon. Gentleman one of those members of the GLC who supported the present leader of the council before the last GLC election, or one of those who were quite happy to see their party come to power in county hall and then achieve the sugar lumps of political office on the back of the new leader of the GLC, having stabbed the previous one in the back on day one?

Mr. Banks: The Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for Local Government were right in 1977. They are now wrong in 1984. Ken Livingstone was wrong in 1979. He is now right in 1984. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question.

The effective denial by the two Ministers on the Treasury Bench of once well held and considered views may earn them some favour in the eyes of the Prime Minister, but I believe that it will earn them only contempt in the opinion of their former colleagues.

To deal with the matter raised by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), the views expressed by Ken Livingstone in 1978 and 1979 appear to bear some resemblance to those that Ministers are expressing today. However, there is a very important difference. In 1978 Mr. Livingstone said that all powers should be devolved to the boroughs. I disagreed with him then and I still disagree with him. But whatever the Bill may state in its misleading explanatory and financial memorandum about providing for the reallocation of the functions of the GLC

"principally to the London borough . . . councils",

the Bill makes no such proposal.

In their propaganda the Government have referred to "getting rid of" an unnecessary tier of local government. If we are going to do that, and take all local government down to the unitary level, when shall we see proposals for the abolition of shire counties and for all power to be given to the districts? The fact is that the Bill does not propose to get rid of GLC services. It proposes merely to get rid of a body called the Greater London council. Next Monday it is proposed that we should get rid of GLC elections and of the accountability and democratic control which Londoners currently exercise over their services.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will my hon. Friend agree that the point he is making for the GLC is equally relevant to the west midlands, where only 20 per cent. of the services are estimated by value to be devolved to the districts and that 80 per cent. will come under central Government or joint board control? Both for the metropolitan counties and for the Greater London council this Bill has got nothing whatever to do with increased local democracy.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This Bill is a living lie. It says that power will be devolved to the boroughs. The Bill will do no such thing. London boroughs will have direct responsibility for only 30·9 per cent. of the GLC's net expenditure in 1984-85. The remainder will go to the Government, or to quangos or to the indirectly elected joint bodies.

Hon. Members should remember that the LCC, the predecessor authority of the GLC, was set up in 1889 to replace the indirectly elected Metropolitan Board of Works. It was decided that indirectly elected bodies were not appropriate for London government in 1889. I maintain that that remains true in 1984. Indirectly elected bodies are neither truly democratic nor accountable. It is a total fiction for Ministers to claim otherwise.

The case for the abolition of the GLC which has been inherited by the Minister for Local Government remains as weak as ever. Therefore, he has resorted to a series of unsubstantiated assertions which reveal his profound ignorance of GLC functions or his belief that, with a docile Tory press whipping up ignorance and prejudice, he can afford to go around spreading misinformation. In his *Daily Telegraph* article of 29 November, he stated that 75 per cent. of the GLC's expenditure would go to the boroughs. I have already mentioned that the figure is 30·9 per cent., but if inner London education is included the proportion drops to 15·7 per cent. Even if the joint body that is proposed for the fire brigade is regarded as a devolved local service, the figure is still nowhere near 75 per cent.

The Minister for Local Government conveniently ignored in his calculation debt servicing, housing deficits, and the GLC subsidy to London Regional Transport. He assumed that waste disposal would go to the boroughs, although the matter has yet to be decided, and that services for which individual boroughs are merely paymasters, such as concessionary fares and grants to voluntary bodies, were all included in the figure of 75 per cent.

In the same article in the *Daily Telegraph*, the Minister for Local Government repeated the Prime Minister's totally misleading statement that only 11 per cent. of current expenditure on local services in London is accounted for by the GLC. The truth is that the GLC spends 20 per cent. of the total budgeted expenditure in London ranking for block grant. That figure of 11 per cent. is obtained by omitting items from GLC expenditure while adding to the calculation the costs of the Metropolitan police, which in London have never been a local government service. In the same article he complained about the GLC wanting to achieve political control of London's police. I would remind the Minister that all police forces outside London are under local political control and, of course——

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East) *rose*——

Mrs. Roe *rose*——

Mr. Banks: Of course, the Metropolitan police are under the political control of a Tory Home Secretary. It is quite amazing how Tories, whenever they manage to achieve control of a service, somehow deem that it has become non-political.

Mr. Bruinvels: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No. I would give way to the hon. Gentleman if he had been here for most of the debate.

In a written answer, the Minister for Local Government produced a tissue of propaganda, half-truths and wishful thinking about the so-called savings from abolition. Even at this late stage, Ministers cannot say that they have any true indication of the likely level of savings. They now say that that will depend on policy decisions yet to be made by the successor body, although they admit that there will be about £40 million costs for redundancies in 1986-87, plus transitional costs.

The GLC estimates that in 1986-87 costs for the council alone will run to £65 million and that there will be continuing costs of at least £32 million a year, at today's prices. We at county hall calculate that the cost of abolition of the GLC will be about £225 million over the next five years.

It is clear that arguments about the costs will continue. It is time for the Government to say that the case will be submitted to an independent financial assessment by outside accountants. If the Government are prepared to do that, I undertake that the GLC will give full co-operation to such an independent inquiry. I do not wish proceedings in the House and in Committee to be taken up by fruitless exchanges between the two sides about figures that neither side can adequately prove. If the Minister will agree to set up an independent inquiry, the GLC will co-operate. The council has no reason to hide from the truth, but we suspect that the Government have a great deal to hide from the electorate.

In the *Daily Telegraph* article of 29 November and in the Tory party political broadcast on the previous evening, the Minister for Local Government made the preposterous statement that the only Londonwide service that Londoners see from time to time and which the GLC still provides is the fire brigade.

Has the Minister ever visited the GLC's south bank or the national sports centre at Crystal Palace? Has he ever walked on Hampstead heath or in Victoria park or in the Lea valley or in Mile End park or in the Trent valley or in Burgess park? Has he ever been to Kenwood or Marble Hill house or the Ranger's house? Has he ever shopped in Covent garden or driven along the 900 miles of GLC roads past the 2,000 GLC traffic lights? Has he ever crossed the Thames by a bridge or gone under a GLC tunnel? Has he ever travelled on the Woolwich free ferry? Has he ever wondered how the green belt got there, how it was assembled and how it is preserved? Has he ever wondered how his domestic rubbish miraculously disappears? Has he ever gone by boat from one of the GLC piers to the GLC's Thames barrier? Has he had no worries about the 2,000 voluntary groups funded by the GLC? Has he ever appeared in an outer London court house? Some of his hon. Friends ought to be there now. Has he ever bothered his mind about London's historic buildings? Has he ever worried about pollution control or about the London record office?

All those services are provided by the GLC, and they are Londonwide. If the abolition of the GLC is all about the fire brigade, why do we need a Bill with 100 clauses, many of which are taken up with problems of the GLC?

The Bill stinks in the nostrils—as do some Tory Members in the Chamber. It arises out of the Prime Minister's political malevolence and it is an insult to nearly 100 years of Londonwide local government.

We have perhaps the finest local government system in the world, yet all that the Government can do is to attack local democracy and our system of local government. If the GLC goes down by virtue of this legislation, my colleagues and I at county hall will at least have the great

[Mr. Banks]

pleasure of knowing that we shall take with us a lot of London Tory Members and, I believe, ultimately the Government. Such thoughts will comfort me in the long and bitter period to come while we resist the legislation inch by inch as it moves towards the statute book.

Whether or not the Bill reaches the statute book, I am utterly confident that there will be a Londonwide directly elected council based in county hall a long time after this Government of third-raters have passed from the political scene into the well-deserved obscurity that awaits them.

9.59 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): It gives me great pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). He always strikes me as being like one of the Marx brothers when he stands up to make a speech such as he has just made—the rather sad one who keeps running into things and never does anything quite right. It brings back to me what I hear about the Leader of the Opposition following the line of the Duke of Wellington in his thoughts when he hears the hon. Gentleman speak:

"I don't know what he does to the Tories but my goodness he frightens me."

We had the hon. Gentleman's usual humorous performance this evening. We have had a fair amount of quotation of poll statistics, as we have had for many months on the hoardings across the river, about the alleged dislike of Londoners for the Government's proposed legislation. But one's memory does not have to be all that long to go back to the Harris poll that was published in June 1983 about the attitude of Londoners towards the GLC when a majority were of the opinion that the GLC was too bureaucratic, was impersonal and was not understood by Londoners, not surprisingly because they felt that it did nothing for them.

The attitude of Londoners in June 1983 was the very attitude that spawned the policy of abolition which the Conservative party put in its general election manifesto. The position has not changed much, except that a total of £12 million has been spent over 18 months to try to bend a few minds to believe that the GLC does something useful for Londoners.

Londoners today are celebrating the beginning of a process that will take them back much closer to local government, through local government and the services from the town hall. The posters on our streets these days which show a brick wall wearing a pin-stripe suit and a bowler hat much more accurately describe the GLC's attitude towards Londoners than they describe the attitude of the Government and Whitehall towards Londoners.

As a relative newcomer to the House—certainly I was not here in 1962, when the original London Government Bill was debated—I thought that it would be worthwhile to look back at some of the things that were said at that time. One particular quotation from the *Official Report* in the autumn of 1962 is particularly apposite tonight. The speaker was Mr. Michael Stewart, the then Labour Member of Parliament for Fulham, speaking from his party's Front Bench in opposition to the Conservative Government's proposals. He started off by saying that

"the powers of the Greater London Council will gradually eat up and overshadow those of the boroughs."

He went on:

"Nor can it last because the Government who are bringing it forward not only lack support for these proposals, but, as we saw on 22nd November, the very day the Bill was published, lack the support of people in every part of the country for almost every one of their policies. In view of that, we believe that this job should fall to be recast by a Government which will have in mind the real needs of planning which the Government have funked, and the real needs of the human services, which they have despised."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1962; Vol. 669, c. 84.]

By an amazing coincidence, this Bill was also published on 22 November. The views expressed by Michael Stewart could well have been used yet again by the Labour party to describe its present feelings, although in reverse. The much-honoured Mr. Michael Stewart, who was then the Labour party's Front Bench spokesman, was talking about the creation of the GLC, but his party now says exactly the same things about its abolition.

Curiously enough, the Bill that was passed on 31 July 1963 came into operation on 1 April 1965 when a Labour Government were in power. Nothing was done by that Labour Government or by any subsequent Labour Government to abolish the very body that it had so castigated—the GLC. Similarly, I suspect that the very prophetic words of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about the metropolitan councils will not come true. Indeed, I suspect that the Labour party—if it ever returns to power—will not make any attempt to reinstate the metropolitan councils that we are about to abolish.

Quite a bit has been said about Lord Marshall, or Sir Frank Marshall as he was at the time. He was called upon to write a report about the GLC's role in local government. My researches took me to his report. In paragraph 1.2 of that report, he wrote about the GLC and said:

"Such an authority, however, cannot exist in isolation. It must maintain relationships with other authorities on a wider or narrower plane, with organisations outside the public sector and with the peole of London. The way it does so is of paramount importance to its relevance and credibility and thus to its success in its chosen role."

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Tracey:

"On this reckoning, the GLC has fallen short — largely because it has not found it easy to identify a role for itself which is acceptable to those with whom it interacts. In the eyes of some it has abrogated its responsibilities, whilst others consider it has usurped their proper functions. To many ordinary people it seems an expensive irrelevance."

It was not surprising that in 1979 the leader of the Labour opposition at county hall, Mr. Ken Livingstone —and since then we have heard quite a bit about him— said that he believed that the Conservatives at county hall, Sir Horace Cutler and Sir Frank Marshall, had not gone far enough, or so far as to abolish the GLC. He believed that that was the right policy. Since then, Mr. Livingstone has taken the matter even further. I have quoted him before, but in June 1982 he told the CIPFA conference:

"I have always at heart been committed to the borough council rather than to regional government."

That is precisely the policy that the Government have introduced in this Bill for the benefit of the people of London and the metropolitan councils. Sir Frank Marshall said that the GLC had not fulfilled its so-called strategic role. How right he was. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) says that the London Docklands development corporation has not done much for the people of that part of London. The fact is that the GLC had a perfect opportunity to do all that before. If only the GLC

could have worked with its colleagues on the Labour-controlled councils in the east end of London. Yet the councils say that it is impossible for them to work with the GLC.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Greater London enterprise board has created and saved jobs at a cost four times cheaper than the docklands and the Government's enterprise boards have done?

Mr. Tracey: I should like to restrict my remarks to the docklands because they are the most classic case of the GLC's total failure to fulfil a strategic role in the capital.

Mr. Spearing: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the first chairman of the docklands joint committee, which was a partnership between the GLC and the London dockland boroughs, was the leader of the GLC? Is he aware that the partnership went well until the GLC became Tory and Mr. Cutler began the disagreements?

Mr. Tracey: I have no reason to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, except that I was quoting the view of a Labour leader of a Labour-controlled council in the east end of London. In the mid-1960s he said that the problem involved with the advancement of docklands was that the councils could not work with the GLC. We can take the matter no further, because the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to a view that I cannot check out and I am quoting the statement of a Labour leader of a council.

The south circular road is another example of where improvements should be made. It is taking my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my hon. Friend the Minister of State to do something about that wonderful collection of signposts, but nothing else. We hope that the powers in the Government's hands will make the south circular road into something resembling a proper road.

I remind the Labour party, which clearly is somewhat embarrassed by the statements of some of its colleagues in support of unitary authorities, of what Labour Members subscribed to in the Labour party manifesto in the June 1983 election. That aim was simple. The manifesto stated: "we aim to end, if we can, the present confusing division of services between two tiers of authority. Unitary district autorities, in England and Wales, could be responsible for all of the functions in this area that they could sensibly undertake." That is the whole point. We hear a great deal of rhetoric from Labour Members. We begin to pierce some of that rhetoric when we find that the Labour party has no intention of restoring the metropolitan councils. For a little while longer, Labour representatives may feel that it is appropriate to put up hoardings, spend a few more millions of pounds and use a little more rhetoric and make out that they would restore something of the old GLC. They see the GLC as having been a useful platform off which some of them could jump to other things. I am deeply cynical about what Labour representatives say to us when I recall what they said in 1962 about the creation of the GLC.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): My hon. Friend referred to his scepticism about what Labour Members said in the past. Will he deal with the sheer hypocrisy of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) when he said——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must withdraw that allegation.

Mr. Harris: I happily withdraw that word "hypocrisy". I invite my hon. Friend's comments on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West when he spoke of his party's defence, across the water, of the green belt. When I was a member of the GLC the Labour party did its utmost to build all over the green belt round London.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) speaks with authority, since he was a member of the Conservative-controlled GLC and before that he was in opposition at county hall. He knows better than I about those times. My hon. Friend is right because the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has political tunnel vision in this respect.

The people of London and the metropolitan areas will soon appreciate what the Government are doing in the Bill. We intend to provide closer personal service for them. The people of Kingston upon Thames will have 50 councillors to look after them instead of only two members of the GLC. It is clear that 50 local councillors, instead of two councillors on a great body like the GLC which is remote, impersonal and bureaucratic, is better. Unitary authority will bring great benefit to the people of London and the metropolitan areas.

10.16 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): When I hear the hon. Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) and for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) I cannot help thinking that their speeches are more attuned to the hustings. However, if the Bill becomes law such speeches will never be delivered at the hustings. They have a great dislike of the majority on the GLC, but they have not enough trust in their own persuasive powers to allow the people of London to make a decision between their view and the Labour view.

It is striking that the Tories have shifted their ground and arguments. One of the main arguments used at the outset was that the metropolitan counties and the GLC were overspending. The main purpose of the Bill was to effect savings in local government. Throughout the argument, Conservatives have ignored the fact that cost inflation for the metropolitan county services since 1978-79 has been 86 per cent. compared with cost inflation for other local authorities of about 78 per cent. Conservatives have ignored the need to provide certain services such as police and fire services. Such services cannot be neglected lightly.

I was a chairman on the Merseyside county council a few years ago. When we tried to make sensible trimmings to our budget we decided that we could not touch the police services. The chief constable would have argued that if we had done so we would not have been carrying out our duty.

Let us compare the provision of police and fire services in the metropolitan counties with the provision—or non-provision—of social services for the chronically sick and disabled, or the provision of council houses in the metropolitan districts throughout the country.

It was possible in Liverpool for a Liberal council to ignore the needs of handicapped people who required telephones—and the council was able to get away with it. It was possible for a Liberal council in Liverpool, aided by the Tories on that council, to stop building council houses, despite the 29,000 unmet housing needs in the

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

city. Again, it was possible for the council to get away with it. There are higher levels of need in the metropolitan county councils. That is one of the reasons why, in the Government's book, they appear to be high spenders.

I have it on good authority that when the Tory party was originally considering its manifesto for the 1983 election, it intended to review the local government system. But the leader of the Tory party, the Prime Minister, scratched that out and replaced it with the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan councils. It is a personal vendetta on the Prime Minister's part.

The Tories are suggesting that, as a result of the Bill, £100 million will be saved, but there is no breakdown of that figure. We do not know how or where it will be saved. All we know is that £50 million is expected to be saved in Greater London.

Recently I asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the savings would accrue on Merseyside. I asked him how many employees of the Merseyside county council could expect to be made redundant and what the cost would be in terms of compensation. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment replied:

"The numbers, in each case, will depend on detailed decisions to be taken by successor bodies."

I asked the Secretary of State what was his estimate of the annual savings to ratepayers on Merseyside. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's reply was that £50 million would be saved annually with the abolition of the metropolitan counties. He added:

"On average, this represents about 3 per cent. of MCCs' rate fund current expenditure".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1984; Vol. 68, *c. 558*.]

If the Minister is not prepared to make an estimate, I am. I estimate that the savings to the ratepayers on Merseyside will be no more than 15p a week, or £8 a year. But at what cost? We know that there will be redundancies. We know that there will be the cost of increasing the number of unemployment benefits. We know that there is a real monetary cost to the taxpayer in paying those benefits. We know that there is less prospect of young people in our areas finding jobs.

The Government shifted their ground. They not only shifted their ground; they shifted their Minister. The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) has retired hurt. The attempt is being made to create the acceptable face of the Department of the Environment in the person of the Minister for Local Government. He is the new boy.

Mr. Dobson: He is the Michael Eaton of the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Wareing: That is a very good comparison. The Minister for Local Government said last Friday that savings are not the primary objective. He said:

"The case for abolition rests on the provision of a more local, more accountable system of local government in the metropolitan areas."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *612*.]

I am sure that he would be the first to suggest that that is very much in line with the Conservative manifesto, which said that the aim of a Conservative Government would be to return most of the functions to the boroughs and districts. If any Tory Members believe that by supporting the Government tomorrow they will be voting for that manifesto, they could not be more wrong. They will be voting to ensure that the joint boards, the joint committees and the trusts to which the Secretary of State referred will be set up to replace democratic, accountable and genuinely local government.

The PA Management Consultants report shows that on Merseyside only 15 per cent. of the functions will be devolved to the districts. A mere 3 per cent. of the functions of the county council will devolve to each of the five metropolitan districts. If the proposals do not make savings and do not make local government more local, they will, according to the Government, at least cut out bureaucracy. The Secretary of State says that they will simplify the structure. The White Paper was entitled, "Streamlining the Cities". What we are being offered, however, is not streamlining but a chaos of authorities in the form of quangos or semi-quangos, which will lack cohesion and will make responsibility for services far less clear than it is now and local government far more remote from the people than the metropolitan counties have been.

If the Conservatives believe that the Bill will bring savings in bureaucracy, they should think again. Every joint board, committee or trust will require support services. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but every board will presumably have to have a treasurer. All these bodies will need financial services, legal services, computer services, technical services and personal services. That is what bureaucracy means. But instead of one bureaucracy there will be a large number of bureaucracies, all of which will have to be paid for by the ratepayer and the taxpayer. These bodies will be denied the economies of scale accruing to multifunctional authorities.

Redcliffe-Maud argued that local government reform was needed because of the disparities in size and resources among local authorities. The largest county borough was Birmingham, with more than 1 million people, and the smallest was Canterbury, with only 25,000. All those authorities were supposed to provide similar services—fire services, police services, and so on—and they were often found wanting. It is perhaps unusual for me to agree with the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths), but I certainly agree with his comments today about the fragmentation of police forces, the resulting diffuse systems of equipment, and so forth. For example, a criminal might commit a crime in Altrincham and then travel to Rochdale, crossing six different police authority areas in which different equipment and different radio wavelengths were used, as was the case before the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s in London and the metropolitan areas. There will be the same haphazard allocation of functions as occured before the reform. There will be overspill problems and peculiar boundary arrangements.

There are those who believe that the west midlands and Tyne and Wear authorities have no affinity with the people in their areas. However, whether he lives in Liverpool or Wallasey, Halewood or Southport, everyone who lives on Merseyside — "on Merseyside" is the phrase that is always used—regards himself as a Merseysider. People are proud to be Merseysiders, just as I am proud to be a member of the Merseyside county council.

We must ask the Government what is to happen to the county help for small enterprises, introduced by the Tory county council in 1978 and improved by the Labour majority after 1981. Will small businesses on Merseyside still receive assistance? The matter is not mentioned in the Bill. Will co-operatives still receive the assistance that we

have given to enable working people to provide their own enterprises? Will there be proper assistance to enable the unemployed to set up their own centres? There is no mention in the Bill, either, of the Mersey tunnel or of tourism. The people of Merseyside are entitled to know to whom those services will be accountable and whether they will be provided at all.

There are nearly 70 references in the Bill to instances in which the Secretary of State would have more power. The real reason why the Government have brought in the Bill is nothing to do with improving local government. The Bill has been brought in to provide the gauleiter political back-up to aid and abet the dinosaurean economic policies of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

10.32 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I was one of the Conservative Members who voted against the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill. I did so because I thought that it set an unfortunate constitutional precedent in that it presumed that Parliament had passed certain legislation that it had not yet passed, and not because I was inherently opposed to the abolition of the Greater London council.

However, the fact that I voted against that Bill has meant that, since that time, I have been inundated with lobbying material from every organisation under the sun that is opposed to the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties. Much of the material has, I suspect, been commissioned at considerable expense on the part of local government ratepayers.

I have taken care to try to read such material as I have been sent by various public relations and other lobbying organisations. If I ever had any vague reservations about the correctness of abolishing the GLC and the met counties, the lobbying and briefing papers have served only to remove them.

Documents are not all that I have been sent. Today a video arrived in a plain brown envelope, produced at great cost to the ratepayers of Greater London, purporting to tell me what happened at the Conservative party conference. There is no need to spend the ratepayers' money to tell me what happened at my own party conference.

I should like to make one or two simple constitutional points about the Bill. We have heard much noise from the Opposition today and at other times about the Bill being an attack on local democracy. No local authority has any powers, duties or functions other than those given to it by Acts of Parliament. Local authorities are nothing other than a creation of Acts of Parliament. The GLC and metropolitan counties have tried to take powers that Parliament has never given to them and to acquire from ratepayers the money to pay for them. We have the ludicrous example of the Greater London women's committee, which spends three times as much money as the Equal Opportunities Commission. No Act of Parliament gives the GLC duties, functions or powers to look after equal opportunities in Greater London.

Hoardings saying that eight out of 10 Londoners want to retain the GLC are mistaken constitutionally, as the time for the decision about whether the GLC and metropolitan counties should be abolished was the last general election. It was clear in the Conservative party manifesto that we intended to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties. It was in that knowledge that the Conservatives were returned to Government with an overwhelming majority. Since then, the GLC and others have attempted to mislead electors, using their money, as to the functions, duties and powers of those bodies. An analysis of what the GLC does reveals why it has failed as a strategic authority. Anyone who wanted a finer definition of why it has failed had to do no more than listen to the speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who concluded his peroration by saying that the greatest loss to Londoners arising from abolition of the GLC would be the loss of Greater London control of the south bank, Hampstead Heath, Woolwich ferry and the London Record Office. If that is all that is left of a strategic authority, the sooner it goes the better. It has remnant duties to which it has sought to add further functions and powers which were never given to it by Parliament. It has sought to delude the people of London that it does things that Parliament has never authorised it to do. Moreover, it has done that with money appropriated from the ratepayers of London.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): In what is, so far, a short speech, the hon. Gentleman has said half a dozen times that the GLC and metropolitan counties are doing things that were not authorised by Parliament. If he is saying that, in certain respects, they have been acting ultra vires, why have they not been challenged in the courts?

Mr. Baldry: Whether they have been doing things that are distinctly ultra vires and therefore challengeable in the courts I seek not to say. I am saying that they have tried to acquire functions that they have never been given by Parliament.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. They have turned the penny rate into a mockery. Perhaps when I give way to the hon. Gentleman he will refer me to the Act of Parliament that gives the GLC the duty, power and function to have a women's committee that spends three times as much money as the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. Straw: I am delighted to do so—the London Government Act and section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. The hon. Gentleman is saying that authorities are exercising functions for which they have no statutory power. He must recognise that he is plainly wrong. Does he accept that authorities do these things through the exercise of statutory powers and nothing else?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman makes my point. He refers me to section 137, but authorities are making the penny rate a penny mockery. The GLC and the metropolitan councils have used and abused that section.

I would not mind if it affected only Londoners, but it affects the rest of the country. If the GLC and the metropolitan councils seek to appropriate unto themselves an unfair share of the national financial cake, by seeking to appropriate duties that Parliament has never given them, it costs authorities such as mine dear, even though they have prudent housekeeping and have sought to cut ratepayers' bills.

Mr. Dobson: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that if the GLC, the ILEA and the Labour-controlled London boroughs reduced their spending to the levels requested by the Government, there would be less money available for the local authority in the area he represents?

Mr. Baldry: That argument has been put forward by Labour Members on many occasions and it just does not wash.

Labour Members say that the Bill is an attack on local democracy. That does not wash. Local government is a function of Parliament and the Conservative party won a clear mandate at the last general election to abolish the GLC. One must therefore look at this matter on its merits. The GLC has failed as a strategic authority.

In addition, the Bill will give considerable powers back to local residents at a level they will understand—that of the London boroughs. Let us look at what will happen to the residual powers that are left to the GLC. The responsibility for local planning and development will be transferred back to the London boroughs and the metropolitan district councils — power back to the people. Responsibility for highways, streets and bridges will be transferred from the GLC and the metropolitan county councils back to the London borough councils and the metropolitan district councils—again, power back to the people. Waste disposal will be transferred in like manner, as will drainage and flood prevention—further examples of power back to people. The administration of justice will be transferred back to the London borough councils and the metropolitan district councils—also an example of power back to the people.

All those residual powers are pretty much the remnants of duties with which they are now left. Therefore, the GLC and the metropolitan county councils have clearly failed as strategic authorities. Their abolition should not be regretted. All Conservative Members will look forward to 1 April 1986, when some sanity will return to local government.

10.43 pm

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): It is clear that the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) failed to demonstrate that the GLC has been acting ultra vires. It was clear from his speech and those of the hon. Members for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) and for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) that their chief reason for wishing to abolish the GLC is that they do not like the policies which the current GLC is pursuing. That is a total denial of the principle that lies behind the debate. If the Conservative party dislikes a particular form of government, it either rate-caps it or abolishes it. The Conservative party has operated on that principle for the past six years. That is a disturbing reflection on it.

Some Conservative Members will have read an interesting pamphlet entitled:

"How do we get out of this mess without appearing disloyal?"

by Mr. Rodney Gent. No fewer than four and a half pages —more than one third of the pamphlet—are devoted to the political reasons why the Greater London council should be retained. The arguments between Conservative Members who are in favour of the GLC and those who oppose it are not arguments about local government and the need to devolve power to local authorities, regardless of whether the Government like the authorities' policies, but about whether they like the policies which a particular local authority is pursuing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) pointed out, that has characterised the Conservative party's behaviour for the past six years. Indeed, it has characterised its behaviour for far longer than that.

I am glad that the Secretary of State for Education and Science is present. It has not yet been acknowledged that he introduced the London Government Act 1963. He is now present to provide his apologia pro vita sua for that legislation.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science: (Sir Keith Joseph): I did not introduce that legislation but inherited it mid-way and carried it through.

Mr. Barnett: I apologise for my forgetfulness. It was about 20 years ago that the right hon. Gentleman and I were Members. Perhaps the confusion of being a new Member at that time made me forget that he did not deal with the legislation on Second Reading.

Mr. Spearing: The right hon. Gentleman did deal with the legislation on Second Reading.

Mr. Barnett: My hon. Friend says that the right hon. Gentleman did deal with the Second Reading debate. No doubt that matter can be settled later—time is short. It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman spends his life introducing legislation and regretting it afterwards. No doubt when he replies he will again regret the actions that he took 22 years ago.

The Labour party opposed that legislation, as I did. It seemed that the motive behind the London Government Act 1963 was entirely political. The Conservative party's objective was to end Labour control of the London county council. Alas for it, that objective failed to be realised, because at the first GLC election the Labour party won control and the Conservative Government had to give in to protests from those who did not want so see education in inner London broken up and had to retain the Inner London education authority. ILEA has been under the control of the Labour party, except for one period, ever since.

The Conservative party has deeply regretted the London Government Act 1963 and the setting up of ILEA. Ever since ILEA was set up, that party has sniped at it. I am glad that the Minister for Local Government is present. He was chairman of the so-called Baker committee, which produced a remarkable report based almost totally on misinformation, as he knows. Its statistics were entirely erroneous, the principles it enunciated were not reflected in its conclusions and the document had little to recommend it.

It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman who, as chairman of the Baker committee, was able to report to the then Secretary of State for Education and Science that ILEA should be broken up, should now find himself, as a Minister, supporting this legislation. The legislation was introduced as a consequence of a decision by the Prime Minister in the middle of the general election to support legislation based on no investigation, no inquiry and no public consultation, and without even a debate in the House.

It must be unparalleled for a Government to bring legislation of this importance before the House—I hope that the Minister is listening—without any inquiry into the proposals which are put before it.

Mr. Tracey *rose*——

Mr. Barnett: I wish to mention two aspects of the GLC's work which have so far received scant attention. The GLC has a statutory duty, under present legislation, to provide for a research and intelligence function. I do not know whether the Minister has any idea of the damage that will be done if that function were to disappear.

When the GLC was investigated by the Marshall committee, the evidence provided by Westminster city council was:

"It is unlikely that"

London local authorities

"would be able to perform their own functions satisfactorily without the research and intelligence function of the GLC."

I wonder whether the Minister understands that the information provided by that body is crucial for resource allocation to meet London's needs in respect of the economy, social issues and environmental and inner-city matters, as well as a host of services.

It is vital for London's economy.

I happen to know that because I was elected to a London constituency in 1971. At that time, the research and intelligence department of the GLC identified the declining employment and industry in London. It was the first to recognise that. When I tried to talk on the issue, as a result of the evidence that that department produced, I was laughed at by those who said that it was absurd to suggest that London had serious industrial and employment problems.

Alas, that department was all too right. It was as a result of those investigations that later the Labour Government came forward with their White Paper on the inner cities. We produced the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978 which I had the honour to pilot through the House. It is now accepted that London has serious inner-city, employment and industrial problems. As a result of the work done by that department public opinion and Government opinion and policy were altered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has properly mentioned the work that the GLC has done on industry and employment. The Bill does nothing about that. The Minister barely mentioned it. I sometimes wonder whether he is aware of that work, because, as has been properly mentioned, the Greater London enterprise board has within a short time made significant efforts under difficult circumstances to provide jobs and assist in the development of industry in Greater London, where there has been a serious decline in employment and industry over the past decade or more. It has had to work under exceptionally difficult circumstances, while the Government have pursued policies that have only added to that decline in industry and employment. This is a bad Bill.

I regard the Bill as an insult to the House, because the Government are asking the House for powers to make directions and orders on important policy matters, including the abolition of the Inner London education authority. The tragedy is that London government needs reform. The London Government Act 1963 was a disaster. A great deal needs to be done, but the chance of progress towards greater democracy is, I believe, destroyed by the kind of legislation that we are considering.

We shall need to wait for a Labour Government before London government is better organised to meet the democratic needs of Londoners.

10.55 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): If ever there was an argument for the metropolitan counties, it is the Bill. In the last election manifesto, the Government said that they would get rid of most of the functions of the metropolitan counties. This they have singularly failed to do. From the Conservative Benches tonight, we have heard a great deal of political prejudice and arguments as to why Tory Members do not like Ken Livingstone and other council leaders. There has been little attempt to address the issues of local government.

I am pleased to see that the Bill fails to abolish countywide functions. In west Yorkshire, for instance, only 18 per cent. of such functions are transferred wholly to the districts. The remaining 82 per cent. will be administered on a countywide basis. West Yorkshire as a county remains. Instead of a county council there will be a series of quangos and joint boards. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of functions are county functions.

However, instead of one council, we shall have a number of councils, a number of rate precepts and a number of bodies with authority to levy on the ratepayers. If the Bill were ever to be translated into a film, its title would no doubt be "Last Quango in Whitehall". The Government have created a whole series of quangos. We have had experience of this through the Yorkshire water authority. If one is looking for an unpopular body in Yorkshire, one has to look no further than the water authority. It is heavy with bureaucracy, has pushed up the rates already, will push them up by a further 12 per cent. this year, and has provided fat cat salaries for its top bureaucrats. All the evidence suggests the unpopularity of quangos and the Government's failure to abolish countywide functions, so why do we have this Bill to abolish the county councils? The only argument is that this Bill is an attack on Labour authorities. It is built out of spite, and it is an attack on democracy.

It is an attack on democracy for three reasons. First, if the Government abolish the county councils, they will take from the electorate the right to chose their priorities. The electors will no longer be able to chose their transport policy and other policies administered by the county councils, which will not now be subject to democratic control. Secondly, there will be no election to the joint boards. No councillor who sits on a joint board will have to put a manifesto to the electorate. All councillors will emerge on the joint boards as a result of decisions taken by a Conservative or Labour group. Thirdly, the Government are rate capping the joint boards for the first three years, and abrogating to themselves substantial ministerial powers.

In those three ways, the Minister and the Government have taken away from west Yorkshire and the other metropolitan areas the ability to excercise democracy, and put in its place rule from Whitehall. One of the ironies of this legislation is that the Government have told the electorate in these areas that they would like to get rid of two-tier administration, although they were not talking about the shire counties. However, instead of doing that, they have provided three-tier local government—district councils, joint boards or joint committees, and rule from Whitehall. That is a recipe for chaos, and for electoral cynicism and apathy.

This shift away from democracy and away from local control has occurred without a public inquiry and without any attempt by the Government to verify their assertions and subject them to objective scrutiny. Reports have been produced on behalf of the metropolitan county councils. The Minister told me last week that the report by P.A. Management Consultants was long on assertion and limited on fact. It would have been useful if, before legislating, the Government had had a report which was short on assertion and long on fact. We have not had that from this Government.

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman has just accused the Government of doing no research into the proposed legislation. Does he deny that in the press release by the Labour party after its local government conference in 1982 it was said that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) had said that if the Labour party proceeded to unitary authorities there would be no more commissions and that we would proceed straight to legislation?

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is even more pathetic than his speech. At no stage did he answer my assertion that the Government had not subjected their proposals to an independent inquiry. When he can answer that, he has a right to intervene again.

The Government are legislating on the basis of dogma and their political prejudice. The Secretary of State for the Environment will be remembered for his intervention in an earlier miners' strike when he told us to brush our teeth in the dark. In 1984 he is legislating on local government in the dark. The habits of a decade die hard. So we have a shift away from the districts and from the people.

I want to refer to functions that the county councils have carried out, because the Government have abrogated certain responsibilities. Last week, a former Leader of the Conservative party talked about the economics of the housewife. One of the characteristics of those economics is that the Government have pulled away from their responsibility to manage the economy. We saw that last week in the statement on regional policy and we see it in many other respects.

In the county areas we have had to fill that gap, not sufficiently, in an attempt to minimise some of the damage the Government have inflicted. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) said that the GLC had saved only 2,000 jobs with the Greater London enterprise board. I invite her to compare that saving with the total number of jobs that the Government have destroyed over the past five years. If she wants to study the work of the West Yorkshire enterprise board, I shall happily compare its figures with what the Government have done to push us up to levels of unemployment never experienced before in west Yorkshire.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Are those jobs long-lasting? How many of them are real jobs, rather than temporary buy-off jobs?

Mr. Fatchett: Given the hon. Gentleman's majority, I am sure that he has a special interest in short-lasting jobs.

This is a bad Bill. It is bad for west Yorkshire, bad for local government and bad for democracy. The Secretary of State said that he would speak confidently in favour of these proposals. I suggest that if he is confident and prepared to advocate them round the country, why does

not he put them to the ballot of the people in the metropolitan counties? We hear a great deal from him and his colleagues about the desirability of ballots. Why does he not take the risk? If he did and performed as he did in his speech today, the result of such a ballot would be very easy to predict.

11.4 pm

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): In July 1981 I introduced a private Member's Bill called the Greater London Council (Abolition) Bill. Little did I realise that my modest proposal would result in today's debate.

I made my proposal because, rather like the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), I largely believe in single-tier local government. The reason for abolishing the GLC and the metropolitan counties is to pass back to the control of the local boroughs the responsibilities of the larger authorities.

It is significant that the expenditure of the GLC, which is my principal concern, amounts to 11 per cent. of the money spent by the 32 London boroughs. Under the Bill, 75 per cent. of that 11 per cent. will be passed down to the 32 boroughs. I welcome that, because the public do not generally support the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. In the GLC elections of May 1981 only 44 per cent. of the London electorate troubled to vote and in the recent four by-elections, only 25 per cent. of the electorate were sufficiently interested in the issues to vote—even after the expenditure of millions of pounds on propaganda.

I welcome the Bill, because the existence of a two-tier system of local government in London has led to conflict over the past few decades. It has often meant that the powers of the larger authority have been in conflict with those of the boroughs, which are the primary sources of local services. That is why I believe that the Bill is right and why I shall support it.

Over the years since the creation of the GLC, many of the original services given to it by the House have been transferred by the House to other bodies. Examples include the creation of Thames water in 1973, the transfer of the ambulance service to the NHS in 1973 and the transfer of housing to the 32 London boroughs in the previous Parliament. That has left a GLC with a series of minor functions, few of which are strategic and most of which could be discharged at borough level. For example, the management of coroners' courts and the issuing of entertainment licences are obviously local issues.

However, I welcome the joint board for the London fire brigade. There has been a joint fire service in London since the second world war, and a joint body under the control of the elected London boroughs is a desirable objective. I also welcome the directly elected ILEA and I look forward to the authority taking office when the Bill becomes an Act.

The Bill will serve the people of London well. It fulfils a manifesto commitment that was popular in the general election. I support the Bill and look forward to supporting it in the coming weeks.

11.9 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): There have been three significant points about this Second Reading debate. The first is that the Secretary of State completely failed to make the case that the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties would increase local democracy. It is clear from what we have heard this evening that it will reduce it. Let me quote the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he was the Minister of Housing and Local Government, and Minister for Welsh Affairs in 1962. I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that his memory was at fault; he did move the Second Reading of the London Government Bill. I forgive him; he was probably thinking about student grants. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"the Royal Commission considers and rejects two alternatives. First, that the central Government should fill the gap in the local administrative structure. The Commission says that this would be the death knell of responsible local self-government in Greater London. The Commission is plainly right."

He goes on to say:

"The second solution examined was the setting up of *ad hoc* authorities for various purposes. The Commission points out that many of London's problems are interlocked and need to be considered and dealt with as a whole." — [*Official Report*, 10 December 1962; Vol. 669, c. 53.]

The right hon. Gentleman was right then, but unfortunately he is not right now.

Secondly, my hon. Friends have ably exposed the weaknesses, incoherence and sheer political spite behind the Bill.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significant of all, the Secretary of State received at the very best extremely half-hearted support from his party. Indeed, if the Government put on the Committee all the Tories who have spoken I would not give much for the Government's chances of getting the Bill through its Committee stage at all.

Sir John Page: The hon. Gentleman is not accurate. I have heard all the speeches of my hon. Friends, except three, and I found them remarkably supportive of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman has not been here a lot. I have listened to every speech except two, which is probably more than the Secretary of State.

I want to concentrate much of my remarks on what the Bill intends for ILEA. I find some of the ILEA clauses quite inexplicable; indeed, deeply disturbing. The Secretary of State for Education and Science has taken a great deal of pride in the fact that the Government responded to the overwhelming feeling of Londoners and decided in favour of a democratically elected ILEA instead of a joint board of elected councillors. He was right. Indeed, he patted himself on the back for his decision on several occasions before the House—on 5 April, on 9 May and on 23 October. He has told us that we really need not have worried; ILEA was never at risk.

The chairman of the Tory party, as is his wont, went even further. On 5 April he announced to an astonished world:

"This is the listening Government. Today Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, announced that ILEA will in future be elected directly by the people of London. That is what the people of London wanted, it came overwhelmingly from the Government's consultation and the Government has taken the earliest possible opportunity to announce that that is what we are going to do. It used to be thought that consultation was merely a polite necessity before Governments did exactly what they intended to do in the first place. This Conservative Government believes in real consultation and the ILEA decision is proof of that."

Let us have a look at the Bill. It sets up a democratically elected ILEA in clauses 17 and 18, but what it gives with one hand it takes away with the other. The truth is that under the Bill democratically elected members will be muzzled by the Government. Under clause 64 the new

[Mr. Radice]

authority will be automatically subject to the rate-capping provisions of the Rates Act 1984 for the first three years of its existence. That is bad enough, but it is only a start. A number of other clauses give the Secretary of State unprecedented powers over the new authority. Clause 80 gives the Secretary of State powers to require ILEA to submit its plans on the control of the number of employers, provision of services and supplies and the administration of the authority. Clause 48 gives him powers to control levels of pay of non-teaching ILEA employees by setting up reviews. It is even more incredible that clause 20 gives him power to interfere in policy matters. Clause 20(5) gives him authority over ILEA's main policy objectives. Clause 21 goes even further, for it gives him power, subject to affirmative order, to transfer ILEA functions in whole or in part, either before March 1991 or at any subsequent time, to the borough councils.

In other words, the Government could wind up ILEA without introducing any new legislation despite all the promises that they have made. How does that square with the Secretary of State's remarks of 5 April? Some of us wonder whether the clause is there at the Prime Minister's command or that of the right hon. Gentleman's.

My charge against the Secretary of State is that he has misled Londoners, the House and the country. He must tell the House why he has broken the promises which I heard him make directly on 9 May in front of 2,000 London parents. He made the same promises to the House on 17 July. He said that apart from rate-capping the Inner London education authority would be free to decide its priorities and allocate its resources. That is just not true. He promised an autonomous directly elected authority for inner London education. The authority that will be set up by the Bill will be subject to a degree of central control that will be unprecedented in the history of local government. The Bill introduces democracy for inner London education by the front door and lets it out by the back.

The Secretary of State will justify his attack on the ground of ILEA's extravagance. He usually starts by paying a faint and rather fastidious tribute to ILEA's achievements. Any fair-minded person must admit that ILEA has substantial education achievements to its credit. It has a good pupil-teacher ratio, extensive nursery provision and good primary and secondary education. It has made a special effort to help the 16 to 19-years age group. It provides the most extensive adult education service in the country and makes generous provision for pupils with special education needs. The examination results—I take the Secretary of State's test—in 1983 were the best since 1978. The DES statistical officer has confirmed that if proper account is taken of background factors, ILEA's school leavers performed significantly better on almost every account than might have been predicted — [HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] The DES statistical officer. If Conservative Members do not understand their statistics, they should get learning them. Of course, ILEA is not satisfied with current levels of achievement. That is why it has set up the Hargreaves inquiry into secondary schools, which has been welcomed by many, including the right hon. Gentleman. ILEA has set up the Thomas committee on primary education, which will be reporting in the near future. It has introduced special measures to help children from deprived families, to give greater opportunities to girls and to assist ethnic groups. The truth is that ILEA is a progressive local education authority which is setting educational standards and showing the way forward in many important respects, as DES officials recognise full well.

The Secretary of State says that ILEA is too expensive and wasteful. He argues that its budgeting is flabby. He finally says, and apparently believes, that cutting ILEA's budget will do no harm and may improve the performance of children in ILEA schools. It is true that ILEA spends more than other educational authorities, and so it should. On almost count, ILEA has more to cope with — population density 20 times the national average; one-parent families twice the national average; children taking school meals twice the national average; and children speaking English as a second language four times the national average. Seven out of 10 of the most disadvantaged boroughs are in inner London. It has twice the national average of primary schools built before 1900 and one and a half times the national average of secondary schools built before 1900.

It is untrue to argue that ILEA is a wasteful authority. ILEA's gross spending between 1978-79 and 1983-84 rose by 77 per cent. The national figure for a raise in pay and prices in educational service was 76 per cent. That is hardly a wild spending spree—keeping up with the rate of inflation. Despite the total withdrawal of block grant from ILEA — a loss of £160 million — ILEA's net expenditure between 1978-79 and 1983-84 grew by 87 per cent. Over the same period, local expenditure grew by 86 per cent. and central Government expenditure by 99 per cent. That was when the Secretary of State was in Government.

Mr. Tracey: I do not want to rush the hon. Gentleman, but so far he has spoken only about inner London. He has said nothing about the outer London boroughs, which also are covered by the Bill, or about the metropolitan counties. Does that confirm that the Labour party has ditched the metropolitan counties' future?

Mr. Radice: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here earlier today — *[Interruption.]* I listened to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) did so. If he had been here earlier today, he would have heard my hon. Friend make an excellent speech ranging over the whole area. Frankly, my hon. Friend made such a good case that I do not need to add to it.

In any case, Her Majesty's inspectorate—the adviser to the Secretary of State—has confirmed that ILEA is one of the few authorities reaching the proper standard of educational provision. It is untrue to say that ILEA's budgeting is "flabby" — that is the word used by the Secretary of State, not me. The right hon. Gentleman made much play of the £24 million underspent in 1983-84. I am extremely surprised that he does so. First, we are talking not about an overspend but about an underspend, and that is different from what has happened to the central Government's plans over the past few years. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that ILEA received a windfall of £10 million from the GLC superannuation fund. The Secretary of State knows also that ILEA prudently marginally overestimated the inflation rate. ILEA thought that inflation would increase

by 5 per cent., instead it went up by 4·5 per cent. ILEA did better than the Government, because the Government said that the increase would be 3 per cent. ILEA's underspend was actually £8 million, or not more than 1 per cent. of the total budget. There were good reasons for that, including the fact that ILEA had not started its asbestos programme in the year concerned. That was hardly flabby budgeting.

It is clear that the cuts which the Secretary of State has in mind will harm ILEA's educational functions. In its budget for 1984-85 ILEA has made significant savings. It is budgeting for a small decline in real spending. To cut back to the Government's proposed expenditure level will hurt education.

ILEA's chief education officer is not a political leader but a technical expert. He is widely admired and he has said that savings of £9 million would make a significant impact and that savings of more than £20 million would do serious damage to London's education. In any case, next year is only the first year. The Secretary of State has clearly warned that he will require further extensive cuts. He has the power to make them and that will do further extensive damage.

If ILEA were wasteful and spending too much—I argue emphatically that it is not—it is none of the Secretary of State's business. The Government make no contribution in rate support grant to London's education. The revenue comes from the rates. But we know that 80 per cent. of Londoners support either increased spending on education and increased rates, or keeping spending and rates at current levels. That percentage includes a majority of Conservative supporters.

If ILEA voters do not like ILEA's spending they will have the advantage which the voters of other authorities will not have. They will be able to turn out those in power. The truth is that the Secretary of State's problem—or at least one of his problems—is that, like his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, he does not really trust democracy. Because we do trust democracy we shall vote against the Bill.

11.27 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I had expected a longer peroration than that from the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice).

I was in at the birth of the GLC. I inherited a Bill drafted by my predecessor and steered it through the House. Now I am assisting at the obsequies of ILEA. *[Interruption.]* I was in at the birth of the GLC and now I am assisting at its obsequies—perhaps that is better.

The London county council fought against the 1963 Bill. It released a barrage of tendentious propaganda. It refused to co-operate in the transitional arrangements. During the debates on that Bill the late Mr. Chuter Ede told us that the metropolitan board of works had reacted similarly when replaced by the LCC. Strong feelings are evoked by such legislation.

One of the books that I remember from my childhood had the peculiar title of "Gobbo Bobbo—or the One-Eyed Griffin". It was a curious mixture of magical displays, by a sort of Merlin, of the history of London, all interspersed in a diatribe against the LCC. There was a witch called Bordibus Skulibus. [HON. MEMBERS: "She's not here tonight."] Despite the claims of Labour Members, I suspect that the criticisms of the Bill, and the objections to it, tend to be councillor-deep and not people-deep. We are concerned with residents rather than representatives; we are concerned with ratepayers rather than councillors.

If Labour Members were to pay more attention to the real interests of ratepayers, they would take a different view of the Bill. Three-quarters of the rates levied by the GLC are paid by businesses, and businesses are the prime providers of jobs. The constant harping by Labour Members on the level of spending, and the pride they take in large spending, seems to show that they do not realise that the more that is raised in rates, the greater is the damage to employment in inner London.

It is ironic to remember that the City of London was twice offered, in the 19th century, the opportunity to take over the government of London as a whole and twice refused that opportunity. So the ceremonial function that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page) wished to have for London as a whole might have been performed, had the City of London taken a different decision, by the Lord Mayor of London.

Since its creation, the GLC has lost many powers. Labour Members do not emphasis that very much. Since it was brought into being by the statute of 1963, it has lost most of the powers with which it began. Most housing has gone, ambulances have gone, education is now going to a directly elected body, transport has gone, sewerage has gone and drainage has gone. All those relatively massive powers with which the GLC was endowed at its birth have, by decision of this House, been removed from it. The GLC that was brought into existence 21 years ago was a very different animal, with far wider powers, from the GLC that the Government are now seeking to terminate.

The support from the Conservative Benches for the Bill in its entirety — the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils—has been very robust and articulate. *[Interruption.]* I have seldom heard such effective speeches as came from my hon. Friends the Members for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) and for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths). I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds that the Government have no intention whatever of injuring the operational efficiency of the police. I should also mention my hon. Friends the Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester), for Harrow, West and for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler). The only criticism came from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) expressed approval of the general decentralising tendencies of the Bill but expressed the wish that there should be a small body—he did not say whether it was to be an elected body—to take a view of the interests of London as a whole. I must ask my right hon. Friend, whose powers of analysis I greatly respect, what kind of powers he thinks that such a body might have. No doubt he will make that clear.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) also referred to some kind of forum in which wider London issues might be discussed. He expressed some dissatisfaction with the scope that the House provides for discussing Londonwide issues and produced the interesting idea of a London Grand committee, to which I am sure that my right hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment will give consideration.

Mr. Sheerman: As the right hon. Gentleman is clearly having difficulty stretching his material until midnight, perhaps he will answer this question. Is not his real problem the fact that he has always been fond of snatching up fashionable ideas, pursuing them for a year or two and then dropping them? Does he agree that that is why we are now in this mess?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I do not agree. There has been a constant chorus from the Opposition to the effect that the Bill is undemocratic. They seem to think that indirectly elected bodies are somehow undemocratic, whereas in fact they are very close to the democratic, whereas in fact they are very close to the democratic end of the spectrum. Hon. Members who were not here earlier should note that when the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was asked by my hon. Friends how he would proceed if ever a Labour Government were returned to power he was quite unable to give a clear answer, taking refuge in sheer gobbledegook, which I defy any hon. Member to understand. I offer him a second chance now. Would a Labour Government restore the metropolitan councils and the GLC? It seems that he does not wish to give a clear answer. The Opposition must face the dilemma. They must opt either for boards appointed by Ministers, which we have avoided in practically every case, or for indirect election, which is certainly not undemocratic.

The Opposition also seem to think that the Bill is a centralising Bill. That, too, is an absurd fabrication and distortion of the truth.

Mr. Wareing: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the fact that about 110 quangos have been created since May 1979?

Sir Keith Joseph: With respect, that question has no connection with the Bill whatsoever.

If the expenditure of the GLC on education and transport is omitted, 95 per cent. of its current spending on service delivery goes to the boroughs. This is a decentralising and democratic Bill. [Hon. Members: "Oh."]

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I will not give way. I have much to say.

I turn with relish to the subject of the Inner London education authority. The hon. Member for Durham, North has allowed himself to become a spokesman for the ILEA. One might almost call him the hon. Member for ILEA. He should exercise rather more independent judgment instead of simply parroting what ILEA tells him to say.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West expressed some regret that the Government had not decided to abolish ILEA. However, I must remind my hon. Friend that we said in our White Paper, "Streamlining the Cities", that

> "The Government consider that a unitary education service, administered by a single education authority, offers at present the best prospect of meeting the educational needs of inner London."

We came to that conclusion because there is so much movement across borough boundaries by London children and students that to break up ILEA would mean a very big departure indeed from current practice. We therefore decided to keep a unitary authority and in due course decided, as a result of consultation——

Mr. Spearing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I have too much to say.

Mr. Spearing: The Secretary of State may be able to answer this question. If the position is as he explained it to his hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page) why is there a power in clause 21(5) for the Secretary of State by order, and with only one and a half hours' debate, to break up the centuries-old unitary education system of London to which he has just paid tribute and to distribute it to the boroughs, when the inner London boroughs have never had that power?

Sir Keith Joseph *rose*——

Hon. Members: Answer the question.

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall answer all the questions, if I can. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] I will answer them now, if I am given time.

The hon. Member for Durham, North went so far, with no justification whatsoever, as to say that although the Government had declared their intention to maintain ILEA, though in a directly elected form, we are muzzling it as a decision-making authority. He quoted three clauses, of which one was the clause to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The first was clause 64, which follows—[HON. MEMBERS: "Clause 63."] It is clause 64, which is a consequence of the rate capping that the Government have decided is necessary to protect the ratepayers of London and the businesses of London, which provide the jobs. The GLC has brought rate capping upon itself, with the consequences in the clause about the level of precepts. That does not interfere with the decision-making of ILEA. It will be free to decide how to spend up to the precept level imposed under rate capping powers by my right hon. Friend. There is no suggestion that my right hon. Friend or I will seek any interfering power in regard to decisions made by ILEA under that precept.

Clause 80 is also a consequence of rate capping, which has been brought on the ILEA by the GLC's irresponsibility.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State said that clause 80 is a consequence of rate capping. It makes no reference to rate capping. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, by clause 80, the Secretary of State has powers to direct ILEA as to its manpower and the exercise of its functions and services?

Sir Keith Joseph: Clause 80 is a manpower control, which has been included in case the precept or rate-capping powers are not effective enough. If rate capping is as effective as we expect it to be, it might not be necessary to exercise powers under clause 80.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall not give way. Clause 21 should be of some comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West. The Government believe that it is necessary for the protection of the pupils of inner London. If our hopes of ILEA are not fulfilled and if the unitary authority does not achieve the standards that we think the children of London deserve, the Government of the day have the power after review, after publishing that review and subject to affirmative resolution, to adopt a totally different policy in connection with the education of the children and students of inner London. That power was

also introduced in the 1963 Bill and was later cancelled by a Labour Government. I take that as another demonstration of Labour's—I shall not say indifference to standards for children's education as that would be unfair—but their failure to concern themselves enough with standards as opposed to expenditure.

Mr. Radice: To be honest, the Secretary of State is explaining this in a way that makes it even worse than I feared. He is saying that this is the only local education authority in Britain over the objectives of which the Secretary of State has control. Clause 21 says that if he is not satisfied, he can abolish it. It is pretty extraordinary is not it?

Sir Keith Joseph: I think the hon. Gentleman refers to clause 21.

Mr. Radice: That was clause 20.

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman completely misunderstands clause 20(4). He talked of some power being kept by the Government to intervene in ILEA's objectives. Clause 20 defines the duty of the new ILEA to consult the boroughs on objectives. In order to guide ILEA and the London boroughs about objectives on which there should be consultation, the clause provides that the Government may define an objective on which consultation is a duty. Under the clause there is no possibility of any interference by Government in ILEA's objectives. There is simply a power to define the objectives on which ILEA is required to consult the London boroughs. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will drop the suggestion that there is any intent to interfere with the objectives of the new ILEA.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and understand his difficulty because of his cold. I asked him about clause 21(5) and he has confirmed that it is possible for him to lay an order seeking the abolition of ILEA and the dispersal of its functions to boroughs which, in a century, have never dealt with education. The right hon. Gentleman has not dealt with that point. Will he please do so?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is quite right. The Government have retained this power for the protection of the education of inner London. If the Government so decide, it will be used after the review is carried out and published and after the passing of an affirmative resolution. It is a reserve power, to allow the Government to depart from their policy of a unitary authority for inner London.

Mr. Simon *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall not give way. Let not hon. Members think that if it ever came to that—I very much hope that it will not—*[Interuption.]* This is a power that the Government think necessary to retain in case ILEA does not improve standards. The affirmative resolution procedure is required, but the Government of the day, through the usual channels, would obviously arrange for a longer debate if that was desired.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish) *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I shall not give way.

This brings me to the ILEA spokesman's defence of ILEA's spending policy. For the hon. Member for Durham, North to maintain that how much the ILEA spends is none of the Government's business is monstrous. What ILEA spends affects the level of rates, particularly on businesses, and the employment and prosperity of London. That is most certainly the Government's business.

The hon. Gentleman warned the House that normally on these occasions I pay tribute to the zeal and dedication of most London teachers, and I do so again. But I repeat that ILEA is extravagant.

Mr. Radice: That is not proven.

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree that ILEA has great problems, but so do other cities. Let us compare ILEA with cities with comparable problems. ILEA spends per pupil 29 per cent. more than Manchester, 30 per cent. more than Newcastle, 31 per cent. more than Sheffield, 54 per cent. more than Bradford and 59 per cent. more than Birmingham. All of them have much the same problems as ILEA, but ILEA's expenditure is extravagant. I shall give the House some examples. It has not increased the charges for school meals since 1981. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray."] Children from low-income households are entitled to free school meals. If ILEA thinks that it is being generous, it is at a cost to jobs in London.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: Similarly, ILEA has not adjusted adult education charges in suitable cases as much as it should have. Similarly, it spends one and a half times more per child on energy costs than other comparable local authorities. Similarly, during the past few years when its school rolls have been falling sharply, it has increased administrative, clerical and related staff by 10·5 per cent., school keepers by 4·5 per cent. and youth and play centre leaders by 8 per cent.

Mr. Radice: What is wrong with that?

Sir Keith Joseph: That has taken place when the school population in inner London has been falling dramatically. The consequence of that on rates damages the prospect of jobs in London. There is plenty of scope for ILEA to economise. Moreover, it has sought to scare London voters by alarm stories about what economies may mean for education. First, it issued scare stories about the damage that might be done——

Mr. Radice: Is the right hon. Gentleman challenging the judgment of the chief education officer of ILEA, that if there were £9 million worth of cuts it would have a significant impact, and if there were £20 million worth of cuts it would cause severe damage to education in London? Does the right hon. Gentleman know better than the chief education officer of ILEA?

Sir Keith Joseph: This is the degree of reliance which one can rest on ILEA. First, when it was told of the level of the precept that would probably be imposed by the Government, it said that it would mean a cut of £75 million. Then it reduced the figure to £65 million and now it quotes a figure of £57 million—all within a few weeks.

ILEA underspent by £24 million last year. With a little effort, such as increases in school meal charges and adult education charges in suitable cases, a little more control of energy, and the £8 million, which the hon. Member for Durham, North rightly says that the director of education says could be saved without any damage to education,

[Sir Keith Joseph]

ILEA could, without difficulty, save the £55 million that is needed with no damage to education. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] I have listed some of the ways, which are clear from statistics. I have such respect for the director of education of ILEA that I know that if the authority asked him to save such a sum or more he would be able to do it without damaging education.

The hon. Member for Durham, North laid great emphasis on the damage that would occur, but I do not believe it. I pay tribute to ILEA for having appointed the Hargreaves inquiry. The contents of the report, which recognises the low standards in many ILEA schools and suggests many ways of improving them, are encouraging signs. I pay tribute to ILEA for consulting on the report, but let the House not kid itself. There is huge scope for the educational improvement of the children of inner London. I am sure that we all want to see that improvement achieved. It is not something that can be achieved overnight. Plainly ILEA's huge overspending has not achieved remarkable school results.

It being Twelve o'clock the debate stood adjourned, pursuant to Order [29 November].

Debate to be resumed this day.

Drivers' Hours

12 midnight

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5937/1/84 and of the Department of Transport's Explanatory Memorandum dated 28th November 1984; and welcomes the Government's broad support for the proposals to make the Drivers' Hours and Tachograph Regulations more flexible and easier to understand and enforce.

This motion concerns a proposal to amend the Community regulations which deal with the conditions of work of coach and lorry drivers. It is a subject of great complexity but nonetheless important for that.

The social regulation was first adopted in 1969, before we entered the Community; however, just a year before, that, in 1968, the United Kingdom had introduced a revision of our own rules in the Transport Act 1968, which the Labour party introduced. When we joined the Community we made it clear that we did not think much of its arrangements, but we accepted them with a long phasing-in period. Regulation 1463/70, requiring the use of tachographs was also adopted and has now, by and large, been accepted by the industry, although it is still a source of irritation from time to time.

Dissatisfaction with the rules governing hours and rest periods, however, is increasing. There is a widespread feeling that they no longer meet the requirements of the industry or the drivers. It is not only the United Kingdom that thinks that. The Commission and other member states have also come round to that view.

There is no disagreement about the broad objectives of the regulations. Since the 1930s, Governments of all complexion have recognised that commercial pressures can lead transport operators and drivers to indulge in excessive driving that can endanger both themselves and other road users. Although the research evidence about fatigue is less than clear—and certainly does not lead to firm recommendations about which limits to adopt—one's own common sense is enough to show that tired drivers are dangerous. It also makes sense to have common international rules which can be applied to drivers irrespective of nationality, so that transport costs, and thus competition are not distorted.

The Commission published its proposals to deal with these problems in March of this year, after over two years of discussion with representatives of both sides of the industry as well as Government experts. In May this year the Council of Ministers agreed some general guidelines to be followed by officials in considering these proposals. They said that there should be increased flexibility in daily driving, but within a reduced average driving week, and there should be an increase in weekly rest.

A possible package of measures has emerged and is set out in the annexes to the supplementary memorandum of 28 November. The Council will be considering that next week, although it is unlikely that any firm decisions will be taken.

The Commission's proposal has three main parts. The first contains proposed amendments to the existing drivers' hours regulation, EEC 543/69. The second contains proposed amendments to the tachograph regulation, EEC 1463/70, and the third part consists of a draft Council recommendation on implementation of the regulations.

Taking first the draft amendments to the drivers' hours regulations, there are a number of proposed amendments to the definitions in article 1. Most of these are aimed at clarifying the existing rules, particularly as regards driving on private roads, but a particularly important proposal is that the week should be defined as fixed from Monday to Sunday, rather than, as now, being the last seven days at any time. That is fundamental to some of the other proposals in the document. The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) will agree that, without this, the regulation becomes almost impossible to enforce.

Article 4 of the existing regulation provides automatic exemptions for certain types of vehicle and use. The Commission proposed that it be redrafted in the interest of clarity. There is still some discussion about which exemptions should appear in this article, and which in article 14, which deals with exemptions that member states may themselves grant for certain specialised and localised activities. We attach particular importance to paragraph 10 of article 4, which will make it clear that vehicles used for private purposes are exempt, and this should apply equally to passenger and goods vehicles.

Article 5 deals with the minimum age of, and training for, professional drivers, and we are broadly content with the proposed amendments.

The present article 6 is redundant and is to be deleted. The new article 6 will deal with driving times. The present maximum daily driving time is eight hours, extendable to nine hours twice a week for certain vehicles. The Commission proposal is to extend this to nine hours with provision for 10 hours twice a week. This would not go as far as our own 1968 Act, which allows 10 hours every day, but we regard it as acceptable.

This extended daily driving period will be contained in a slightly shorter average working week. The Commission's proposal to reduce the weekly driving time from the present 48 hours to 45 hours is not acceptable to us or to most other member states. The latest proposal is to retain the 48 hours maximum a week, but to allow not more than 90 hours in a fortnight, so that the average would be reduced from the present 46 to 45 hours a week.

The existing article 7 deals with the maximum period of continuous driving. The present regulation says that no period of continuous driving shall exceed four hours. The Commission proposed to amend this to

"no period of continuous work shall exceed 4½ hours, excluding waiting time".

There is a provision under our 1968 Act which specifies a maximum of five and a half hours' continuous work. I can understand the argument that if a driver is doing work other than driving, such as loading and unloading it can be just as tiring as driving. However, there are some serious practical difficulties in introducing the concept of duty into the regulation, and that is one of the main unresolved issues at present for a large number of countries.

Article 8 deals with the breaks that a driver has to take between hours of continuous driving. At present, these must be either one hour, in the case of large vehicles, or half an hour in the case of smaller vehicles. In each case there is provision to take the break in shorter periods. The Commission proposes one hour for all vehicles, but we and most other states regard this as too long and the discussion at present is whether the period should be 30 minutes or 45 minutes.

I now come to daily rest periods, which will now be article 9 instead of article 11. The present provisions are for 11 hours in the case of goods vehicles, reducible to eight or nine hours twice a week. For passenger vehicles, the provision is either 10 hours, or 11 hours, reducible to nine or 10 twice a week in some circumstances. The Commission proposes 12 hours for all vehicles, reducible to nine hours not more than three times a week. I apologise for the seeming complication, but this is the fact of what we have before us.

We and most other countries consider that this is too long and would prefer to retain the present 11 hours with reductions to nine hours not more than three times a week. There is also a proposal to allow the rest period to be split into two periods, of which one should be at least eight hours on, which would be of particular assistance to the passenger industry.

The new article 9 would also deal with weekly rest periods. We and most other countries considered that the original Commission proposal of 48 hours was too long since it would effectively prevent the working of a regular 5½-day week, which is still common practice in the industry. A number of other proposals are under consideration, based on an average of 42 hours' rest a week, though possibly measured over a fortnight or longer period. The figures I have quoted are for single-manned vehicles; additional provisions will be needed, as now, for vehicles with more than one driver. This is an area where, above all, we need flexibility to cope with varying patterns of work and, in particular, to enable drivers on long international journeys to spend as much time at home as possible.

There are then number of consequential amendments, before we come to existing article 12a which prohibits bonus payments related to distances travelled or the amount of goods carried unless these payments are of such a kind as not to endanger road safety. The Commission proposes to delete this, and we agree.

There is then new article 13 which deals with emergency situations and with which we are broadly content.

I have already referred briefly to new article 14, which lists the exemptions that member states may themselves grant for certain categories of transport. We regard it as particularly important that the wording of this article should make it clear that member states may specify in their national measures the scope of the exemption within the categories described. The proposed exemptions for agricultural vehicles and for vehicles used for specialised purposes and for only short journeys are also of importance and need careful consideration. We welcome the proposed exemptions for vehicles confined to isolated islands and for vehicles used in exceptional circumstances not foreseen in the regulation.

The remaining provisions are, again, consequential on drafting.

I turn now to an issue that was not in the Commission's proposal but was included in the conclusions of the 10 May Transport Council. The EC regulation is concerned only with driving time—the time actually spent behind the wheel—and rest periods. But in our 1968 Act we also have provisions regulating, for goods vehicle drivers only, total hours of work and "spreadover"—the maximum time between starting and stopping work on any one day. These provisions apply on top of the EC rules to driving on journeys within the United Kingdom, and this is a

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

further complication. It has been suggested that the EC regulation should cover duty hours as well as driving hours, and I know that some trade unionists in particular would welcome that.

I have considerable reservations about this suggestion. It seems to me that it would make the regulation even more complicated than it is now—our own regulations already have to provide a number of exemptions and special provisions — and it would be very difficult to get agreement on comparable rules on a Community basis. Moreover, for passenger vehicle drivers we found that duty limits were wholly impractical — they were abandoned in 1971. I would not wish to hold up the many other desirable changes in the regulation to which I have referred in an attempt to insert duty hours limits at this stage.

But if duty hours are not to be covered in the EC regulation, should we do anything about our domestic laws? I cannot answer that until we know what the new EC provisions will be. But the need to look at our laws again in due course will not be overlooked.

In the tachograph regulation, most of the proposed amendments are consequential or in the interest of clarification. However, the proposed new article 16 would require tachograph charts to be numbered, used in numerical sequence, and recorded by the employer. While such a move might help in enforcing the tachograph regulation, it would, in our view, be unworkable in practice. We understand that the chart manufacturers cannot guarantee completely accurate numbering of charts; there would be a substantial additional administrative burden on operators and considerable difficulties for drivers who in any one week may drive several different vehicles with different models of tachograph. Therein lies the problem of doing something which appears to be sensible.

The same problem arises on new article 17. In addition, the provision in paragraph 5 of that article for crew members to retain tachograph charts will need to be looked at in the light of what is agreed about the fixed or rolling week to which I referred earlier.

The draft recommendation on enforcement would recommend to member states certain principles for organising checks on drivers' hours, including the percentage of vehicles to be checked annually and a framework for fixing penalties. We are sympathetic to the need to improve enforcement throughout the Community, but I think that the proposed provisions need more detailed consideration, especially when they purport to lay down how many vehicles should be checked annually.

I have discussed the main matters under consideration. Because the subject is so complicated, the Department has consulted not only the principal unions and trade associations in transport, but many other bodies that have an interest. They are united in saying that something should be done to clarify the situation. The employers are concerned about proposals to extend the rest periods, not because they want to curtail them, but because they wish to retain flexibility, particularly in industries like agriculture and construction, which depend on light nights in the summer. The unions, as I have said, wish to see limits on duty in the regulations.

The Commission's proposal as it is shaping up in discussion seems to strike a reasonable balance between the competing pressures of employers and unions and the overall considerations of public safety which are important. There are still matters on which we are unhappy and we shall pursue those in Brussels. It is disappointing that, after three years of discussion, more progress has not been made and that next week's Council meeting will not be able to take firm decisions. But I look forward to hearing the views of the House tonight and to its support for the Government's pragmatic position.

12.17 am

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I do not want to delay the House for longer than is necessary, because we have had a long day. However, it is right that we put some of our observations on the record, because this is an important matter.

Has the Minister complied with a recommendation of the Select Committee on European Legislation? The Committee's report says:

"In view of the importance of the issue raised the Committee recommend that this instrument should be further considered by the House. They look to the Department however to keep them informed of developments so that they may review their recommendation in good time before the instrument goes to the Council for adoption."

Has the Minister complied with that recommendation? I have been in touch today with the Department and with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is Chairman of the Select Committee, and it seems that the answer is unclear.

Over the years, the Minister and I have shared the important policy objective of improving road safety. Collectively, we have put on the statute book legislation to improve road safety and save lives. However, I believe that the regulations, which the Government have asked the House to accept, will be harmful to road safety.

I begin by outlining some of the regulations that the members of the Transport and General Workers Union and the Freight Transport Association regard as important and agree upon. The hon. Lady has already mentioned some of them. In particular, the week as defined on a fixed basis from 00 hours on Monday to 2400 hours on Sunday is an acceptable starting point for all the calculations.

Secondly, the definition of "driving" is included for the first time as

"time which is spent behind the wheel of the vehicle."

That may seem obvious, but it is the only time that that has been defined in regulations.

The third point on which we can agree relates to the exemptions for small passenger vehicles and the proposed increase from 15 to 17 nationally does not apply

"if carrying goods other than passengers' personal effects".

This is the familiar jargon of European legislation. Having ploughed through it, I think that we can agree with it.

Fourthly, the new wording for rescue vehicles includes other vehicles

"when used in a temporary emergency."

Once again, that seems patently obvious, but once again we must get the syntax right. As the Minister will see, few of the regulations that the Minister has introduced tonight find common ground with the TGWU or the FTA.

The 1968 Act was introduced to reduce the hours of work of drivers of commercial vehicles in the interests of road safety and driver fatigue—a proper and adequate proposal at the time. I am given to understand that the 1968 Act provisions are in operation today. Those include up to 10 hours driving at the wheel; up to 11 hours on duty,

including driving; up to 12½ hours spread over booking on to booking off; at least a half hour break for rest and refreshment after five and a half hours of duty; at least 11 consecutive hours off duty between working days; 60 hours a week on duty; and at least 24 consecutive hours off duty. Those provisions of the 1968 Act found a generally favourable reception among the trade unions and those principally involved in road haulage.

I have with me the professional driver's handbook of the TGWU, which sets out the conclusions of that Act and which is the bible of road hauliers' employees. That is the book on which they operate. The proposals that the Minister is asking the House to consider tonight include a combination of amendments to both daily driving hours and the rest period hours. Those proposals are opposed by the European transport unions. Their opposition is soundly based.

Everyone accepts that a major cause of road accidents is driver fatigue. It is nonsense for anyone glibly to imply that an extension of working hours and a reduction in the daily rest period enhances the driver's working conditions. Safety and health depend on the avoidance of fatigue. Fatigue can be caused by both long working hours and inadequate rest and sleep. Accumulative fatigue can be caused by repeated periods of work with insufficient rest periods to enable the driver to recover.

According to the Government's statistics, fatal accidents resulted in 47 per cent. more goods vehicle drivers being killed in the second quarter of 1984 compared with the same period last year. Serious injuries fell by 8 per cent., but 426 were still seriously injured and the number of those slightly injured rose by 2 per cent. to 1,678. Sixteen fewer people were killed or injured by goods vehicles during the first six months of this year, yet there was an increase of 53 people who were killed or seriously injured while riding bicycles, which is a slightly disturbing figure. Any measure that can add to driver fatigue will increase inevitably the dangers of fatal or serious accidents occurring on the roads of Britain and elsewhere in Europe. That prompted Mr. Jack Ashwell, the national road haulage officer of the Transport and General Workers Union, to say to an audience listening to a speech on road safety that a driver died when he fell asleep at the wheel after driving 760 miles in two days. An eye-witness saw his lorry swerve across the lanes and plough across a roundabout and up a slip road before ploughing down an embankment. The tachograph showed that he had been driving for nearly 30 hours during 42-hours.

The changes that the Commission is proposing and the Government are asking us to support—we are being asked to approve them tonight—are, as the hon. Lady has said, a complex equation involving the juggling of arithmetical sums involving drivers' hours and rest periods. The Minister has set out the ramifications of these complicated regulations in her usual astute way. After we have distilled this almost incomprenhensible European document, we find that the regulations amount to an extension of hours and a reduction of rest periods. In the 1968 Act, there was an outcry when hours were reduced from 72 to 60. Yet in 1984 we have the ridiculous situation where employers' representatives in the European Community want to increase driving hours to 10 hours daily and to reduce the daily rest period away from base to eight hours uninterrupted or nine hours with the possibility of an interruption, of which six hours would be interrupted and a maximum of 30 minutes' driving time. It is proposed that the daily 11 hours on-duty limitation should be rescinded, as in the rest of Europe. That sound like gobbledegook to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it does not to you, but that is what the Commission's regulations are proposing.

The House should consider carefully the consequences of the regulations, even though the hour is late. The implicit promise of extra rest hours at a later stage does not reduce driver fatigue on the day in question. Adequate rest is necessary at all times if accidents are to be prevented, and surely that is what the House wishes. Hours spent "resting" in the cab of a lorry without the necessary provisions for meals, toilet facilities or personal hygiene do not fall into the category of rest. It is on that basis that the unions in the transportation business in Europe, including the United Kingdom, are opposed to the regulations. On the balance of the argument, I, too, am opposed to them.

The Freight Transport Association is none too happy about the tachograph proposals. That is clear from its briefing which came to me this morning. Part of it reads:

> "Employers are required to number charts, issue charts in numerical sequence, maintain registers covering the issue and return of charts and keep completed charts and registers for two years.

This suggestion has been made before by the Commission, and the Association remains opposed to the introduction of such provisions on the grounds that they would be of little practical benefit to the enforcement agencies and impose yet another burden of non-productive work on the operator. The requirement for completed charts to be retained for two years is a nonsense and an impossibility to justify."

I hope that the Minister will bear those comments in mind. She alluded to the difficulties in trying to legislate for those possibilities.

The Minister must be aware that any regulation that provides for options within the provisions makes a mockery of law enforcement. I am referring especially to the tachograph and the intention to rescind the requirement to retain the two or seven previous days' discs. To suggest that adequate enforcement can be maintained by visits to company premises and an electronic analysis of discs is misleading not only Parliament but the industry and the public at large. The Government's evidence to the Select Committee on Transport showed that the Department had 235 traffic examiners who have a wide range of duties, including roadside checks on vehicles in connection with weight and dimensions. The examiners are spread over 11 traffic areas, and I believe that it will be physically impossible to transfer road checks to company premises and maintain the same standard of enforcement on drivers' hours and rest period regulation.

In paragraph 219 of the Select Committee report, the Government stated that the police examine records on roadside checks arising from stopping the vehicle for other reasons. How can the law be enforced, as the only disc that the driver will be required to produce is that particular day's disc? That is what I understand from reading the document.

In essence, the proposals mean that checks can be made only at the company's premises. The level of enforcement officers is such that only a small percentage of those

[Mr. Roger Stott]

premises could be visited, thus eliminating the effectiveness of roadside checks and frustrating the implementation of the law which all of us support.

This is a complicated issue, as the Minister has already outlined. I have spent most of the day looking at the complicated regulations. I have said to the House that I believe that there are sound reasons for scepticism and for opposing some of the regulations. Late though it is, I say to my hon. Friends that we should register our opposition to the Commission's proposals. I do not believe that the recommendations, principally those on road safety, are beneficial.

I return to what I said at the beginning of my speech. The Minister and I have shared many a Standing Committee on transport issues, and both of us have been rowing on one oar with respect to the provision of road safety legislation. We have much of which to be proud.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): It was a long time ago.

Mr. Stott: It was a long time ago. as my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Prescott: She has changed since then.

Mr. Stott: My hon. Friend will recognise that I am a retread in this position. I look forward to locking horns with the hon. Lady on perhaps even more contentious issues than this one. Given what we have heard this evening and the provisions contained in the document, I ask my hon. Friends to register a protest against the regulations.

12.33 am

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) that we should register a protest against these regulations.

I am a sponsored member of the Transport and General Workers Union. We as a union oppose this directive and the reasoning behind it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan said, this measure means an extension of hours and a reduction in the rest periods from either those stipulated in our 1968 legislation or in the ECC's previous legislation. This measure means a worsening of conditions for drivers.

The Commission says that there are three aims behind this document—greater simplicity, more flexibility and better enforcement.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan, I spent a considerable time reading the regulations. He said that they are goobledegook. The regulations are not simple. They are far more complex than the original regulations and are extremely difficult to follow. I agree that there should be greater simplicity of regulations—either ours or those of the Community. There is no simplicity about this ECC draft document.

One of the aims is to give drivers more flexibility so that they have more free time when on their home ground and less free time when away from home. That is difficult to understand when one considers the normal life and duties of the long-distance lorry driver. By the nature of his occupation, he is not at home much because, like us, he has to be away from home most of the week.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan talked about a 10-hour driving day. This House began sitting today 10 hours ago, although I have not been in the Chamber for 10 hours. We are talking about a driving day lasting from the time the House sat until now. That is too long to serve the interests of road safety.

We are talking about regulations which could result in the deaths of drivers and passengers and of innocent pedestrians in Britain and throughout Europe. It is deplorable that we should be discussing that at this time of night. Prime debating time should be given for the discussion.

That we are discussing the regulations at this time highlights the issue. We are talking about a half-hour extension to duty or driving. We have been on duty for 10 hours, but we have not been speaking for that time. Most of us are tired, so I shall not burden the House with a long speech.

The same applies to drivers. Being on duty might involve not only driving the vehicle but unloading it and other duties in connection with the vehicle. Is it suggested that a driver is refreshed by unloading his vehicle and that he is still fit to drive? That is not in the interests of road safety.

I have been approached by people in my constituency, which has an interest in road haulage. Firms in the area carry gases and dangerous chemicals. Pressure is put on many drivers, because of unemployment, to skip the rules, to do that much more, to get there that much quicker and to fit in another journey. That happens under existing rules.

Flexibility is fine, but if it encourages employers to persist in that pressure, our lives are affected. We must do nothing to encourage employers to put on that pressure.

The directive is said to improve enforcement. I hope that it does. On television we see clapped-out overland coaches which should not be on the road travelling from one end of Europe to the other. Greece is often mentioned in this respect. We hear of drivers changing over on motorways when their vehicle is travelling at speed. One driver jumps into the driver's seat and the other vacates it to have a couple of hours sleep before changing over again. This can happen when the coach is carrying 40 or 50 passengers. We need some enforceability if that is to happen.

I notice that one of the exceptions in the rules relates to passenger transport journeys of less than 50 km. If the Secretary of State's bus legislation on local routes in Britain is passed, he may need to include local routes as well, because some of the owner-drivers, and the drivers who will be driving in urban areas on crowded routes, will be greatly tempted, in the competitive world that the Government are trying to create, to spend far more hours at the wheel. Therefore, I am not so sure that local passenger transport should not come within the provisions of the rules, even though the majority of member states seem to want to exclude it.

Driving conditions are not uniform throughout Europe. Our regulations concerning drivers' hours should be far more generous than those in other European countries. In winter, in the worst conditions, we have far more hours of darkness in which our drivers have to drive, because of our geographical position at the north end of Europe. The farther north one goes — especially in Scotland — the fewer hours of daylight there are, but drivers still have to drive and to carry their loads in the long hours of darkness. Therefore, we should be more generous on that account.

The most stressful conditions for a driver, obviously, are in winter. Apart from possibly Ireland, Britain is the wettest country in Europe, and wet roads are a hazard. They are difficult to drive on, they create slush, and they are stressful for drivers. Apart from possibly Germany, we have snow, ice and fog far more often than the south of France, Italy, Greece and other European countries. Therefore, if we are to have uniform European regulations, or any decisive voice in improving the regulations, ours should be the best, because our drivers in Britain have the worst and the most stressful conditions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan is right to say that the regulations are bad for our drivers in their conditions of work. They are bad regulations for pedestrians, for cyclists and for other road users, because they can create stress and danger. This House should vote against them, late though the hour is.

12.43 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I should like to make a constituency point relating to the revised article 14. Having listened to the debate, I have been struck by the complexity of the proposals, especially as they are meant to be a simplification. I have been somewhat confused as to how one can put together a working day, a working week or a working fortnight, taking account of periods of work, periods of driving, and rest periods, and maintain some degree of flexibility.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) mentioned a tragic accident where the driver had been driving for 30 hours out of the previous 42 hours. I was not aware whether that was within or outwith the present laws. I imagine that it would be outwith them.

One important point that has already been raised in the debate is referred to in the explanatory memorandum attached to the draft council regulation. Paragraph 2.2. says:

"The number of infringements has remained relatively high; and the passage of time has not produced any sign of a clear downward trend in infringements for the Community as a whole."

Far too many accidents have been caused through drivers being tired, and many of them may be due to infringements of the regulations. From what I have heard so far, I am not convinced that the Government are taking any steps to improve the enforcement of the present regulations. I therefore seek further assurances from the Minister on that. Moreover, at a time when there is already concern about fatigue, we regard with considerable anxiety any regulations which would lengthen the time of driving.

The constituency point relates to the exemption of certain island areas. Reference is made to Crete and Corsica. I hope that the Minister will confirm that the exemption also covers all the islands off Great Britain. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) stressed that one must be careful about applying uniformity. This is a welcome example of uniformity not being applied. In many areas of my constituency it would be virtually impossible. I therefore welcome the exemption for itself and as evidence that the Government and the Community see fit to exempt island communities where the general law would to some extent be nonsensical if applied in detail. Now that that principle has been accepted, I hope that we may look forward to the Government's accepting that in other legislation, too, there should be different rules in the very difficult circumstances that often pertain in our islands.

12.46 am

Mrs. Chalker: With the leave of the House, I seek briefly to respond to the debate and perhaps to reassure the House on some points, although I suspect that the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) intends to get his nightly exercise whatever I may say. I see that he confirms that.

I believe that the hon. Member for Wigan was referring to the further explanatory memorandum issued on 28 November. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is no longer present, nodded when I mouthed that, so I believe that everything that his hon. Friend queried was properly carried out.

I hope that the hon. Member for Wigan will take my comments on the 1968 Act in the spirit in which they are intended so that the record is correct. As he knows, I have the benefit of advice from the Box which, sadly, he does not have, and it is important to get this absolutely straight.

The 1968 Act allowed 10 hours of driving, but the European Community regulation at present allows only eight—as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, that is not enforced—with a proposed limit of nine hours, which will be enforced. The 1968 Act requires 11 hours' rest, as does the European regulation now and for the future. Taking the figures overall, the proposed provisions will still be less fatiguing than those under the 1968 Act.

I appreciate why the hon. Gentleman understood the provisions as he did because I, too, have seen the letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State from Mr. Jack Ashwell of the TGWU. Understanding of the matter was not so clear as I would wish, so I will try to put it into the context of the serious question of accidents. Any increase in accidents is clearly deplorable, but the figures quoted in the letter were not relevant to this situation. Drivers' hours limits have not changed in 1984. We are investigating the causes behind the figures, but when the daily driving limit dropped from 10 to eight hours there was no appreciable change in the accident figures, so although no one wants fatigued drivers on the road I think that we must accept that the relationship between fatigue and accidents is not quite so simple as some people suggest.

The hon. Member for Wigan knows—I have not changed my view about this, any more than he has—not only that we shall take the necessary steps to ensure that the regulations do not allow any cause for greater fatigue—we should like to see less fatigue on the roads—but that we must look at the facts as they are and make sure that we do not marry together matters not directly connected.

The hon. Gentleman also said that he had gained the impression that the daily rest would be reduced in length. There is no proposal to reduce the length of daily rests. As I said just now when dealing with the 1968 Act, the daily rest would be longer under the Commission's proposals.

I hope that I do not need to take up every single word that the hon. Gentleman uttered and that he will accept from me that the Government are concerned to ensure that driving time is reasonable, that adequate rest is taken and that the provisions are enforced.

I was glad to hear what the hon. Gentleman said in describing the Freight Transport Association brief that he had received this morning. I am inclined to agree that a system under which every tachograph chart had to be numbered, used in numerical sequence and recorded by the employer would be unworkable. However, I suggest

[Mrs. Chalker]

to the hon. Gentleman and to the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) that two charts are not enough. A week's charts are the minimum number that should be inspected. Could one ask the driver to keep a chart of that length, or should one put pressure on the operator to adopt an efficient system? I tend to favour the idea of concentrating on the operator as well as on roadside checks on the drivers. One could reasonably ask that a week's charts should be kept at the operator's premises. The charts for such a period could be more easily analysed by computer than the charts for odd days picked up at the wayside—and computer analysis will come in future.

We are increasing the number of our staff involved in enforcement. It is interesting to note that the police are doing almost twice as much as the Department's own traffic examiners. It is the police who stop vehicles on the roads and also visit company premises to check the weekly record of those whom they have stopped on the road for what they suspect to be infringements.

There was a notorious case which arrived on my desk recently in which one operator was responsible for 1,400 separate offences. The police have, rightly, taken that case up, and we shall give them any help that they need in taking the matter to its logical conclusion.

The right hon. Member for Halton also spoke about the question of pressure to skip the rules. I could not agree with him more. If there were pressure to skip the rules, that would be completely wrong. However, with computer analysis of the charts, the operator's collection of the charts from any operation can be checked, and the operator is under pressure to keep to the rules. That is most important.

While I know that there were infringements by certain coach operators there has been considerable tightening up through the Bus and Coach Council code of conduct in this country. In addition, I went to a special meeting with Commissioner Contogeorgis about the hours that continental coaches were operating and what was happening on the road. Every Minister of Transport has discussed this issue with the Commission as a result of the initiative that I took about 18 months ago. I am anxious that, as we efficiently operate construction and use regulations and widen their remit throughout the Ten and beyond, we should have even safer coaches on the roads.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) asked about article 14 on exemptions and its application to the islands. All the islands in the United Kingdom are covered, so he can rest assured. In regard to the awful accident that the hon. Member for Wigan mentioned, a man driving for such extensive periods is outside United Kingdom law, existing EC regulations and the proposed changes to EC regulations. Nobody is content for drivers to drive unreasonable periods of time with inadequate rest periods. The matter is complicated. The only hope that I can offer the hon. Gentleman is that it is getting simpler. We are trying to make matters logical and sensible. There will always have to be some exemptions, but we are trying to ensure that these hours of duty and rest regulations are conducive to greater safety. I therefore hope that the House is able to accept the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 102, Noes 55.

Division No. 32] **[12.58 am**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Hawksley, Warren
Henderson, Barry
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Powley, John
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Archie Hamilton.

NOES

Alton, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Boyes, Roland
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Caborn, Richard
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cowans, Harry
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dubs, Alfred
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
George, Bruce
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meadowcroft, Michael
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*

Prescott, John	Stott, Roger
Radice, Giles	Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Redmond, M.	Welsh, Michael
Skinner, Dennis	
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*	Tellers for the Noes:
Snape, Peter	Mr. John McWilliam and
Soley, Clive	Mr. Don Dixon.
Spearing, Nigel	

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5937/1/84 and of the Department of Transport's Explanatory Memorandum dated 28th November 1984; and welcomes the Government's broad support for the proposals to make the Drivers' Hours and Tachograph Regulations more flexible and easier to understand and enforce.

LAW REFORM (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee. *—[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That in the course of its consideration in relation to the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Grand Committee may meet in Edinburgh on Monday 10th December at half-past Ten o'clock.*—[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That during the proceedings on the matter of Transport in Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet; and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 67 (Meetings of Standing Committees) the second such sitting shall not commence before Five o'clock nor continue after the Committee has considered the matter for two hours at that sitting.*—[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

House Improvements (Liverpool)

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.*—[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

1.7 am

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): At the end of a long day for the Department I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for being present to deal with this important debate. It takes place against a background of an impending housing crisis, which, if it is not countered soon, could result in the triumphant return of the bulldozer to many of our cities. Paradoxically, it also takes place against a background of widespread unemployment in the construction industry. About 400,000 building workers are languishing on the dole.

I intend to concentrate on the circumstances in Liverpool and to spell out the gravity of the housing crisis for thousands of my constituents. I shall begin by putting the position in Liverpool in a national context. About 900,000 homes lack amenities, 1·1 million are unfit, 1 million require repairs in excess of £7,000 per dwelling, and 3·9 million require repairs in excess of £2,500. Yet national Government subsidies to local authorities for housing construction and improvements have fallen from £1·3 billion in 1978-79 to £700 million in the current year —a drop of almost 50 per cent. Gross lending to private persons for house purchase or improvements is only 25 per cent. of what it was before 1979. Loans and grants to housing associations are only 75 per cent. of the 1978-79 levels.

The Select Committee on the Environment, of which I am a member, estimates that some 21·3 per cent. of the English housing stock needs to be repaired, with 4·3 million homes requiring repairs of £2,500 or more.

Yet, despite the manifest need to allocate resources, funding, especially on home improvement grants, has been cut. Home improvement grant spending has been cut from £960 million in 1983-84 to £500 million in 1984-85, which in real terms is a cut of 50·3 per cent. That in turn is reflected in the number of homes improved—some 105,000 in the first quarter of 1984, down to 75,000 in the second quarter. That is a reduction of 28 per cent. in one quarter alone.

The overall position in Liverpool mirrors the position of the nation as a whole, but there is an undoubted concentration of housing problems in Liverpool. Over the past two years, the housing investment programme in the city has been reduced from £46 million to £36·5 million. The bid made by the local authority for house improvement grants alone was some £16 million last year, yet this year it has been able to allocate only £11 million for house improvement work. It estimates that for next year, if the programme for house improvements is to be maintained, it would require a total of £19 million.

The council has also cut the money available to housing associations for home improvements from £4·4 million to £3·7 million, and, in addition, housing associations have sustained a massive 55 per cent. cut from Housing Corporation funds since 1981. That, with the way in which the general needs index system works, means that the Liverpool housing associations face a bleak 12 months.

The implications of that for the housing renewal programme in Liverpool are enormous. In the early 1970s,

[Mr. David Alton]

the then incoming Liberal administration abandoned the Labour-Tory policies of breaking up communities, levelling homes and bulldozing people's houses out of existence. We opposed their policies of constructing massive, faceless public housing schemes in faraway places miles from familiar surroundings and from family and friends. Instead, we took full advantage of the Housing Act 1974 and by 1983 had introduced the largest programme of home improvements in the country, with 39,400 properties targeted for renewal. We embarked upon a four-phase housing action area programme.

The first phase was declared in 1976, and of the 4,800 houses included, 87 per cent. have been renovated. The second phase was declared in 1978, and of those 8,600 homes, many of which would otherwise have been demolished, some 74 per cent. are now improved. The third phase was declared in 1982, and of the 13,000 included in that programme some 46 per cent. are complete. The fourth and final phase of the programme involved 12,600 homes, but that has not even begun. The local authority says that a declaration date is still uncertain due to cuts in funds. Therefore, of the original 39,400 homes, 23,700 remain to be improved. Many of the 12,000 that I mentioned earlier are without inside toilets, running hot water or bathrooms.

At the present rate of progress, it could be the turn of the century before many of those homes are renovated. The House should consider what that means for communities in Anfield, Tuebrook, Old Swan, Kensington, Wavertree, Broadgreen, Garston village, Edge Hill, Kirkdale and Walton. It means for many people the continued indignity of a home without an inside toilet, running hot water or a bathroom. Those are things which many hon. Members take for granted. It is not much fun for an elderly person living in a two-up, two-down, terraced house to have to slide out over the ice on a chilly winter night to the outside loo. It is not much of a joke for the young mum who still has to bathe her youngsters in the kitchen sink.

I have already this evening given the Minister some 150 letters from all over the city from residents who were expecting their homes to be improved and who have been badly let down. My colleague, Councillor Richard Pine, a former chairman of the city's housing committee, has carefully compiled this dossier and I handed it to the Minister at the beginning of the proceedings tonight.

I am sure that the Minister will be appalled to learn of three cases which illustrate the seriousness of the housing situation in parts of my constituency. One resident, Mr. Sabah of Wavertree, lives in the Stevenson street housing action area. He came to see me last week at my weekly housing advice centre. He had just received a letter from the council telling him that,

"because of the uncertainty concerning the availability of improvement grant monies in the next financial year, I am unable to carry out an inspection of your property or to give you permission to start work on the roof."

That property is in grievous need of improvement, yet, like many others, Mr. Sabah is being denied not only a grant but also an inspection of the property. Once the property is inspected, it would take a further year and a half before the application is processed. The improvements department is not only under-funded but understaffed.

The real rub for Mr. Sabah comes in the next paragraph of the letter from the council. No, it will not inspect his property for a grant, and no, it will not give him a grant towards the cost of the work, but it says,

"the roof is in a dangerous condition and I must remind you of your responsibilities to have this attended to."

What kind of bureaucratic nonsense is that?

Let us take the case of another applicant for an improvement grant, who wants a bathroom. She received her letter from the council telling her that her application had been refused, on the very day that the council announced that it was giving a £10,000 handout for the welfare fund of the 37 gaoled Cammell Laird protesters. How does one think she felt?

There is also the case of Mr. William Black of Edge Hill. He has been living in a flat that has never had an electricity or hot water supply. The only lighting was from old-fashioned gas jets projecting from crumbling walls —until the gas was cut off three years ago. Mr. Black goes to the public baths in Lodge lane if he wants a bath. A local newspaper report in *The Liverpool Echo*, which I handed to the Minister earlier, highlighted the case of Mr. Black, who said:

"When I tell people I still have gas lights they laugh. They think I am something out of Noah's Ark."

However, he does not want to leave the collapsing ceiling, the grimy walls or the outside toilet if it means going to some faceless public housing ghetto on the outskirts of Liverpool. Mr. Black's home was to have been improved, until the council sabotaged the housing renewal programme. Many people would rather put with stone age conditions than be forced into some of the monstrosities that the Socialist planners and politicians have the effrontry to call progress.

At one council meeting alone, more than 600 grant applications were scrapped, without a debate. This is a direct result of the overall reduction in Government funding and, locally, the reallocations of the remaining resources into a strategy for 17 so-called priority areas. This strategy is called the total approach. A more fitting name might be the final solution.

The strategy involves limited resources being spent on some properties only 20 years old. It involves 15,800 public sector properties — of which 5,300 will be demolished. The council's leaders say that they will replace all the demolished properties with new public properties. That is in addition to the 6,400 council-owned properties which, through rank bad management, are standing vacant in Liverpool at the moment.

Last week, the self-styled master builder behind this strategy, Cllr. Tony Byrne, said that the Secretary of State was "a calculated liar". Mr. Byrne is himself more of a municipal Houdini. One minute there is to be a 100 per cent. rate increase, the next a 240 per cent. increase. One minute homes are to be improved, the next they are not. One minute the rents are to go down by £2 a week, the next they rise by £2 a week. It is all based on the "now you see it, now you don't" principle.

The truth is that this Government and the council entered into a solemn and binding agreement when they declared the Housing action areas. The 1974 Act says that HAAs are not to be declared unless sufficient resources are there to see them through. Because both the Government and the council have rated on their word, people have been badly let down, but the law has been broken as well. The Government, as they admitted in a letter to me on 14

November, are content to sit idly by and let it all happen. The Minister for Housing, who chose not to visit a single HAA when he came to Liverpool, said:

"The prospects for maintaining momentum in the City's HAA programme appear doubtful, but that is a decision which rests with the City Council."

But it is not just a decision of the council. This Government consented to these areas being declared and they should now insist that the element of the housing investment programme that is required to sustain the programme to its conclusion should be used for that purpose and nothing else.

There is no point in the Government expecting Liverpool's Militant council to respond. In its abandonment of housing co-operatives and its scrapping of low-cost homes for sale, its decimation of the voluntary housing groups, its down-grading of our excellent housing association movement, and its wholesale destruction of Georgian and early Victorian Liverpool, it has shown itself to be a council run by fanatical ideologues. It is the worst administration that anyone can remember. It is incompetent, it is dishonest, and it is ruthless in pursuit of its political aims. Its continued appointment of political stooges to highly paid positions in the council's employment shows the contempt that it has for public opinion and for public service.

Local government officials now go in fear of losing their jobs as these town hall despots put their placemen into positions of power. Caught up in this vicious power struggle are thousands of ordinary Liverpool people, some waiting years for a transfer, others waiting years for a grant.

The Government must not be so foolish as to suggest that the answer to all this lies in telling everyone to wait on the council's response or to buy their own homes. As desirable an objective as that might appear, with one in five of our population out of work, tens of thousands of Liverpool people will never be able to own homes of their own. For these people, Liberals believe that housing co-operatives are the best way of providing citizens with a stake in their community.

Liverpool now has the most dynamic housing co-operative movement in the country, some of them renovating old homes, some of them building new homes and some of them now managing housing estates. Some of the co-ops were originally inspired by my Liberal colleagues on the city council and developed especially during the chairmanship of Chris Davies. That administration gave them every possible support.

I am not talking about the middle-class student or the vegetarian trendy sort of co-operative, which might be the image conjured up in the minds of some hon. Members. I am talking about ordinary working-class Liverpool people, many of them unemployed, some young, some elderly, who have formed legal organisations which are now carrying out every possible housing function. They have taken control of their own lives, have worked together to achieve change, have taken on the professionals of the city council and the Housing Corporation and have worked with architects to design new homes. They have discovered new abilities and a self-confidence that perhaps they never dreamt that they could have. Every encouragement should be given to them and their successors. They conjure up all that is best about Liverpool and, through their work, one can see the prospects for an entire city pulling itself up by its bootstraps and dealing with its problems itself.

Sadly, the Labour party has done everything possible to hinder and obstruct the work of the co-ops, preferring the out-dated and irrelevant Socialist answers of the 1930s to housing problems rather than placing trust in ordinary people. I am confident that Labour's majority will have been reduced within 18 months, and the Liberal party once again will have a commanding influence on housing policy. The encouragement and development of communities, both old and new, will be at the core of our housing aspirations. I hope that the Minister will recognise the importance of this work.

I see the support which the Liberals give co-operatives as being the epitome of all that my party stands for. I see housing renewal as the cornerstone of preserving community and family life. I see a special position for housing associations, perhaps developing an agency role where they take over the management and improvement of housing action area programmes. I see a need for the Government to respond with more resources and possibly the establishment of a Royal Commission inquiry to examine the extent and the gravity of our housing crisis. I see also the need for a variety of new solutions.

To achieve these objects, the Government will have to commit themselves to turning the tide of misery and depression which faces so many of our fellow citizens in the city of Liverpool.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important issue.

1.23 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): The speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on a subject which I know to be of considerable concern to him was delivered with his usual vigour. As was clear throughout his remarks, his quarrel is to a large extent with Liverpool city council, and I do not propose to get in the line of fire. But I can sympathise with the frustration of those who are affected by the decisions of that authority, and my Department has had extensive recent experience of its antics.

Although the scale of the problems facing Liverpool may set the city apart, the issues and the choices that it faces are far from unique.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I shall try briefly to put the matter in some context, say a word about the Government's record on housing improvements nationally and outline where we stand. Then I shall consider Liverpool itself and the suggestions put forward by the hon. Gentleman.

Our commitment to the improvement of the housing stock has been illustrated by the measures that we have adopted over the last two or three years. In April 1982 we raised the maximum grant at which repairs and intermediate grants could be paid to 90 per cent. We made special arrangements in 1982-83 and 1983-84 to provide local authorities with additional capital allocations to help them meet the increased demand for grants; indeed in 1983-84 local authorities could, in effect, spend without limit on home improvement grants.

The result has been a spectacular rise in spending on grants — up from £200 million in 1981-82 to £430 million in 1982-83 and over £900 million in 1983-84.

[Sir George Young]

Although the special arrangements have now come to an end, spending is still likely to top £700 million this year, not £500 million, as suggested by the hon. Gentleman. The total resources available rose to unprecedented levels and there was no way that extra help on this scale could continue indefinitely. The hon. Gentleman criticised the reduction from £900 million to £700 million, but that must be seen in the context of the £90 million spending at the end of the Lib-Lab pact in 1979. The extra help was never intended to be permanent and we never claimed that it was.

However, there can be no disputing the value of what has been achieved by that additional funding. A vast amount of worthwhile renovation work has been carried out and thousands of ordinary householders have been made aware, as never before, of the benefits of repairing and improving their homes. The initiative has dramatically and permanently changed priorities across the country, both for local authorities and individuals.

In Liverpool, spending on grants has been rising, though not nearly so quickly as in some other authorities. Spending rose from £4·5 million in 1981-82 to £10·7 million in 1983-84. Unfortunately, because Liverpool has not supplied regular returns to the Department, I do not know how many grants were given. The figure nationally was 250,000 in 1983-84, more than half of which were repairs grants. Disrepair was shown by the 1981 English house condition survey to be on the increase. In the Housing Act 1980, we greatly extended the scope of repair grants and there has since been a vast increase in the number paid.

Another important initiative for tackling disrepair is enveloping. In December 1982, we made enveloping available to all local authorities as a technique for dealing with groups of houses in poor condition, which can be a valuable and cost-effective tool for urban renewal. In October, we issued a circular that clarifies the guidelines for schemes and is designed to encourage enveloping further by speeding up decisions. More than 50 schemes have now been approved in England, although no applications have so far been received from Liverpool.

As the hon. Member will be aware, we have been carrying out a thorough review of private sector improvement in recent months. The repair and maintenance of the national stock of older housing remains a firm priority for the Government and we have no intention of back-tracking on that commitment. What we are keen to do is to ensure that as much private spending as possible goes on improvement and repair work and that public money that is available is used as cost effectively as possible to produce the maximum benefit for every available pound.

That means that grants should go to the properties and people that most require assistance and that the system should be simple to administer, provide a good standard or work, and offer value for money. We hope to announce the outcome shortly, in the form of a consultation document.

Having set out the Government's record nationally, and made clear that the repair and maintenance of the housing stock remains a firm priority, I turn to the special problems of Liverpool. In the housing areas of Liverpool, there are serious problems and no one denies their gravity. The Government are not indifferent to the problems mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. But there are also opportunities. Much of the public housing in the inner city was built with the best of intentions. It reflects immediate post-war policies. The legacy in Liverpool is housing which at times is ill-planned, at times poorly constructed but, most significantly, badly managed.

Improvements are needed urgently. They must be carried out in a way that represents good value for money and in a fashion that provides housing choice and utilises the energies of local people. A cardinal lesson of the past is that local authorities do not always know what is best. Encouraging owner-occupation and co-operative housing is the surest way of gaining lasting improvement in living conditions.

In major cities such as Liverpool, there will always be a substantial role for rented housing.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No. I have only a few minutes in which to deal with a number of issues.

But the conditions for existing tenants cannot be improved simply by spending vast sums of public money or simply by demolishing old houses and building new ones. Authorities across the country, large and small, have learned that it is often better to keep communities together. This can be achieved as much by better maintenance and management of existing properties as by simply recycling the public stock and its problems.

An increasing number of city council tenants are looking for ways to help themselves, to have a definite say in the way in which their housing is managed and to play a role in creating and sustaining good quality housing conditions for their families in the rented sector. That new energy is being further frustrated by the dogmatic refusal of the city council to entertain their ideas. A solution to Liverpool's housing problems can be secured only through partnership—a partnership between the city council and those people that it represents; a partnership between the city and the Government, and a partnership between public and private sectors.

The determination is clear on the part of many Liverpudlians. The commitment is there from the Government, and the private sector. They stand ready to play their part, but the council leadership is simply not prepared to listen. It is not prepared to look at successful solutions and remedies from elsewhere in the country. It will not learn from the encouraging examples on Merseyside of partnership with the private sector.

There is a prime example in Liverpool itself of what the private sector can achieve in housing improvements. Minster court was a desolate and derelict tenement. The bulldozers had moved in. At the last moment, Barratts and the then city leadership combined to perform a rescue which has seen one of the most imaginative refurbishment schemes in the country yet come to fruition. Other opportunities present themselves readily for similar initiatives. Developers remain ready to undertake schemes but the city turns its back on such assistance and proposes just to demolish and rebuild further council housing and add further to the public cost of revitalising the city.

Elsewhere on Merseyside, there is the major public/private initiative at Stockbridge village, where one of the most rapidly deteriorating and run-down council estates in the country is being turned round. Tenants are no longer leaving the estate. The success of the remodelling of the

rented housing, the encouraging signs of increased owner-occupation and the commitment shown by Knowsley borough council—Labour-controlled—the private sector partners and the Department has brought new hope to the residents of Stockbridge.

At Edge Lane in Sefton and Woodchurch in Birkenhead other major initiatives involving a partnership of public and private sectors are under way. New and refurbished homes are being provided for sale and rent. Community provision is being improved and the Government are playing their part in those worthwhile schemes. The examples are there. The lessons can be seen but the city leadership shows no signs of heeding them.

I must tell people in control in Liverpool that what is needed is a coherent strategy. The right programme will not be dominated by council housing. It must give full weight to improvement in the private sector, using local authorities' wide powers.

In some cases the answer will be grants to individual householders for installing basic amenities and for carrying out essential repairs or improvement. People are entitled to mandatory, rather than discretionary, grants for necessary amenities. In other cases it may make more sense to opt for area action, through general improvement areas or housing action areas. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, there have been many examples of this in Liverpool in the past.

Improvement initiatives will always be most effective where they fully tap the resources of the private sector. That makes sense since private spending will always far outweigh public spending on improvement grants.

The unwillingness of the city council to look beyond its dogmatic municipal-dominated approach is symptomatic of its attitude to its finances. At the beginning of last month the Secretary of State warned Liverpool city council that it had to take urgent action to put its finances in order. This week we have seen its reaction. The city council has ignored completely the breathing space offered by the settlement of this year's budget in the summer. Nothing has been done to prevent a budget deficit building up. Once again the city council threatens to plunge the city into chaos and to make a budget and a rate for 1985-86 which do not balance.

It is a cruel deception to pretend that such an approach will bring much needed action to tackle the city's problems. The consequences for Liverpool will be far worse if the council fails to make a proper rate than if it accepts its statutory responsibilities. The people of Liverpool do not need further months of needless anxiety. The city itself is not well placed to sustain a further knock to its confidence and reputation.

This summer there was much good news coming from Liverpool. The garden festival and the tall ships race show what can be achieved. The Government continue to show their commitment to the area. By pursuing its present course the city council can only damage considerably the good that has been done. The offer of partnership remains open on the Government's part.

I turn to resources for housing. As for 1985-86, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 12 November that the gross capital provision for next year would be £3,056 million. That is only £65 million less than we had planned before the level of overspending in 1983-84 and 1984-85 had become apparent.

Allocations to individual local authorities will be made as soon as possible and resources will be distributed among authorities fairly. As the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, the city council has recently claimed that my right hon. Friend promised it a large capital allocation for 1985-86. Such a claim is totally false. No such promise has ever been made—indeed, no council's allocation for next year has yet been settled. As final decisions have not yet been taken, I cannot say what the figure for Liverpool's housing investment programme will be. However, it will be nowhere near its unrealistic bid of £132 million, which was three times larger than this year's allocation. Within the amount that it has to spend, Liverpool, like other authorities, will be faced with difficult choices. If it is sensible, it will ensure that sufficient resources are devoted to the improvement of private sector housing.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I would intervene to divide the HIP allocation for Liverpool into various parts, including one for home improvement grants, and require the authority to spend at least a certain amount on that. I see the attractions of that approach but I must reject the proposal for two reasons. First, it is a central feature of the HIP system that it is for individual authorities to decide how to spend their allocations. When the hon. Gentleman was chairman of Liverpool's housing committee, would he have welcomed intervention by central Government to dictate his local housing priorities? Secondly, even if we were to identify separate amounts, we would not be able to oblige the local authority to spend in accordance with the pattern that we had indicated. Such powers as we have are limited to spending on projects of regional or national importance.

The Government are frequently accused of limiting local authorities' freedom to reach their own decisions. That was the theme of the debate which took place earlier. On this occasion I must, in the interests of preserving local autonomy, reject the hon. Gentleman's rather centralist solution. However, I join with him in inviting Liverpool to think again about the policies that it is envisaging. It is abundantly clear that in Liverpool, and in other towns and cities, there are many householders who need help if they are to repair and improve their homes——

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock on Monday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty three minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

OXFORDSHIRE BILL *[Lords]*
Read a Second Time, and committed.

LOCHMADDY AND EAST LOCH TARBERT (IMPROVEMENT OF PIERS, ETC.) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Considered: to be read the Third Time.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Awards

1. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when a parental contribution was last required towards a student's tuition fees.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): Contributions towards a student's tuition fees were last required in the academic year 1976-77.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Does my right hon. Friend recall that when the change was made by Mr. Mulley in 1977 it followed a painstaking inquiry by the University Grants Committee and the vice-chancellors, and considerable consultation? Does he realise that what is placing great strain on the loyalty on many Conservative Members is the discovery, in an essentially financial regulation of a change which many believe will have fundamental consequences for entry into higher education?

Sir Keith Joseph: With respect, I do not accept my hon. Friend's use of the word "fundamental". It is the Government's duty continuously to review the balance between the taxpayer's contribution and that of the family and student to the costs of higher education. That is what the Government have done. I accept that it involves a change, but I do not believe that it is a fundamental change.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Was the matter discussed by either the "star chamber" or the Cabinet?

Sir Keith Joseph: The right hon. Gentleman would certainly have refused to answer that question if it had been put to him when he was in office.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend remember that in 1979 we said officially that our first priority for student grants as money became available would be to reduce the parental contribution? Will he tell the House what has changed since then to make such an apparent dramatic change in our proposal?

Sir Keith Joseph: A change in circumstances has made it right for the Government to pursue above all the constraint of public spending in relation to the nation's revenue as a whole. We have had to bear that constantly in mind.

Mr. Wilson: While I express the strongest possible opposition to all the proposed changes in grants because of the hardship that they will cause, does the Secretary of State not realise that the decision to place a greater burden on parents will have repercussions, especially at Scottish universities, which run four-year graduation courses? The Government do not appear to have taken that into account.

Sir Keith Joseph: Whether the courses are three or four years — I cannot tell which is the more advantageous in the circumstances—the subsidy paid by taxpayers to students' higher education is large.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of his right hon. and hon. Friends fully support him in the action that he has taken? Is he further aware that quite a few of those who have signed the motion against the proposals wish that they had not done so?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I hope that the House will bear in mind that taxpayers at all income levels are contributing heavily to the higher education of a minority, whose education, it is true, will benefit society, but also themselves.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Is the Secretary of State aware that I agree with him about what happened in 1976-77 when university fees were raised? Is he further aware that there was a great argument in the Cabinet, out of which came the principle that whatever else happened there should not be a charge on fees to the universities of this country, and the basis was accordingly changed the following year?

Sir Keith Joseph: The right hon. Gentleman takes his own responsibility for revealing Cabinet discussions, but I assume that the discussions in question focused on the desire not to deny access to those whose household circumstances might otherwise prevent it. We, too, have studiously tried to do that.

Mr. Charles Morrison: Does my right hon. Friend accept that students, although they are a minority, have received assistance both as a matter of principle and as a matter of national investment? In view of his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Sir W. van Straubenzee), will my right hon. Friend explain why a proper inquiry was not held before the proposals were brought forward?

Sir Keith Joseph: Hon. Members may not have taken into account the Government's view of the urgent need for extra money for the science research base of this country. It is true that to some extent higher education can be an investment for the country. Nevertheless, there are more students in higher education than ever before, both as a proportion of the age cohort and in absolute numbers, despite what are constantly described as discouraging economic circumstances, and I believe that that will continue.

Mr. Radice: Perhaps I may come to the assistance of the Secretary of State. In view of the opposition so

forcefully expressed both within and outside the House in recent weeks, will the right hon. Gentleman admit that his proposals are unacceptable, first, because they break a principle by introducing charges for tuition; secondly, because they fail to recognise the 14 per cent. decline in real value of the student grant since 1979; and, thirdly, because they make students and their parents pay for scientific research which the whole country needs? Will he therefore abandon the proposals immediately, establish a review of support for all those in further and higher education and go back to the Treasury for the extra money needed for research?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman seems still to be living in the never-never land of absence of any economic constraints. As I failed to answer the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) about expectations, I should say now that I accept that one of the severest aspects of the policy is that it defeats deeply entrenched expectations. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), however, must accept that the Labour Government made charges towards tuition fees for seven years before they made changes. He says that the value of the student maintenance grant has fallen, but that has coincided with a record level of applications and of accepted entries into higher education in this country.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Long questions lead to long answers.

Free School Meals

2. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schoolchildren now receive free school meals.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): In autumn 1983, which is the latest date for which figures are available, 1,076,585 children were receiving free school meals on the day of the school meals census.

Mrs. Short: Is the Minister aware that the Tory county councils, which many of his hon. Friends represent, have reduced school meals to a minimum, further depriving families which are already deprived because of the Government's policies? Will he now consider the matter and instruct county councils which have reduced school meals to a minimum to reassess their policy and to ensure that children get their meals and that the women who were working in the school meals service get their jobs back?

Mr. Dunn: I cannot accept the hon. Lady's view. Most local authorities try hard to provide a balanced meal for all children who are entitled to take it or who wish to partake of a school meal. Children whose families receive family income supplement and supplementary benefit are entitled to free school meals, and the authorities make every effort to give a child a balanced meal under those circumstances.

Mr. Holt: Does my hon. Friend accept that many of the parents of the children receiving free meals today will, through their own endeavours and hard work, reach a status in society which will make it likely that, later on, their children will be in the catchment area but will be denied grants under the Secretary of State's proposals. Are those not the very children whom we ought to be protecting?

Mr. Dunn: Both my right hon. Friend and I are somewhat confused about the point that my hon. Friend is making.

Student Awards

3. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received about his proposals to amend parental contributions to the cost of further education.

4. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the alteration in the criteria for awarding student grants.

7. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received concerning the abolition of the minimum student grant and the charging of higher education fees to parents.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have received some 1,800 such representations.

Mr. Mackay: As my right hon. Friend must be aware from that massive number of representations, in many cases there will be real and sudden hardship. Would it not be prudent now to withdraw these ill-conceived proposals —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and instead to announce a full inquiry into the financing of further education, which would include a close look at the merits of a loan scheme?

Sir Keith Joseph: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and note the support that he has received, and I accept that the proposals are a shock to the expectations of many, if not all, the households involved. I can say no more than that.

Mr. Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while he has advanced a powerful and sincere case for a greater financial commitment by students and parents, there is cause for genuine complaint about the speed with which the decision has been made and the suddenness of the change, which is disrupting carefully planned family budgeting? Will my right hon. Friend look again at the phasing of his proposals, and will he also consider whether, in any such review, he sees any place for a loans system?

Sir Keith Joseph: I have certainly accepted from the start of this announcement that 11 months' notice is by no means ideal. However, my hon. Friend's gentle words hide the fact that any phasing must cost money and that the money is, in my judgment, needed as a national priority to prevent the science research base from suffering, perhaps in some very grave way. Nevertheless, I hear what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Madden: Does the right hon. Gentleman not accept that his proposals are fundamentally misconceived and unduly severe? Will he further accept that this move represents a further attack on the standard of living of many students, and the parents of many students, including those from ethnic minorities? Lastly, in view of the widespread opposition to the proposals in the House —and particularly from the Government Back Benches

—will the right hon. Gentleman not now scrap the proposals and establish a comprehensive review into the grant structure for our university students?

Sir Keith Joseph: Even after the proposals have had their effect, students will remain very heavily subsidised by the general body of taxpayers, many of whom are much less well off than most students will be.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Secretary of State recall the saying:

"Whom God would destroy He first sends mad."?

Is that not appropriate, as this proposal is the height of madness and will damage the educational future of many children and, in the process, deprive them of national educational standards?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to accept that. I do not accept any part of his case.

Mr. Madel: In view of the need to strengthen the links between higher education and industry, does my right hon. Friend agree that changes in tax laws that would encourage industry to donate more equipment and finance to higher education is now appropriate?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree enthusiastically with my hon. Friend, but that does not mean that it would make sense for the national economy. The tax changes that he postulates would have to be considered in the light of the overall tax situation. Therefore, once again, I note what he says but cannot promise that the Government will be able to deliver it.

Mr. Bruce: Is the Secretary of State aware that there is widespread anxiety that the parental contribution to fees is the thin end of a very large wedge which might result in students being unable on economic grounds to choose the course that they want to take, and the Government losing as a result? Does he agree that courses should be pursued on their merits and that financial considerations should be different for four-year courses, as in Scotland?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am not concealing any decision to carry the charge into tuition costs any further. No such decision has been made.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most serious aspect of his current proposals is that they damage the vital principle of equal opportunity of access to higher education for all sections of the community? Will he take that into account and modify his proposals?

Sir Keith Joseph: For once, I am not sure that I am prepared to accept what my hon. Friend says. Perhaps he will reason with me or write to me to explain the reasoning behind his view.

Mr. James Lamond: When the Secretary of State hears the attacks behind him from hon. Members who have sat silent through attack after attack on our social services, does he recall that old Scots saying,

"Touch ma pooch and friendship ceases"?

Sir Keith Joseph: I have to accept that my hon. Friends have a strong case only, in my view, about the shock to expectations at relatively short notice. I do not think that I can offer any firm prospect on this, but I accept that that lies behind many of the complaints that are reaching me.

Dr. Hampson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is more than just the short notice, and that there are some things that really matter? Does he agree that when fees were last charged they were charged very much at the top end of the scale—at present prices, at above £36,000? I understand that we are now to charge fees when there is a residual income of about £19,000, and it seems likely that home-based students will be charged fees at a considerably lower level of family income than that. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a real case for reconsideration, at least on the fees front?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am not quite sure whether my hon. Friend has got his analogy right. I should like to examine it. I fear that he might have misled himself again.

Mr. Wigley: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many of those who are assessed to have a parental contribution do not receive it, certainly in full, and that the National Union of Students assessed that number to be as much as 43 per cent. of all students last year? In those circumstances, is there not an argument for doing away with the parental contribution so that people aged over 18 can stand on their own feet?

Sir Keith Joseph: No Government have found it possible to replace that money with funds from the taxpayer. Although I realise that some students—it is certainly not 43 per cent. of all students — do not receive all that they might expect, I must observe that there are record numbers of students in our universities and polytechnics and record numbers of applications.

Mr. Budgen: Why was it not possible for my right hon. Friend to take an opportunity long before this decision both to inform and to persuade those who are likely to be affected by this decision?

Sir Keith Joseph: The problem of preparing for public expenditure discussions, which are inevitably in confidence, present some difficulties. I can accept that a long intellectual approach march to what the Government have decided would have had certain advantages. However, I ask my hon. Friend to face the problems of public expenditure discussions.

Mr. Fatchett: Given the fears that exist among students and parents about the future funding of university and polytechnic courses, will the Secretary of State give a clear commitment that it is not his intention, during the lifetime of this Government, to introduce a loan scheme for students?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government have already put on record that loan schemes are not at the moment on the agenda, and that if the Government wish to bring them back onto the agenda an announcement will be made and consultations will be embarked upon.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend recall coming before the Select Committee in the last Parliament and endorsing the policy put forward by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South, (Mr. Carlisle) on parental contributions? Furthermore, what is the point in devoting extra resources if the students will not be able to afford to take advantage of them?

Sir Keith Joseph: I do not accept my hon. Friend's second question. It does not follow from the Government's announcement that there will be fewer applications for the science, technology and engineering places, the number of which we are deliberately increasing.

Further Education (Cumbria)

5. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will review the level of his Department's support for the Workers Education Association and further education within the county of Cumbria.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Peter Brooke): No, Sir. The levels of support for WEA districts have been established nationally following a review at the end of 1983, and local levels have been determined in that context. The level of provision accorded to adult and further education within the authority's education service is largely a matter for the local education authority to decide, although for advanced further education my right hon. Friend makes allocations from the advanced further education pool in the light of advice from the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education. We are currently awaiting advice on the 1985-86 pool allocations.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that the 8·3 per cent. cut imposed on the WEA in the county of Cumbria leaves it in a desperate position? How is it possible for the Government to tell the WEA to raise its fees when on the other hand they are advising it that its role is to support the disadvantaged element in our community? Is it that the Government wish the disadvantaged simply to pay more?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is a little misinformed. The 8·3 per cent. is a national figure over three years. The cut for the northern district, in which Cumbria falls, is 2 per cent. in real terms.

Primary Schools (Expenditure)

6. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil at primary schools in England in real terms in 1978 and in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what are the comparable figures for primary schools in Staffordshire.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authorities in England spent an average of £620 per primary pupil in 1978-79 and £681 in 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available. The comparable figures for Staffordshire are £621 and £698 respectively. All these figures are at 1982-83 prices.

Mr. Knox: In view of the impressive increase in expenditure per pupil in Staffordshire since the Government came into office, an increase that is much better than in the country at large, why does the Labour-controlled Staffordshire county council keep trying to close primary schools, particularly in areas outside Stoke-on-Trent, and why does it keep complaining that there are Government-forced cuts in its education budget?

Mr. Dunn: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying. The House will accept that there are financial and educational benefits in taking surplus school places out of use. I hope that those benefits are in the mind of the Staffordshire local educational authority when it comes to assess primary and secondary education.

Pupils (Capitation)

9. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the national average total of expenditure on capitation for pupils aged five to 11 years.

Mr. Dunn: There are considerable variations in the items authorities require schools to pay for out of capitation, and no central record is kept of capitation levels nationally. However, most include an allowance for books and equipment and, in 1982-83, authorities in England spent an average of £21 for each primary aged pupil on books and equipment.

Mr. Fisher: Does the Minister appreciate that that works out at only just over 10p per pupil per school day? Does he think that that is a sufficient sum with which to educate our children? Will he now introduce a national review of capitation and bring forward serious proposals to allow children to be properly educated?

Mr. Dunn: I fully accept that there is concern about the provision of books in schools, and we have provided for that. I suggest to the hon. Member that he might care to advise his own local authority to consider other ways of getting better results for its money, including the benefits of privatisation of some services.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is scope for devolving more financial responsibility to individual schools? Will he give us his views on that point?

Mr. Dunn: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that this is one of the very issues that we considered in our Green Paper on parental influence at school. We are studying responses to that document. I understand that the Audit Commission is likely to have things to say about the need to increase delegation to schools in its forthcoming reports on non-teaching costs in secondary schools. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has agreed with the local authority associations that they should discuss that report when it becomes available.

Mr. Bruce: Will the Minister recognise, as he has acknowledged in his answer, that the variation in the capitation contribution is often made up by parents, and that that is also to a widely varying degree? Will he take account of that and recognise that a VAT imposition on books would further aggravate the position?

Mr. Dunn: The Government have consistently maintained the view that they welcome the generosity with which many parents demonstrate their support for their children's schools, so long as that support is given on a genuinely voluntary basis. VAT is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Hayes: Since 33 per cent. of school books are bought by parents, does my hon. Friend agree that the imposition of VAT on books would have a disastrous effect on capitation?

Mr. Dunn: I have already given an answer on that very question.

"Parental Influence at School"

10. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in response to his Green Paper, "Parental Influence at School".

Sir Keith Joseph: Over 700 responses have now been received, in the light of which the Government are carefully considering the way ahead. Our conclusions will be announced in due course.

Mr. Colvin: I acknowledge that it is good to have more parent governors of schools, but does my right hon. Friend agree that he should maintain some flexibility in agreeing a system for the appointment of school governors? Giving them a majority on school boards may suit some localities, but not others. Will my right hon. Friend, in reaching his conclusions, consider that parents should be allowed to continue as school governors after their children have left the particular school?

Sir Keith Joseph: I note what my hon. Friend says and will take it into account during the decision-making process.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I doubt whether anyone in the House would question the Secretary of State's commitment to parental influence in education. Will he tell the House what influence parents' comments on grants are having on him?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am receiving direct, and through hon. Members, a very large number of expressions of opinion from parents, which I cannot help but take seriously.

Mr. Forth: Has my right hon. Friend been surprised by the fact that, in spite of the commitment of Conservative Members to parental influence in schools, a very large number of the representations from Conservatives have been against the proposal? Is he therefore prepared to review the proposal and to have a balanced representation in schools, instead of one that is overwelmingly in favour of parents?

Sir Keith Joseph: What my hon. Friend says will be taken into account in our decisions.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: In view of all the other problems that the Secretary of State now has on his plate, would it not be a good idea to abandon the proposals here and now, since no one seems to be in favour of them?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government do not intend to follow the example of the Labour Government and ignore the Taylor report.

Teachers (Pay)

11. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the level of additional resources necessary to implement the management proposals to restructure the teachers' salary structure.

Sir Keith Joseph: These proposals are from the local authority employers. They have not been endorsed by the Government and do not constitute a formal pay offer. Their initial cost would depend critically on the timing and manner of their introduction. The Department estimates that their annual cost would build up over seven years to something of the order of £650 million at current prices.

Mr. Barron: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is no justification for employers forcing on teachers what is nothing more than a contract? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the vast majority of teachers are likely to lose their good faith in the local authorities which force this contract on them? The vast majority of teachers are committed to the education of pupils. In effect, all that will happen is that relations between the teachers and their employers will be soured.

Sir Keith Joseph: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's statement is justified. Negotiations are in progress, and no doubt both sides will make their opinions clear.

Mr. Maclean: Does my right hon. Friend accept that those of us who have worked in industry have experienced the system of performance appraisal and payments by results, which is common in industry? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that any system to restructure teachers' salaries will contain a similar element of performance appraisal and payments by results?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is true not only in wide sections of industry but in the Civil Service and the Armed Forces.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not true that teachers are already deeply embittered by the fact that, during the past few years they have lost 30 per cent. of the Houghton report proposals, which were agreed by both sides of the House under a Labour Government? Teachers feel that, having lost that amount, another incursion into their conditions is provacative and is bound to result in some type of action from people who are among the most orderly people in our society.

Sir Keith Joseph: Those proposals are not this Government's proposals. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's opinion. His hankering after Houghton only misleads the teachers, because the world of Houghton has vanished—I hope for ever.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend accept that within Britain and the teaching profession there is a great anxiety to ensure that good teachers in the classroom are properly rewarded and their professional efforts recognised, and that this restructuring would do that?

Sir Keith Joseph: I certainly agree in principle with my hon. Friend that it is absurd that the effective classroom teacher cannot be given a better career prospect than the ineffective teacher for staying in the classroom..

Non-advanced Further Education

12. **Mr. Foster** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the age participation rate of 16 and 17-year-olds in non-advanced further education.

Sir Keith Joseph: Taking full-time and part-time day release courses together, 20 per cent. for 16-year-olds and 21 per cent. for 17-year-olds in England at January 1984. The Government's expenditure plans for 1985-86 assume some limited increase in the participation rate of 16 and 17-year-olds in future years.

Mr. Foster: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the participation rate of 16 to 19-year-olds in full-time education—taking further education and staying on at school together — has declined during the past 12 months? Will he confirm that the participation rate in the

north of England is one of the worst in the country? Will the right hon. Gentleman introduce a scheme of educational maintenance allowance to ensure that poor families can gain proper access to full-time education?

Sir Keith Joseph: Although the hon. Gentleman's first proposition is correct, he did not mention the fact that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of 16 and 17-year-olds in youth training schemes. The activity of the 16 and 17-year-olds in YTS, employment and staying on in further education has increased substantially.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Secretary of State admit that it would be better if young people stayed on at school or went into non-advanced further education on the basis of what was best for them, not on the basis of where they can get some money for the family budget? That matters very much in the north of England. Is not the right hon. Gentleman helping the north-south divide and the two nations concept by refusing to look at educational maintenance allowances?

Sir Keith Joseph: Once again, an hon. Member from the Opposition Front Bench is throwing away the taxpayers' money with complete indifference to the results that might emerge. Does the hon. Gentleman not yet realise that the deadweight cost of providing the sort of allowance that he has in mind would be far larger than what would reach the people whom he wants to help? The hon. Gentleman must realise that in the north of England pupils can judge what is in their own interests far better than he can and that many stay on in school because it is in their interests to do so, even though there is no universal allowance for them.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Will the Secretary of State accept that the extension of maintenance grants is crucial, otherwise there will be pressure on 16 and 17-year-olds to go into YTS where there is some recompense?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman could not have heard the reply that I just gave, in which case will he take it away and read it twice?

Liverpool (Schools Reorganisation)

13. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussion he has had since September with the teachers' unions about the reorganisation of schools in Liverpool.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have had no such discussions.

Mr. Loyden: Is the Secretary of State aware that serious concern is being voiced by teachers in Liverpool about their ability to reorganise in an effective manner because serious constraints have been placed upon them by Government policy in relation to financing education?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman cares to write to me or to see me, I shall try to learn from him.

Mr. Alton: Has the Secretary of State had a chance to consider the representations of the unions in Liverpool about the failure to award social priority area status to schools in the reorganised sector of the Roman Catholic schools? What is being done to provide capital funds to give those reorganised schools the chance to provide the equipment and new classrooms that were promised at the time of reorganisation?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am aware of the latter point. I have had a long letter from the Roman Catholic archbishop and have written to him at length. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, with the archbishop's permission, I shall send him a copy.

"The Economy and Higher Education"

14. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on "The Economy and Higher Education", a copy of which has been sent to him by the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.

Sir Keith Joseph: I welcome the document's recognition of the importance of higher education for the development of the economy. I regret that it does not show equal recognition of the importance for the economy of containing the growth in public spending.

Mr. Lamond: If the Secretary of State accepts that a highly-skilled and well-qualified work force is an essential element in Britain's long-term economic recovery, why is he setting about increasing the decline in the number of graduates by bringing forward the proposals to cut student subsistence and introduce tuition fees?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am not sure that the two are necessarily as connected as the hon. Gentleman thinks. Despite what his hon. Friends are constantly saying, there are more and more undergraduates in universities and polytechnics than ever before, and more and more applicants.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is no demonstrable link between the amount of public expenditure that goes on higher education and the performance of the economy, and that arguments that purport to prove so are humbug?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with every word that my hon. Friend has said.

Scottish Universities

15. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next expects to meet the University Grants Committee to discuss matters affecting the Scottish universities.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend and I last met the University Grants Committee on 1 November. We have no immediate plans for a further meeting.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware of the unanimous opposition in Scottish universities to the latest proposal to cut student grants, which will particularly discourage many students from going to Scottish universities because they will not be able to afford the additional year of study that is involved in many Scottish degree courses? Bearing in mind that the proportion of the population in higher education in Britain is less than in many comparable countries, will the hon. Gentleman scrap these disastrous proposals and introduce a comprehensive system of student grants, phasing out the parental contribution so that all people who can benefit from higher education will have the opportunity of doing so?

Mr. Brooke: I had the great pleasure last week of visiting Dundee university. The president of the students

union had the opportunity of spending two hours with me to argue his case. He was not there and I can only assume that he was demonstrating on the streets of London.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that in a speech last week the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) advocated the closure of Stirling university? Will he make it clear to the House and to the University Grants Committee that in spite of perhaps some evidence to the contrary that is not the Government's policy?

Mr. Brooke: No Government would consider the closure of an institution without receiving advice from the UGC first. We have received no such advice.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): I have been asked to reply. My right hon. Friend is attending a meeting of the European Council in Dublin.

Mr. Loyden: Is the Leader of the House aware that unemployment is responsible for marital breakdown and the destruction of family life? According to the results of a recent survey undertaken on Merseyside, there are between 60 and 70 deaths a year because of long-term unemployment? When will this violence end? When will the Government recognise their abysmal failure in dealing with unemployment? When will they exercise one or other of the two options open to them, which are a changing of course or the Prime Minister's resignation?

Mr. Biffen: The Government are fully conscious of the social damages that are caused by high and persistent levels of unemployment. The policy of sound management of the budget lies at the heart of our economic recovery. The fact that 250,000 are at work now over and above the working population of a year ago is a sign that there is the beginning of a turn.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend must be aware of the widespread concern about the Government's proposals for student grants. Will he therefore invite the clearing banks to join in discussions with the Government with a view to abolishing the parental contribution and introducing a system of grants for all, with top-ups for those who require them?

Mr. Biffen: I note my hon. Friend's interesting suggestion. Doubtless he, like me, will have heard exchanges earlier in Question Time today involving my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. I think that for the moment we might leave the matter there.

Mr. Steel: Will the acting Prime Minister confirm my arithmetic that 2 million households have had a pre-Christmas bonanza over the sale of British Telecom shares, while about 17 million households have lost about £100 worth each of the assets? Will he confirm that that is so? Is this not the equivalent of the Government playing bingo with other people's money?

Mr. Biffen: Although it is a flattering premise that attends the right hon. Gentleman's question, I must reject it. I shall concentrate upon the particularly narrow and dispiriting comment that he made about the success of the British Telecom sale. The result of the sale is a massive extension of share ownership, especially among those seeking to be small-scale shareholders. The fact that there has been such an impact upon the price in the early dealings is not unconnected with the fact that there is a relatively small market in the shares because of loyalty to the shareholding.

Mr. Dickens: Has my right hon. Friend heard the strong reports that money of the National Union of Mineworkers is being held by Left-wing trade union headquarters in London and that, daily, couriers can be seen leaving these headquarters with suitcases stuffed with used banknotes and heading for the Sheffield headquarters of the NUM? If my right hon. Friend has heard these reports, what do the Government intend to do, especially the Treasury, to investigate the taxation implications of the exercise and the title to the money?

Mr. Biffen: I am afraid that I have no knowledge whatever of the points put to me by my hon. Friend. But the strike and its financing are so redolent with tragedy that I agree that it might yet end in farce.

Q2. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.
I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wareing: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, although the Government are led by a married woman, albeit temporarily, many hon. Members hope it remains the view of the Equal Opportunities Commission that the new regulations for the community programme are likely to bring the Government into indirect conflict with the Sex Discrimination Act? If the Government are such upholders of the rule of law, should they not put aside the regulations until there are full discussions with the EOC?

Mr. Biffen: I was unaware that we were about to run such an appalling hazard. If there is a prospect of illegality, I am sure that this Administration will wish to avoid it.

Q3. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.
I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Eggar: Did my right hon. Friend note that yesterday Mr. Scargill urged trade unionists to choose between the law and their membership? Is that not hypocritical when it comes from a man who has defied both the law and his own union's rule book? Will my right hon. Friend make it quite clear today that the law is indivisible? No trade union leader or individual can choose which part of it he agrees with and which part he chooses to disregard.

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to confirm that and to assert that there would be much advantage if the leadership of the NUM returned to the law and to the negotiating table.

Q4. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Is the Leader of the House aware that tomorrow Scottish teachers will be going on strike because of the Government's refusal to grant an independent pay review? Will he recognise that many able and dedicated teachers north and south of the border are leaving the profession because of low pay, and instruct the Prime Minister to grant that independent review?

Mr. Biffen: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I cannot accept that the pay is as catastrophic as he implies. Indeed, it is much to be deprecated if strike action is taken.

Mr. Gorst: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that we can bask in further satisfaction at the direction in which the Government are leading us, by reviewing that direction with regard to student grants, the possibility of VAT on books and periodicals, the cuts in the external services of the BBC and the cuts in the British Council? Will he also ensure that there is an elected element for the GLC? We shall then be very satisfied with the Government.

Mr. Biffen: It is one of my hon. Friend's engaging characteristics that he has never been known to bask in satisfaction. A very distinguished forebear of his sat below the Gangway as a member of a fourth party, and the manifesto that my hon. Friend has just outlined is appropriate for that.

Mr. Kinnock: Has the Leader of the House heard today's disturbing reports that our Hercules aircraft are making only three flights a day, instead of the usual six to eight, because there is no grain left in Addis Ababa? What are the Government doing to expand and improve the flow of grain supplies so that the Royal Air Force can resume its flights and move grain within Ethiopia?

Mr. Biffen: The right hon. Gentleman raises a fair and highly topical point. I believe that our record of assistance to Ethiopia in the emergent circumstances of the past few months is wholly admirable. *[Interruption.]* Oh, yes. The famine in Ethiopia is above the triviality of short-term party politics. I shall, of course, study the point that the right hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Kinnock: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the famine in Ethiopia is above the short-term frivolities of party politics. The Government should urge a much better response from the Common Market in view of the fact that the most recent figures for the grain surpluses show that they have increased by 400,000 tonnes to 6·4 million tonnes. What is the Prime Minister doing at the Dublin summit, if anything, to ensure that those grain surpluses, which no one is buying, are moved quickly to places where they can save lives?

Mr. Biffen: I assert at once that the Government have been giving a lead by their example to their partners in the European Community. What was discussed at the Dublin summit will be reported upon tomorrow.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend pass on to our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the grave anxieties felt by those many parents who for many years have prudently saved towards the cost of higher education of their children and now find that that provision is inadequate?

Mr. Biffen: There has been such a widespread debate upon this point that I doubt whether my right hon. Friend needs any reminding from me, but I shall do as has been requested.

Q5. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dobson: When the right hon. Gentleman reports to the Prime Minister on the disquiet felt on the Conservative Benches and by the Opposition about the proposed changes in parental contributions to student grants, will he also suggest to the Prime Minister that there is a ready saving in the budget of the Department of Education and Science if the Government were immediately to cut the estimated £30 million subsidy to the public schools by abandoning the assisted places scheme?

Mr. Biffen: This debate can be set in many contexts, but I doubt whether most of those on the Benches behind me advocating a reconsideration of policy would choose that route.

Q6. **Sir John Farr** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir John Farr: Will my right hon. Friend pay special attention to the striking DHSS staff at Newcastle? The strike is now causing intense hardship to about 9 million pensioners and 7 million other people. In view of the fact that in the north-east there is a surplus of trained computer operators, will my right hon. Friend urgently consider the possibility of dismissing those on strike?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I understand that of the three unions involved in the dispute, two have settled and the third is now in the process of undertaking consultation. I hope that that will end in a settlement, because there are wider social consequences which I believe will be deplored by all in the House.

7. **Mr. Pike** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pike: While accepting the Government's responsibility for the long, ongoing coal dispute, may I ask whether the Government accept responsibility for the additional cost to the Central Electricity Generating Board of generating electricity from oil during the dispute and will ensure that that burden is not passed on to industrial and domestic consumers?

Mr. Biffen: I do not for one moment endorse the premise that the Government are responsible for the long dispute. The responsibility lies with those radical elements in the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers who have ambitions far beyond a mere coal strike. It is still far too early to make a judgment upon the financial consequences of the dispute.

Mr. Adley: Did my right hon. Friend either see or read the recent debate between the right hon. Member for

Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and Lord Denning on television? If my hon. Friend was looking for somebody either to uphold the law or to protect the weak from intimidation, which of those two would he choose, and why?

Mr. Biffen: I do not like to be set that kind of examination question in the closing minutes of Question Time. All I would say is that I do not believe that the behaviour of Lord Denning, either on that programme or at any other time in his life, would merit the description "simplistic".

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered, That the draft Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—[*Mr. Archie Hamilton.*]

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on amendment to Question [3 December], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Which amendment was, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Local Government Bill because of the centralisation of powers, attack on local democracy, threat to the quality of local services and employment prospects, and the additional costs to ratepayers inherent in its proposals, which are without any proper justification';

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I announce to the House that I propose again today to operate the 10 minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock.

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): Before I turn to the subject of the debate, I think that the House would like me to say that a serious railway accident occurred at 10.45 this morning at Eccles, near Manchester. The 10.05 Liverpool to Scarborough passenger train, which consisted of a diesel locomotive and seven coaches, ran into the back of a stationary oil tank train. The locomotive and the first two coaches of the passenger train were derailed, as were a number of the oil tank wagons. Spilt gas oil from the tank wagons caught fire. The local signalman was able to stop other trains from approaching. The emergency services were quickly on the scene. The traffic on the M602 motorway which runs immediately adjacent to the railway was stopped and as a precaution residents were evacuated——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must stop the Secretary of State. I called him to open today's debate. I had no knowledge that a statement was to be made.

Mr. Ridley: I do not suggest that this is a statement, but I thought that the House would like to be informed.

Mr. Speaker: Order. In fairness to the House, I think that the Speaker should be informed and also hon. Members. I called upon the Secretary of State to speak to the amendment to the Second Reading. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will now proceed.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the tragic loss of life and the severe injuries resulting from the rail accident in Manchester this morning, would it be possible at some stage in the near future for the Secretary of State to make the statement which he had in mind?

Mr. Speaker: That is a very different matter. As the Leader of the House is present, he will have heard what has been said.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): May I seek your advice, Mr. Speaker? We have had a statement. Would it be out of order in the debate to comment upon the statement made by the Secretary of State in his opening remarks?

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid that it would be out of order. It does not touch upon the debate itself. I am very sorry about this, but it is the normal tradition of the House that we are informed if a statement is to be made. It goes on the annunciator in order that we may all know. I am afraid that I was not informed.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not within your discretion to put it to the House that, with the leave of the House, a statement of this nature should be made?

Mr. Speaker: I have already proposed that the debate be resumed. I do not believe we can do that at this stage.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the fact that the Secretary of State made a statement initially about the matter, and since some of us believe that it is important that questions should be asked, it will be a one-sided affair if the debate continues in this way. In order to get out of this impasse, I suggest that perhaps the Secretary of State ought to make it clear to you, Mr. Speaker, that he has made a grave error and that he should make his statement so that our principal spokesmen will have a chance to cross-question him and also so that others who are materially involved in the various constituencies concerned will also have a chance to do so——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand the difficulty in which we find ourselves. Perhaps the simplest thing would be for the matter to be discussed by the usual channels. The Leader of the House is present and, as we are having some difficulty, perhaps the Secretary of State can make a statement tomorrow.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing further to be said now. I cannot say any more on the matter.

Mr. Ridley: The debate on the abolition of the higher tier authorities has ceased to be argued rationally by most of the Opposition. No doubt the speech we are to hear from the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will be no exception.

The tactic is to invent a lot of myths about what will be the result of abolition, then to spend millions of ratepayers' money on leaflets, posters, advertising and propaganda to try to make innocent people believe those myths and scare stories. That is not only a scandalous waste of public money but a cynical manipulation of innocent people whom we ought to protect from deliberate misinformation. For example, last Session we removed responsibility for London Transport from the GLC and transferred it to the Government. Labour Members prefer to forget the sorry stories of the GLC's constant political interference in the management of London Transport and the sorry tale of see-sawing fares and soaring rates.

Six months ago, the GLC and GLC-funded groups such as Capital were covering London's streets and buses and newspapers with expensive posters predicting that when the Government assumed responsibility for London's public transport there would be massive route cuts and station closures and old-age pensioners would lose their concessionary bus passes. There were firm statements that fares would rise by 25 per cent.

Now, six months after takeover, where have all those scare stories gone? Where are the massive route cuts and station closures? Where is the danger to pensioners'

concessionary passes? When fares go up on 6 January, they will still be 8 per cent. lower in real terms then in May 1981.

Of course, there were never any proposals or plans for massive route cuts or station closures. There was never any threat to concessionary fares. But, unrepentant, the GLC's propaganda machine is being primed with ratepayers' money again to play the same shabby game over the abolition Bill, as I will show. But I predict that in 18 months time, when the GLC and metropolitan counties no longer exist, all the myths will be dropped. As before, they will vanish into thin air. Perhaps ratepayers will wonder why so much of their money was wasted on such a worthless cause.

Our proposals for abolishing the metropolitan counties and the GLC are reasoned and in the best interests of local people, local ratepayers, local businesses and, in the case of transport, local travellers. In fact, today I read an excellent summary of our case in *The Times:*

"Despite multi-million pound propaganda campaigns, elective support for the GLC and metropolitan counties is minimal. Functions, boundaries and relations with district authorities are ill-defined. Problems of finance, urban renewal, transport, housing, environment, education and training, youth and community, have been badly tackled."

Those are not my words. They are the words of the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson), the Minister for Housing and Construction in the Labour Government. I commend his article to the Opposition as the best possible statement of our case.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment told the House why we believe that there is no useful future for the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. I want to explain why that applies particularly in transport matters.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The Secretary of State began by implying strongly that the Government wanted to get rid of the GLC not least because they believe that ratepayers' money was being badly used. Other Conservative Members have made the same point. If that is correct, why do not the Government let the electorate decide? If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that the electorate should not be allowed to decide, what is the difference between that principle and the electorate not being able to decide whether the Government use taxpayers' money correctly?

Mr. Ridley: I regard the electorate as having decided. It voted the Government into power with a large majority on the basis of the manifesto pledge to abolish the councils.

The matter is important because transport functions account for more than 40 per cent. of GLC and metropolitan county council expenditure. When those bodies were set up, the fashion was to think that roads, traffic management, and public transport needed to be co-ordinated across the whole area of the major conurbations and, moreover, that they had to be integrated — the fashionable word in the 1960s'—with land use matters in comprehensive plans.

In my view, the case for that sort of comprehensive planning was always spurious. The thick volumes of plans and studies now gathering dust on GLC and metropolitan county council shelves achieved little, except to create work for the armies of planners who laboured to produce them.

Obviously, new road schemes and traffic movement measures cannot always be confined within the boundaries of individual boroughs and districts. Obviously, many local bus services cross borough and district boundaries, which were not drawn to reflect trave-to-work or travel-to-shop patterns.

However, that does not mean that we need grandiose plans produced by upper tier county councils which are desperately anxious to justify their own existence. It simply means that borough and district councils need to talk to each other and to co-operate sensibly in those transport matters which affect their neighbours. That is true wherever a local government boundary is drawn.

As far as roads and traffic management are concerned, we propose to transfer responsibility to the boroughs and districts, which are in many cases doing much of the work already. They will need to make their preparations well in advance of abolition day in consultation with neighbouring districts. I hope that once the House has approved the principle of the Bill today the process of consultation will begin in earnest. This is particularly important where joint arrangements will need to be made for such matters as urban traffic control and the collation of transport data on a compatible basis.

We heard a great deal yesterday from Opposition spokesmen about the need to co-ordinate services. We were told that the measures that we were proposing would not be adequate. Are the Opposition really saying that they do not trust elected borough and district councillors to act sensibly? There is not the slightest evidence from the years that elapsed before the metropolitan county councils were set up — only 10 years ago — for such a cynical and pessimistic view. I simply do not believe that great city councils like Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield, whatever the eccentricities of their political masters, cannot manage their own roads and traffic in sensible co-operation with neighbouring districts without the county council looking over their shoulders. Indeed, most of them already do much of the highways maintenance on an agency basis and have considerable engineering resources which are wastefully and extravagantly duplicated in county hall. They did it before the metropolitan counties were set up, and they can do it and want to do it in the future.

The London boroughs are already major highways authorities in their own rights, with responsibility for about 7,000 miles of London's roads, compared with the 895 miles currently controlled by the GLC.

In some cases the districts may need to recruit a limited number of specialist county council staff. But many boroughs and districts have made it clear to us that they will not need anything like the numbers—nearly 9,000 in total — currently employed by the GLC and metropolitan county councils on road and highways work. I confidently predict substantial savings in that area.

Therefore, in general, I am quite certain that the boroughs and districts will be able to handle the management of roads and traffic far more effectively than the GLC and metropolitan county councils. Financial arrangements will be made to ensure that they have the resources to do so. The Bill provides for the boroughs and districts to receive the support, through block grants and transport supplementary grant, previously available to the upper tier authorities.

The Bill also contains a number of detailed roads and traffic measures to ensure that problems do not arise. In

[Mr. Ridley]

London, as we have explained in our consultation document, which has been generally well received by boroughs, I propose to take direct responsibility for about 7 per cent. of the GLC's roads—65 out of 895 miles. The remaining 830 miles will go to the boroughs, although on 300 miles of major strategic importance they will need my consent before introducing measures which would seriously affect through traffic.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) mentioned yesterday the guidance on traffic management which the Bill enables me to give to the London boroughs and metropolitan districts. This is not a matter of excessive centralisation. I am confident that in nearly all cases the boroughs and districts will co-operate sensibly where their proposals affect their neighbours. But there have to be reserve powers to solve occasional disputes and to provide a sensible framework for co-operation. Referring to *The Times* leader yesterday, I assure the House that I do not want to run the traffic lights in Huddersfield. The reserve powers apply only if authorities do not make satisfactory arrangements properly to run a computerised system going beyond their boundaries.

What has been the GLC's record on highways? The GLC, of course, argues that its presence is required as the strategic highway authority for the capital. Yet the GLC has done virtually nothing about London's roads and the problems sorely need tackling. I quote the right hon. Member for Brent, East again:

"London has been without strategic road planning for more than 10 years."

I agree. The GLC has in recent years seen its strategic responsibilities in terms of spending money on political campaigns suggesting that the Government intend to carpet London with motorways. The GLC is giving £122,000 to TRAFIC, an organisation purportedly seeking improved transport but actually paid to frighten people into believing that the Government are about to embark on a huge motorway programme. It is, of course, another silly myth and complete and dangerous rubbish. The GLC has also seen its strategic responsibilities in terms of giving ratepayers' money to organisations like the New Archway road residents association and the North Circular road Ealing action group to fund their campaigns against the Government's proposals to improve certain roads in London. Never mind whether the roads are needed or not —if the Government propose, the GLC will oppose.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): If the Department proposes motorways throughout London and through parts of my constituency, surely it is only fair that those who object to the Government's plans but have not the Government's resources should have some funding so that they can argue the case on an equal footing with the Government at a public inquiry?

Mr. Ridley: In that case, people who wish to circulate along London's road to carry out their business also deserve a grant from the GLC. It might be better to call it a day and give neither side any money.

The GLC has failed to recognise the need to tackle the appalling conditions for travellers and residents around London's major roads. In its ideological refusal to come to terms with the existence and the dependence of London's economy on the lorry and the motor car, it has done nothing, presumably seeing congestion as the way to tackle London's traffic problems. It has sought to cure the problem by choking off road usage, which also chokes off public transport, and has thus worsened environmental problems for people living near congested roads, irritated motorists and further worsened economic problems for London's businesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) mentioned the need to do something about the south circular road, which he rightly described yesterday as a mere collection of signposts. As hon. Members know, two weeks ago I announced the appointment of consultants to carry out a series of assessment studies to review the problems on some of the worst congested corridors of traffic movement in London, to review options for improving conditions for those living or working in or near heavily congested roads and to ensure that traffic moves as quickly and smoothly as possible within London.

On public transport in the metropolitan counties a great deal of irresponsible and alarmist nonsense is being talked. Myths are being created. I have just seen a particularly misleading leaflet issued by the passenger transport committee of the West Midlands county council which alleges that the county council will be replaced by a non-elected board and that "real power will be in the hands of Whitehall Civil Servants".

What rubbish. The leaflet does not mention that fact that the passenger transport authorities will consist entirely of elected councillors from the districts whose ratepayers will have to meet the bills. How can such an arrangement possibly be described as a quango? As my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) pointed out yesterday —and he has practical experience as an ex-member of Merseyside passenger transport authority — there is nothing new about joint authorities. This is, in fact, a straightforward reversion to the system introduced by the Labour Government in the Transport Act 1968. Actually they went further and had Government nominees on their passenger transport authorities as well as elected councillors, whereas we propose to have none.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Could the Secretary of State say how the situation differs from what it was in 1962, when his right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph) spoke on this point? The right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Government agree with the Royal Commission in rejecting"—

the solution of joint boards, because—

"No solution can be found by submitting these great tasks to delegates of local authorities responsible for part only of the area and its problems and some of which have responsibilities which are not only different from but often in conflict".—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1962; Vol. 669, c. 53.]

Why does not the criticism expressed by one of the right hon. Gentleman's Cabinet colleagues at the time of the origination of these proceedings in a Bill 22 years ago still apply today?

Mr. Ridley: Oh dear, Mr. Speaker. If I had to be responsible for everything that I said 22 years ago, or everything that my right hon. Friend may have said——

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: —let alone what the hon. Lady may have said, life would be very difficult.

I now want to nail another myth. The joint PTAs will inherit in full the county councils' powers to provide concessionary fares for the elderly and the disabled, so there is no reason at all why the present arrangements should not continue if that is what the local people want. The districts also have powers to provide such concessionary fare schemes direct, if they prefer. There is no threat in the legislation, or in any other forthcoming legislation, to concessionary fares.

This brings me incidentally to two more myths being propagated by the Opposition — about our proposed move to capital-only transport supplementary grant and our alleged intention to abolish section 20 grants to the railways. As the House will know, in previous years transport supplementary grant covered capital and current expenditure. I would like to make it clear that money that would have gone to support public transport and concessionary fares through transport supplementary grant will be paid instead through block grant. New GREs will be introduced to cover it.

As for section 20 grants, we have no proposals to abolish them. Hon. Members will see nothing in the Bill to suggest that they will be abolished. Of course joint boards will have to decide on their priorities, as they have to now. The amount of section 20 assistance is, and will remain, entirely up to them.

There is a myth about the Tyne and Wear metro, too. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) expressed concern yesterday about its future when the county council is abolished. He need have no fears. The PTE will continue to run the metro; it will be responsible to a joint board of districts, as it was under the 1968 Act. Of course, the metro will have to face open competition from bus operators, but that will give it a real opportunity to prove itself. *[Laughter.]* I am glad to hear hon. Gentlemen laughing so confidently.

I confirm further that we are seeking economies in the cost of public transport support in the metropolitan areas. At present, revenue support amounts to £267 million a year — plus £190 million more for London Regional Transport. Some of that extravagance is accounted for by low fares policies—that of south Yorkshire in particular.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn) referred yesterday to the extravagant subsidy policies pursued by South Yorkshire county council. I entirely agree, and so in fact did the previous Labour Government, by virtually freezing fares for nearly 10 years the council has laid an appalling burden on the local ratepayers, with serious consequences for jobs.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): They voted for the policy.

Mr. Ridley: Subsidy this year is nearly £60 million — not counting concessionary fares — and if present policies continue this would rise to over £80 million during the next three years. This is why we need precept control.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): The Secretary of State is talking about south Yorkshire and Sheffield in particular. Can he give any evidence of policies or rates in those areas removing job opportunities and damaging businesses? In rateable value terms, more jobs can be created in rate-capped authorities than in non-rate-capped ones because, in the south, it costs more to create a job in an area such as Reading than in south Yorkshire, with its so-called high rates.

Mr. Ridley: The agreed figure is £60 million. Irrespective of whether that money comes from ratepayers, taxpayers or a combination of both, it represents spending that might have created demand, and therefore jobs, through the supply of goods, or savings that might have arisen for investment to provide new jobs in other industries. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. We believe that the money is better spent in productive investment than subsidies.

So much can be saved by bringing fares up to the sort of levels that the rest of the country has to pay. Further savings will become available as a result of the policies in the Public Transport Bill which is soon to come. The Opposition never acknowledge that it is possible to save money by greater efficiency. We have demonstrated that now. In London, the fall in revenue support to LRT will be from £190 million to £95 million over three years, so we intend to give the metropolitan areas the benefit of the best way of all to get their costs down—competition. But that is another subject for another Bill. It is nothing to do with this Bill, except that we want to help the joint boards make the savings that will be necessary.

In addition to their main responsibility for bus and rail services, the relevant PTAs will be given responsibility for the Mersey tunnels and the Tyne tunnel. For the five Metropolitan airports, I expect that in most cases the districts, some of which already have an interest, will wish to make alternative joint arrangements, but if they cannot agree, responsibility will rest with the PTA.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): There is nothing in the Bill to tell the people of Merseyside who will run the Mersey tunnels if the Bill unfortunately becomes law. Can the right hon. Gentleman clarify the matter?

Mr. Ridley: I just have. I have just said that responsibility for the Mersey tunnels will pass to the PTA.

The Government have made it clear that if, after abolition day, any district can demonstrate that it would provide its own bus services more effectively and economically either by taking over an appropriate share of the PTE assets or by contractual arrangements with other operators, it will be allowed to do so. Clause 40 enables districts to withdraw in this way from some or all of the functions of the passengers transport authorities, but we shall of course need to consider separately and carefully the effect on local railways services and on the financing of facilities such as the Mersey and Tyne tunnels before agreeing to secession.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I appreciate that the passenger transport authority will take over responsibility for the Mersey tunnels. One of its great problems will not be with reduced costs but an ongoing cost in financing the tunnels. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time that we examined the fundamental issue concerning all estuarial crossings as it is impossible on any rational fares structure for the capital cost ever to be repaid?

Mr. Ridley: I am aware of that problem. The crossings, tunnels and bridges were undertaken by local authorities in the full knowledge of the financial regime that would govern them. The local authorities undertook those risks. Moreover, I believe that charging policy can have a considerable effect on whether the deficit increases

[Mr. Ridley]

or reduces. In that respect, my hon. Friend can hardly say that the Mersey tunnels have been administered with complete financial prudence.

In summary then, these are the proposed arrangements for transport services. Roads and traffic responsibilities will go in the main to the boroughs and districts, which are well able to discharge them and to co-operate sensibly with their neighbours on proposals with wider ramifications.

In the case of public transport in the metropolitan counties, the PTEs will remain in existence, although they will operate in a more bracing competitive climate, which will follow the deregulation of the bus industry. The county councils will be replaced not by quangos but by passenger transport authorities consisting entirely of elected councillors. Districts will be allowed to secede from the PTA if they can make a good case for doing so, in respect of some functions if not all. These arrangements are democratic, practical, and flexible in substitution for a cumbersome, extravagant and ineffectual two-tier system, which is now totally discredited.

Before the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich speaks—she is clearly raring to go—I hope that she will desist from myth propagation and discuss rather more constructively the Bill's proposals. I realise that it is asking a great deal of her. She does not know entirely what our proposals are. After all, it was only two weeks ago that she spoke to the Bus and Coach Council conference where, I read in *Local Transport*, she made a:

"strong but thin speech. She has yet to acquire the mastery of the subject."

Let us see whether she is any further up the learning curve now.

4.1 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Arrogance is an unlovable quality, whether it is found in individuals or in Government. It is arrogant of the Secretary of State to assume that he can introduce what is probably the most controversial Bill ever, certainly one of the most far-reaching, with such an incredibly superficial and muddled speech. We have already seen today that he is singularly uninterested in consulting the House of Commons about those aspects of the Bill that are vital to every hon. Member. It is clear that this particularly ambitious Bill will be an interesting litmus test of the Government's approach to a whole range of issues.

Transport spending makes up 45 per cent. of the budgets of the metropolitan county councils. Therefore, it is an ideal sector in which to check how serious is the Government's approach to their custody of our institutions. The Government can be tested on three separate criteria. First, on their attitude to wielding power, we have seen today that even in his dismissive mutterings the Secretary of State is not prepared to make clear the full implications of the legislation. Secondly, one of the spurious arguments eternally brought forward is that such and such will encourage efficiency. Thirdly, and much more importantly, the Bill is a sign of the concern—or rather the lack of it—that the Government feel for those who voted them into power. On all the three tests, the Bill is a clear sign that the Government have failed.

One could almost feel a certain amount of sympathy for the Secretary of State for the Environment because—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] We could almost feel sorry for him when we realise that he inherited this rag-bag of incompetent, ill-thought-out, arrogant nonsense, except the he did not have the guts to tell the Prime Minister that one line in a manifesto is an astonishingly bad preparation for one of the most major Bills that the country has seen. He should have had the courage to tell her that the creation of a Bill based on prejudice and malice is a bad test of a Government. We would have thought more of him if he had at least spoken out when he took over the Bill.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): I may have news for the hon. Lady, because I took part in the year-long discussions before the election which led to this commitment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] As Secretary of State——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Who with?

Mr. Jenkin: As a former Secretary of State for Industry, I know that these proposals have the overwhelming support of all the bodies that represent industry and commerce, and pay the bulk of rates. Therefore, I can tell the hon. Lady that I am wholly in support of this measure and I have always had faith in it. I believe that it will be a good thing for the country.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Are we therefore to conclude that, when Ministers came to the House shortly before the legislation was introduced and said that they had no intention of bringing in major changes, they were seeking to mislead us and that the Secretary of State knew about it and did not seek to come here and make a statement on his own account? That is hardly a good sign of responsibility.

Let us talk about the Government's attitude to democracy. They have decided to abolish the metropolitan county councils and the GLC. For public transport, we are told that passenger transport authorities will be created in each individual metropolitan county. The membership of these bodies will be nominated from the constituent councils, and we are assured that this will be fully democratic. Each one will provide members in proportion to the parties on that council. However, in effect this will reduce the true democracy of the PTAs. If the Government are not to be condemned for opposing democracy, they must have alternative justifications for this move. They have created governmental problems by removing a strategic transport authority, which is why they have openly admitted that one of the essentials of the Bill will be some co-operation between the councils to make up for this loss.

The consultation paper "Reallocation of Transport Responsibilities" mentioned the problem of the inherited debts from major projects such as the Mersey and Tyne tunnels and asked for agreement on how best to meet those. Clause 39 asks councils to agree on the operation of airports. Schedule 4(52) asks for co-operation in agreeing responsibility for bridges crossing boundaries. The consultation paper says that urban traffic control systems

"need to be centrally managed".

However, the only response that it suggests is joint committees, despite having devolved the power for decisions on highways down to district level. This ensures that even the democracy of the lower tier powers will be subverted.

Some suggestion is made about road safety projects For traffic monitoring, the paper that is doing away with proper planning suggests that the authority should set up a small central team, perhaps based on staff previously employed by the metropolitan county councils. In other words, on the one hand the Secretary of State does away with proper planning authority, and on the other he says that the new councils may have to set up teams, probably employing the staff who have been previously employed by metropolitan county councils.

In all these cases, failure to solve the problems of power in the new democratic state means the Secretary of State removing all control from the councils, and in effect taking unto himself the power to take all the major decisions. Whenever the councils cannot agree, the people who have brought about this enormous muddle will be those who will take the final decision.

A great deal of this legislation is irrelevant, because the Government never intended those councils to be making decisions in a free and open manner. Clause 64 means that the PTAs will be rate-capped for three years. So much for the Secretary of State's suggestion that they can decide on their own priorities. However, the wording on authorities being assessed differently implies that different councils within a passenger transport authority might be treated differently by the Secretary of State—especially if one of them decided to pull out of the passenger transport authority. That is a good example of the "Alice in Wonderland" degree to which the Government have been prepared to push this bizarre Bill.

Let us consider what would happen if one particular council decided that it would not accept the decisions taken by the councils on either side. It does not matter whether we are talking about manpower—because the Secretary of State will have the power to control manpower for three years—or the purchase of supplies and services or the operation of management. In future, if one council decides to opt out, it will be able to do so, with the agreement of the Secretary of State, irrespective of the interest of the people with whom it is supposed to be working.

What will happen if two authorities decide that they want a particular service and discover that the council in between is not prepared to agree? Under this legislation, there will be no conceivable way that they can reach agreement without going to the Secretary of State, who will exercise arbitrary powers to decide whether they should be allowed to go ahead. Even if the passenger transport authorities survive all that, the Secretary of State has written into the Bill an extra little power. Under clause 93 he may take general power to make any changes that appear to him to be a good idea in relation to any other Bill, whether or not it has been published. In other words, he could take decisions, using the powers in the legislation, which would affect something as basic and important as the buses Bill.

The conclusion to be drawn is very simple. The Government have reduced direct democracy and they plan to remove any part of the democracy that they dislike at any level. The Secretary of State's arbitrary decision-making powers will be the only thing that will decide the future in relation to very basic services.

A further argument used by the Government is that it is being done to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The consultation paper promises

"more efficient economical and convenient transport".

The White Paper promises savings of £120 million, and the Secretary of State this afternoon has repeated the boast that we do not, of course, need 9,000 staff. None of the things claimed will happen and the Secretary of State knows that that is so.

The financial structure will certainly be changed but it will not be improved. The financing of transport structures will now become very isolated one from another for both passenger and road transport. It will be impossible for an authority trying to develop an area for business to spend cash for business aid in providing a better road network. That problem will be made far worse by the isolation of the financial structures at a lower level. Road planning has been separated from passenger transport. The Secretary of State said that integration was simply a fashion and that there was no need for an integrated transport system. That is very different from the sort of thing that he has been saying in regard to London.

When it is a Labour authority that is providing an integrated passenger transport system, such as Tyne and Wear, it must by definition be bad, but when the Secretary of State is talking in the abstract about the need to change the existing legislation, he feels that he can defend it on the basis that somehow or other open competition will provide a better service.

We know that it is not much use having one bus every five minutes if the roads are so congested that all the buses are late and many of them have nowhere to park. Tyne and Wear metro could not have been created if this legislatiion had been on the statute book. In 1976, in return for a promise to use the cash required to build the metro system, the authority gave an undertaking to the then Minister that it would not expand any of its major roads while the metro was under construction. That would not have been possible if this arbitrary legislation had already been in operation.

Merseyside shows why a strategic authority for both road and passenger transport is needed. In order to help reduce urban decay in Kirkby, the metropolitan county council electrified the rail link and increased the passengers by 300 per cent. It reorganised the bus services into the area and rebuilt the roads into the industrial estates, with massive motorway links. Those things could be done only by using an integrated planning system for both road and passenger transport facilities. The results were an immediate improvement, not only in jobs but in facilities.

Let us consider the suggestion that somehow or other the provisions of the Bill will make road organisation much easier. Highways are to be controlled not by the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council but by the individual councils themselves. Instead of six authorities, there will now be 36 councils with responsibility for roads. For example, a non-trunk road which is essential to two non-adjacent councils can be undermined by the council in the middle deciding not to spend cash on the upkeep. The only answer there is for central Government to take over.

Traffic flow, which is improved by the urban traffic control systems, will be materially damaged by the proposed changes. The urban traffic control systems have made an enormous impact and brought about easier road travel. Merseyside has 3 million journeys a day, 90 per cent. of them by road. Urban traffic computer control systems have increased the traffic capacity by 20 per cent. That is far higher than the effects of building new roads,

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

but they cost a great deal of money. Manchester pays £5·5 million. To maintain that system in future, every one of the 36 councils will have to find that kind of money. But the White Paper said that

"reorganisation provides the opportunity to eliminate the duplication of services".

In addition, many of the councils will be rate-capped. Even if they needed to spend £5·5 million, the effect would be a 20 per cent. increase in traffic congestion from 1 April 1986.

There will be total chaos emerging from the lack of specialised units. The metropolitan counties are big enough to afford teams of engineers constantly checking and improving the road network. Those teams will now have to be duplicated or in some way or other supplanted. The consultation paper actually suggests employing the same people. The effect will be felt even in simple things such as the monitoring of traffic movements. It is financially viable at present because of the economies of scale, but it will be impossible for individual councils to employ people to carry out those basic and important services.

The Government say that it is essential for the councils and for Whitehall to have the information but, as the Secretary of State admitted today, he is going back to the system that existed before 1974, which led to the changes that were incorporated in the legislation at that time. As small councils did the road work, co-ordination was sadly lacking.

There were examples such as the west midlands bridgeguard project to protect bridges over the canal network. Monitoring did not happen, and the result was a build-up of massive problems requiring major studies. In the final analysis, Whitehall had to find 50 per cent. of the funding because of the extent of the job that was needed. We have been told today that the transport supplementary grant will be the system of payment for all that chaos, but the recent changes mean that the Government are committing themselves to checking projects individually—not from six councils but from 36 councils. That is what happened under the specific grants system in the 1960s. The result was that Whitehall was overwhelmed by paper and responded passively to the bids of the various councils. The tendency was to give in to the bigger councils. The other effect was that an inflation of bids was built into the system, so that every authority attempted to get the best slice of the cake.

There is a serious question as to whether the Government can cope with the detail of regulation involved. Figures for capital road spending in west Yorkshire show that the annual variation is large. In Leeds, capital road spending in 1976-77 involved £30 million; in 1978-79, £12 million; and in 1980-81, £58 million. Yet, we are told that by some magic planning, the Secretary of State will be able to sit in Whitehall and decide what should happen in these areas.

In case we are taken in by the suggestion that the business friends of the Secretary of State think there will be an improvement, it is interesting to note the comments of the Freight Transport Association, which stated:

"Our members' experience . . . since reorganisation in 1974 . . . has been very favourable."

The association said that the metropolitan counties and the GLC were far less prone to make parochial decisions. Even transport circular No. 2/82 suggested appointing a freight officer. West Midlands took up the idea and produced plans for improving the opportunities for business to expand and create jobs. All that will be abandoned because the Secretary of State thinks that it is better to have many small, unviable, disorganised units.

The Bill will lead to increased costs, increased inefficiency and duplication and will harm business. There will be even greater problems for those people in the centre of large conurbations. The consultation paper makes it clear that more motorways and trunk roads for London are on the way. The metropolitan county councils are unlikely to be affected, although the Government retain powers to change that if they wish. Schedule 4 gives the Secretary of State power to make roads trunk roads—under his control—on abolition day. For London, schedule 5 adds on to that power clear powers to enforce the types of traffic regulation that the Secretary of State feels are apt, with the ability to do the work himself and to charge the councils if they refuse to comply.

The withdrawal of the Archway inquiry merely provides a little breathing space to allow the major London inquiry to go through. We shall then see the rebirth of the London motorway box. It will be the Secretary of State who will come to the House to say that it is important that people should be able to move through London to carry out their duties. The subsequent public inquiries, with many years of total disquiet for home owners, will be the legacy of this damaging change.

These major plans for London are meant to aid traffic flow and to reduce congestion, yet the GLC and other Labour-controlled metropolitan county councils have shown a far more effective method of cutting congestion in towns. The London transport "Fares Fair" policy cut the number of cars on the roads by 8 per cent. Since 1980, the number of people in Tyne and Wear preferring passenger transport to their own cars has risen by 7 per cent. The urban motorway costs £11 million a mile, but the GLC policy on fares brought in extra profits of £45 million in one year and did the same job that the Government's intended motorway policy was to do.

The Government are willing to throw away the benefits of public transport. Before 1974 in the west midlands even the five municipal operators followed different policies. The structure of the metropolitan counties allowed Tyne and Wear to integrate bus services to feed the metro. The four major interchanges all have car parks. In Sunderland, which lacks a metro, the metropolitan county councils fund British Rail to provide an alternative, but still integrated, service. Through ticketing becomes possible, because everything lies within the control of one authority. In a period when the Government said that public transport has declined, the effect has been an increase of 29 million journeys on the system between 1974 and 1983, when it reached 311 million journeys.

Once the passenger transport authorities are created, councils will be able to opt out if the Secretary of State says that they can. What happens if a bus route goes over a council boundary? Does the council still have to pay for it? Will the fares remain the same in all the areas? Clause 93 gives the answer. The Government are using the Bill specifically to give extra teeth to the enforcement of the as yet unpublished buses Bill. The deregulation of services can be enforced and the passenger transport authorities will have to comply. The White Paper on buses is central to the plans that have been written into the Bill.

On top of that, we should be aware that the level of grants implies that there will be a cut of between 25 and 30 per cent. during the next three years. For Tyne and Wear that means, at worst, a £23 million cut in fares. The effect will be that at least 1,000 staff will be made redundant at a cost of £8 million. The Coopers and Lybrand report shows, however, that a Government inquiry in 1982 into the five metropolitan counties revealed that every extra £1 of subsidy could give an extra £1·20 or £1·30 worth of extra services. That is real efficiency, and the Government's blank refusal to accept it owes everything to prejudice and nothing to common sense.

While Labour's metropolitan county councils and the GLC have been much more efficient, they have also been a great deal more caring. We have always been told that this is the Government who care for the people. What do the Government plan to do to those who rely on public transport? The London Regional Transport Act 1984 led London boroughs into agreeing to pay collectively for a basic scheme, but there has been no such promise for the metropolitan county councils. On 21 May 1984, in an oral answer, the Minister of State, Department of Transport, said that after abolition the maintenance of a concessionary scheme was

"entirely up to passenger transport authorities . . . I believe that these matters are rightly decided by district councils". —[*Official Report*, 21 May 1984; Vol. 60, c. 669.]

The hon. Lady gave a written answer on 23 October in which she stated:

"It is for the local authorities concerned to decide the extent to which they are prepared to fund concessionary travel". —[*Official Report*, 23 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. *533*.]

Yet, we were told later:

"Concessionary fares for the elderly are of great importance." —[*Official Report*, 25 November 1984; Vol. 49, c. 631.]

There are 1 million people involved, but the Government are totally uninterested in and indifferent to the needs of those people. Worse still, the Government's consultation document on concessionary fares makes it plain that, in a deregulated and privatised environment, the travelcard approach to concessionary fares will be much too complex to operate, because far too many companies will be involved. Therefore, we are told that everyone can have a nice little book of tokens. It is important for us to ensure that all the old-age pensioners who at present rely on their bus passes, and all those other people who need public transport to get to the shops, to take their children to school and to get to work, understand how indifferent the Government are to their true needs. The Government's attitude is simple: "You will be given a book of tokens, and once you have used your tokens, that is unfortunate. That will be the end of your concessionary fare."

I doubt whether one Conservative Member has ever in his life been solely dependent on public transport.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. friend agree that the reply many of us are receiving from the Secretary of State or one of his Ministers about the issue of concessionary fares once abolition occurs is unsatisfactory? It explains why so many of our constituents are worried and why there is a heavy constituency postbag of letters from pensioners along the lines I have just mentioned.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Many old people will find themselves trapped in their homes if they are deprived of their concessionary fares. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well for the Secretary of State. He plans to deprive the rural poor of any bus services, so why should we imagine that he is interested in saving fares or transport for the people who live in the cities?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Lady must learn to get her facts right. Let me tell her what we have said about concessionary fares. They will remain, as the Labour party has already said that they should remain, the responsibility of local authorities. It will be for local authorities to decide whether to have a pass or a token scheme. In no sense are any of the arrangemens of local authorities for token or pass schemes being changed. Concessionary fares remain exactly as they are, both under this Bill and future Bills. Will the hon. Lady now stop trying to stir up this myth and frighten old people, because it is a wicked and uncaring thing for her to do?

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Secretary of State may find it uncomfortable that many people are now beginning to understand the extent of the damage that he is going to do. He should have thought of that before he allowed himself to be involved in this appalling legislation. The effect of the concessionary fare changes is simple. They will deprive the elderly and the disabled and, in the final analysis, they will make many of the basic services, which make all the difference to the quality of life of such people, unattainable over a certain point. If he is ashamed——

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Mrs. Dunwoody: I shall give way in a minute.

If the Secretary of State is really ashamed of what he is doing, let him not try to hide it. Let him apologise and agree to remove all of this from the Bill.

Mr. Ridley: My complaint about the hon. Lady is that she is not telling the truth. The Bill contains no alteration to the system of concessionary fares, nor does our White Paper on buses. That system remains exactly as it is. Will she please accept that that is the case and stop trying to twist what I have been saying simply for her own purposes of stirring up trouble?

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is true that the system will be the responsibility of councils, which will be rate-capped. It is true that there will be a system of tokens. That is not the same as a bus pass or a concessionary fare, which allows people to travel freely. It is true that the Secretary of State is now uncomfortable because that is becoming public knowledge.

Mr. Wareing: Will my hon. Friend comment on the position in the Sefton metropolitan district in Merseyside, where the deplorable voucher system that she has just explained to the House appertained until the Labour-controlled Merseyside county council came on the scene and subsidised the concessionary fares which are being phased in for pensioners? That is the sort of policy that the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) defended yesterday when he attacked the Merseyside county council in his speech.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We should be clear that that is the sort of change that will follow in the wake of the Bill. We shall have to make it clear to the public at large that local councils will have to decide not their priorities but which of the necessary services they will have to abandon. Passenger transport

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

authorities could find themselves losing their homes because they will be rate-capped under existing legislation.

Let us look at what is happening to some of the services that are provided in London. The dial-a-ride scheme is available for those who cannot use buses because of their disablement. After three years that service serves 6,000 people a month in 30 boroughs. The GLC provides 90 per cent. of the funds. But those who run the dial-a-ride scheme have already gained the impression from councils, even those that helped to set it up because they believed in it, that they will be unable to fund it after the change has taken place. Yet the service costs the GLC only £3·5 million compared with the £400 million subsidy on the main London Transport network. Disabled people are paying for the other transport systems but are unable to use them.

The London taxicard system costs the GLC £2·5 million and has 26,000 members. That gives disabled people £6-worth of travel for £1. In case there should be any argument about who takes advantage of such systems, I should point out that they are available only to those with a mobility allowance and a general practitioner's note. That scheme, like so many others, will be abandoned because of the Government's complete lack of interest in the needs of the elderly and the disabled.

Let us look at the real implications of the Bill. It is not about improving local transport. It is not about lowering rates. The Bill is about the power of the Secretary of State to impose upon democratically elected councils his despotic and arrogant views. It is about the vindictiveness of those who cannot control democratic authorities that have taken basic decisions in transport to the advantage of those who elected them. The price of this legislation will be far too high for the people of the metropolitan counties and the GLC. It will leave large conurbations without properly planned transport systems. It will leave large numbers of the electorate unable to decide the future of the systems that they particularly want. Basic decisions will be taken, not by the people for whom the electorate voted, but by those who are arbitrarily appointed by the Secretary of State.

The cost of the Bill to the electorate will be high. But, as usual under the Government, the highest cost will be paid by those less able to cope. The cost of the Bill will be discomfort and unhappiness for the old, lack of transport for the disabled and arrogant insensitivity to the real transport needs of the people of the metropolitan counties.

4.37 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I intervene, I hope briefly, in the debate, speaking as a London Member. I have represented Bexley now for nearly 35 years and the last 20 of them have been with Bexley in the Greater London area. During the first 10 years we were in Kent, the county where I was born. When the Conservative Government of 1959-64 introduced their local government reforms, when the London county council became the GLC, they did so because it was clearly seen at the time that it was necessary to have a wider area with an overall authority in order to provide the services required in the modern world by London as a capital and by all the people who live there. That was based on the Herbert report. It was done quite determinedly. Of course, there was at the time some criticism, including some from my area which disliked leaving Kent and becoming part of the GLC. But the purpose was clear and the Government of the time knew what they were doing.

I would like to say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that many Conservative Members, particularly London Members, are not concerned with all the contradictions which the Opposition have uttered from time to time. We are not at all concerned when Mr. Ken Livingstone makes idiotic remarks about what should or should not happen to the GLC. We are concerned with the good government of London, and this is for us a deep anxiety.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, in what can only be described as a pathetic image of a speech, made great play about the Greater London council having a plan to deal with heavy lorries, but he has been complaining that no authority has ever made any attempt to deal with the problem of London's traffic. It interested me that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport, for whom I have great respect and affection, was asked about this question. It was put to her that Mr. Livingstone was proposing to take action to deal with heavy lorries. What was her reply? It was sensible and reasonable. She said that there should be a full public inquiry immediately into the control of lorries in London. I entirely agree with that and that is what the Government are now saying. However, they are prepared to wipe out the GLC and the government of London without any public inquiry. What a contradiction! This is why the Government have landed themselves continuously in a ghastly mess.

What grieves me about it is that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have worked most closely with me and who I respect and admire have allowed themselves to be embroiled. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), who is not present in the Chamber, was mixed up with the paving legislation. He was obviously in an impossible position. He had earlier expressed clearly in a book his views about democracy, which involved decreasing the power of central Government and increasing the power of local government. He then found himself asked to handle the paving legislation. He had to stand on his head to do it and the contents of his book were thrown at him to show him that he should not be standing on his head. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government had his entire book thrown at him, whereupon he denied it all and said, in effect, "I have been standing on my head all the time". He implied that it was all our fault for not realising it. My great and right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment says, "It does not matter whether I am standing on my feet or on my head. That makes no difference." This is embarrassing to someone who is trying to be helpful.

The Bill contains proposals for a major constitutional change and it comes without precedent because no public inquiry has been carried out as a basis for it. What is more, the case against the GLC and the metropolitan counties remains unproven. No substantial evidence has been produced for abolishing the GLC or the metropolitan counties. If the case is proved, why do not the Government abolish the shire counties as well, some of which are larger

than the metropolitan authorities? Some of them have larger populations than those of the metropolitan counties and they are more remote from the people than the authorities that are to be abolished. There is no logic in the Government's approach to local government. That is why I repeat that the case against the GLC and the metropolitan counties remains unproven.

On what grounds are we being asked to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties? This is the third stage of a long and sad saga. The first stage involved the Inner London education authority. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, with an insight which he developed with extraordinary rapidity and which I hope will be revealed on future occasions, agreed at once that there should not be an appointed ILEA. He announced that he would have a directly elected ILEA. The second stage was the paving legislation. The Government's arguments were advanced and not accepted. The Lords intervened to good effect and killed that nonsense. The last sad part of the saga is being justified on the ground that the proposals were set out in the Conservative party's manifesto. They were put in nine days after the election was called against the wishes of the party policy committee. They were inserted without the general agreement of those who had been London Conservative Members. The consequences are now apparent for all to see.

Sir John Page (Harrow, West) *rose*——

Mr. Heath: No, I shall not give way.

The argument cannot be sustained that something must be done because the proposal has been placed in a manifesto. First, everyone knows that the general election was not about this issue. That is revealed in David Butler's authoritative account of the general election, which appears after each general election has taken place. These proposals are not even mentioned. I was asked once or twice about the matter in my constituency and I said, "I am not prepared to accept this until I know what will be in its place." That was my position and everybody knows that.

If my right hon. Friends say that the issue played some part in the election, they must recognise that a democratic Government still have to justify to the House what they are doing even though proposals were set out in the party's manifesto. No democratic Government have ever been able to say, "It was in the party's manifesto so we shall do it." The case has not been proven and there is no satisfactory action being taken. That which appeared in the manifesto does not prevent there being an overall body for London or for the metropolitan counties.

I have one word of advice for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment which I hope he will find helpful. If those in another place throw out the Bill, he will not be able to do anything; but if they amend it, he should be ready with a plan for the overall government of London together with the rest of the Bill. I give him that simple and straightforward advice. Let the Government not come forward with the idea that the House of Commons should have a London Committee. We all know that that is not to the point. Such a committee would not have been democratically elected for London. Furthermore, such a committee could be altered. We all know that the Scottish Grand Committee has often been adjusted by various Governments to suit their own purposes. We need an overall elected body for London and, I believe, for the metropolitan counties.

What justification is there for saying that there will be better or more economical administration if we remove six metropolitan counties and appoint 18 joint boards with an unnumbered series of committees? There have been various costings, but no one can prove any figures because there has not been an independent and impartial inquiry. Two of the largest firms of accountants have produced different answers. The cost of the changeover is being grossly underestimated. I am talking not of the sum which the Government hope to save when the Bill has been implemented but the cost of changing a local government system and the disturbance cost, which continues. We learnt all about this in 1963-64 and 1973-74. The cost of the disturbance is extremely high. I know that it will be far greater on this occasion than the cost which was incurred in 1963-64 or 1973-74.

Will local government be brought closer to the people by these means? Most forms of local government will not come closer to them. A large amount of it will go to bodies of councillors who will be indirectly elected. They will not be closer to the people. Most of our constituents have the utmost difficulty in knowing who their councillors are, and they will certainly not be able to find out who their indirectly elected councillors are. In the London area—I cannot speak for elsewhere—GLC councillors are often much better known than the councillors of individual boroughs.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Rubbish.

Mr. Heath: I am saying only that the chances of an indirectly elected councillor being known and of people being able to go to him are very remote. That is why I do not approve of creating a mass of indirectly elected bodies.

I deplore what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and others have said about Conservative councillors and about these bodies when they had Conservative majorities. I believe that they did excellent work and that their achievements were remarkable. That applies to the former Conservative-controlled GLC as well as to some of the metropolitan counties. I see no reason why Ministers should stand at the Dispatch Box and abuse Conservative councillors for the work that they have done. I find that deplorable. To say that those councils that have had Conservative councillors for so long are no longer creditable is a condemnation of what our own party has done, and I repeat that I find that deplorable.

The Bill will put an extraordinary accretion of powers into the hands of the Secretary of State. Very well—I trust my right hon. Friend; but what will happen when another party comes into power?

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): When?

Mr. Heath: No democratic body is entitled to say that there will never be another party in power. The powers will be there to use, and it will use them deplorably.

Mr. Marlow: It can take them anyway.

Mr. Heath: How can my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), even with his might and massive intellect, take away powers when he is in opposition? We are witnessing the complete fragmentation of local government for one reason—which the hon.

[Mr. Heath]

Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) touched on—so that the Government can have more power over local authorities to deny them the money that their electors want them to have to carry out the services that are needed. That is the situation into which we are gradually being dragged, and it is more damaging than anything else.

I shall make one last point about the politics of the issue. I have so far tried not to introduce party politics into the debate, but I must ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider what will happen as a result of the legislation. What will be the political influence in London? The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) smiles. Of course he does. The London Boroughs Association will be Labour controlled. That is what will happen.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Don't tell them.

Mr. Heath: I must be honest with my Front Bench. What will happen in Manchester? With additional powers, Manchester city council will be far more extreme than the Greater Manchester council. That is what will happen. As a Conservative, I do not see the point of this. Of course, I value integrity in politics enormously, but this Bill seems to be carrying integrity just a little too far. I have no desire to hand over such a large area of local government, with more and more power, to our adversaries, yet that is precisely what the Government are doing. The Government have enough things to look after—quite hard things—and we already seem to be upsetting quite a number of people without any need to upset them further with all this.

I therefore ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to think ahead to the point at which he will be forced to have an overall London authority, which will then be a reformed one. Such a reform should have been carried out earlier in a different way. Provision was made for that to be done, but the Government did not pursue it. In local authority matters one should always, above all, move slowly and cautiously. I am afraid that that is what the Government have failed to recognise on this occasion. Accordingly, I ask my right hon. Friend to think ahead to the stage at which he will be required to provide an overall authority for the greatest capital in the world and for the metropolitan boroughs.

4.55 pm

Miss Betty Boothroyd (West Bromwich, West): I hope to refer a little later to the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), but I should like first to refer to the comments of the Secretary of State, because he came to the Dispatch Box again today to reiterate what he had said during the early life of these proposals.

Yet again, the right hon. Gentleman says that the plans for abolition were the most carefully thought out part of the Government's manifesto. Those few lines in the Tory manifesto claiming that the metropolitan counties and the GLC were wasteful and unnecessary led the Secretary of State into the early confident prediction that abolition would lead to savings of many millions of pounds for the ratepayers of those areas. Unhappily for the Secretary of State, the responses to his White Paper and to the Bill all seem to be out of step with what he tells us are the most carefully researched conclusions, which he himself was involved in.

I believe that only a very small percentage—about 10 pe cent. out of over 5,000 responses, some of them coming from closely involved financial bodies — favoured changes such as the Government intend in the Bill; and the findings of the independent management consultants show that the case for change is both overstated and misleading. In fact, there are unlikely to be savings. It is more likely that significant extra costs will be placed on ratepayers if the Government get the changes that they are demanding. To some extent, the Secretary of State has now changed his tune. Yesterday, when presenting his Bill, he no longer insisted that abolition would lead to savings of many millions of pounds. He was much more modest than that, and simply said, "There will be savings."

But there has also been an admittance that expenditure issues are no longer central to the right hon. Gentleman's case for abolition. What, then, is the central issue? It could be, as many of my hon. Friends have suggested, that he simply wishes to get rid of Labour-controlled councils and that legislating them out of existence is a sure way of doing it. I think that there may be something in that. Or it could be, as the Minister says—he said it yesterday, too—that it was a commitment on which the Conservative party fought and won the last election, and that the Government have a duty to uphold the rights of majorities.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup was very interesting today on that point, just as he was during the television debate on Friday evening. I agreed with what he said then, which was that there is nothing wrong with upholding the rights of majorities in many cases; but that is not what is happening with regard to the GLC and the metropolitan counties. He said that in this case the Government were not upholding the rights of democratic majorities, because it had been made quite clear that people want their local organisations to stay and do not want to put the power into the hands of central Government. Indeed, they believe that central Government already has too much power. I do not want to misquote the right hon. Gentleman, but I understood him to say that whatever a majority Government do—it is a most important point—is not a doctrine that he, as a democrat, can accept and that the criteria of democracy should be applied to what an elected Government do with that majority. He reminded those viewers that that was what Lord Hailsham was getting at when he talked about an "elective dictatorship". It seems to me that the central issue is also one of dogma.

Those few lines in the Tory manifesto which bring major changes are to be implemented and the checks and balances of public opinion which a democracy by its very nature has to take into account are being pushed aside by the Government who are replacing an elective democracy with an "elective dictatorship".

I want to restrict my remarks to some of the sections dealing with the transfer of powers and, particularly, with the transfer of powers of the trading standards officers and the effect that the legislation is likely to have upon those whom I represent.

Not long ago, I was at the west midlands county analytical laboratory. It is a laboratory which is equipped with some of the latest computerised, scientific instruments. Apart from analysing many thousands of samples of food products each year, it leads the fight in

exposing many falsely described products, some of which are produced in this country, but especially those which are manufactured cheaply abroad and come flooding into the country because of the relaxation of import controls.

I have masses of evidence of offences committed under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 by the sale of many goods which do not meet the safety regulations. There are poisonous items which contain in many cases more than 10 times the permitted level of lead. The county council can bring prosecutions. It does so successfully. How can the system operate in future when that laboratory—it is rather like the golf course which my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) mentioned yesterday—is broken into seven parts, and when seven technicians and seven legal experts are required, and when seven back-up services are needed because the service that the laboratory provides is being broken up?

Other hon. Members have seen the work that goes on at Garratt green and at that laboratory. I was pleased to see also that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) shares my views about the laboratory and has gone on record to say that the laboratory cannot possibly be recreated in smaller parts. That is what is being suggested by the transfer of power clauses in the Bill.

The Minister talks about costs. The Under-Secretary may have already received estimates from the West Midlands county council which tell him that the trading standards department will have to provide 15 per cent. more money a year if the service is to be transferred to the districts. That is an increase of 15 per cent. to provide an existing service at district level.

I know that much of that detailed evidence is the result of work that will be of use in Committee, but it must also be placed on record here because many of the people whom I represent live in those areas which will be badly affected if the Government get their way.

More recently, prosecutions have been brought against some supermarkets operating in the black country towns — some of them in my constituency — where it was found that 11 stores were selling items at a price higher than that shown in the local promotional advertising and, of course, contravening the Trade Descriptions Acts.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend and I are in virtually adjoining constituencies. Has she had the experience that I have had? Although I have received a large number of letters from constituents about the abolition of the county council and the danger to bus passes, I have yet to receive a letter supporting the Government's proposal.

Miss Boothroyd: That is so, and it is one of the reasons why I went to see what was happening in the consumer departments so that when we were discussing the Bill—if I happen to be involved in Committee — I should know a little more detail about it.

If the Government were to get their way, it would take seven district councils to ensure that the housewife was not being cheated. That will not happen in the event of a break-up, because districts will not be able to provide services on a district basis, and many district councils do not have the will, the ability or resources to perform the specialised service that is carried out by one organisation.

The Minister yesterday spoke of sucking power upward away from the people. He is attempting to diffuse power and deny people the specialist service that they have the right to expect. In my area of the west midlands—I shall repeat this about an area that I am proud to represent —there are high levels of unemployment. The people in that area have little enough money in their purses right now. They have the right to expect value for that money. Some of the social structure that supports them in this way is being removed.

I wish to turn to the effect that the Government's changes will have on industry. As the Minister will be aware, the west midlands is the centre of the weighing machine manufacturing industry. Manufacturers in my constituency welcome the expertise of the council's staff not simply in testing the accuracy of weighing machines —whether they are accurate in weighing a pound of flour or 10 tonnes of steel—but because in recent years they have moved into a whole new ball game. The trading standards department and the manufacturers work together on advances in technology and what requirements are needed to make machinery suitable, adaptable and legally acceptable in future developments.

There is no business man I know in that region who relishes the idea of dealing with seven local authorities. They want uniformity. They do not want seven hands on the tiller; they want one hand on the tiller. The CBI has made it clear that it does not relish the idea either because it will produce inconsistency of enforcement and it will be costly. They need to make the best use of equipment and specialist staff.

I have a submission from the CBI which recommended that the trading standards functions should continue to be carried out on a country-wide level. It has already told the Government of the poor record of voluntary co-operation in the London boroughs where all but one of the voluntary arrangements have broken down. The CBI submission says that its experience

"leads us to believe that devolving this service to the districts will not achieve the consistency we need and will increase costs."

The CBI could not have made it clearer than that.

The CBI is not the only friend of the Government to be vocal in its concern about this. The Retail Consortium added its voice and said that the present system was working well and allowed for development of specialist areas of expertise which smaller units would dissipate. It expressed anxiety in seeing that the enforcement of existing law is as consistent as possible. In its submission it went so far as to say that

"with the proliferation of complex EEC directives the need for uniformity of approach is all the more vital."

All those who are familiar with the system and who use it routinely and daily know that it cannot work well if it is broken up into 36 parts, and they know that the Government have it wrong.

Voluntary joint arrangements will not continue for long, and the quality of service is bound to fall as a result because districts of differing party hues and persuasions will have different views on the level of resources that they feel they should provide. That has proved to be the position in London. There is every reason to believe that the same will take place in the county areas unless the service is properly co-ordinated and given the statutory powers of enforcement.

Whoever has drawn up the transfer proposals in the schedule does not know how the system works. They have not looked at the progress that has been made in the past 10 years. The proposals are imprecise. They are woolly. The Minister must take a more realistic look at them before the Bill gets to the Committee stage. He must use his

[Miss Boothroyd]

common sense. We want less interference from central Government, not more. We need one committee in each of the metropolitan county areas, backed up by statutory powers to get on with the job. I hope that the Minister will not break up this area of service to the people of this country, to industry and to the many who regard it and use it every day as a vital part of their work and their daily lives.

5.10 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I trust that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) will forgive me if I do not follow his line of argument on the Bill. He will recall that for many years I have always taken a consistent and independent line on these matters. I believe that I am able to claim —or, dependent upon one's point of view, to confess— that I am the only Member of this House who was deeply engaged in London local government, both as a borough councillor and as a county councillor, at the time of reorganisation in 1964-65.

I well remember the trauma of those days and my own feeling of great sadness, tinged with some anger, that so many good men and women of both major political parties, who had given many years of dedicated service to their local communities, should suddenly find themselves with no further outlet for their desire for public service. Therefore, I can well understand the feelings of GLC members today who have devoted many years of their lives to their authority. However, I have to say that my nine years of experience in local government led me to the clear conclusion in 1965 that a two-tier system for London was quite wrong, that it had led to unnecessary duplication of functions, over-large bureaucracies, and inevitable conflict between the two tiers. That conflict was particularly bitter between the old metropolitan boroughs and the LCC. It was less bitter but still present between Middlesex and the district council upon which I served.

My hopes for reorganisation in those days were to give county borough status to enlarged district councils. I was very much in the minority in my own party over this, mainly because of the fear of the precedent that this might create in respect of the counties outside London. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup referred to that point. The Labour party was totally opposed to the creation of the GLC, mainly because it saw that body, as it was first envisaged with areas of Hertfordshire and Surrey included, being under permanent Conservative control. My own feelings ran so deep that, when I came to this House in 1966 and was offered an aldermanic seat on the Greater London Council, to act as a liaison between that body and the shadow Cabinet here, I declined. I suppose that refusal of an immediate entrée to shadow Cabinet meetings is not the most auspicious way for a young, newly elected Member of Parliament to commence his parliamentary career. Certainly I recall receiving the message that the Chief Whip of that day was not best pleased with me, yet the whole of my political experience to that date militated against my being a party to those new arrangements.

Moreover, some of my hon. and right hon. Friends will recall that in 1976, when I hope I waxed eloquent from the Opposition Dispatch Box against the iniquities of the Labour Government daring to propose the cancellation of the GLC elections for the following year, when the whole of London was crying out for the right to exercise their vote against a wasteful and incompetent Labour-controlled authority, I promised for the Opposition that sooner or later this House would have to consider the abolition altogether of the Greater London council, not merely put off its elections. And so it has come to pass.

I have put my credentials on this issue before the House in this way because of the suggestion that my hon. Friends are motivated by political spite. I trust that I have shown that I am motivated and have been consistently motivated by what I believe, from my own experiences, to be in the best interests of local government in London and of the people of London. It is the Labour party which has completely changed its stance, for clearly political reasons. It is my own party which has eventually recognised the wisdom of giving to borough councils the powers which should have been vested in them in 1965. Certainly housing, development control and local traffic management are matters which should never have been with the Greater London council. To that extent I welcome and rejoice today in the Bill.

Furthermore, I do not share the misgivings of some that certain and specific Londonwide functions should be put under the management of non-elected bodies. I recall that at one time the London ambulance service was run by an elected LCC, and subsequently by the GLC. When the responsibility for this service was transferred a few years ago to the non-elected health authorities, there was no great outcry. Nor, I venture to suggest, has any London Member received any representations from his constituents that the ambulance service should be returned to the GLC.

The London fire service is a comparable service. The structure of the service is well established. What is required is efficient management. Many believe that this kind of service can be better provided by professional management which does not have to waste its time upon preparing innumerable memoranda for ceaseless rounds of committee meetings. Certainly the experiment, for a few years, of putting London Transport under an elected body led only to its becoming a political football between the parties, to the detriment of the service provided.

Also the docklands development board, which I urged should be created, has proved to be a success in a way that the GLC, because of all the bitter squabbles with the boroughs concerned, was not able to show. If that development had been left with the GLC and the boroughs, I dare say that the London docklands would still be an area of abysmal dereliction and devastation.

However, I have to say to my hon. and right hon. Friends that the detailed proposals before us do give rise to some concern. I regret that greater attention has apparently not been paid to the proposals of Frank Marshall, now Lord Marshall, of 1977. I personally have little confidence in joint boards because, psychologically, councillors feel that they owe their first loyalty to the councils to which they have been elected. I realise the fear of my right hon. Friends that another Londonwide authority might grow into another GLC, but I do wonder how much study has been put into the possibility of a Greater London assembly to deal with essentially strategic matters without it necessarily being a local authority, with all such powers being grafted upon it by the general body of legislation. I should be far happier if I could be assured

that this option had been explored and researched in depth and not merely dismissed out of hand through unfounded fears and lack of time.

To turn to a more specific matter, I am extremely apprehensive about the proposals for the funding of voluntary organisations under clause 46. I fear that some very important voluntary organisations may have to wait for ever and go into liquidation before two thirds of the councils of the London boroughs can be persuaded to agree to joint funding.

I have an interest to declare. I am a patron of the Greater London Association for the Disabled which does invaluable work co-ordinating and acting as an advisory service for small, voluntary organisations concerned with disabled people throughout Greater London. I first became fully aware of its activities when I was Minister with responsibility for the disabled and I was anxious to fund it by what are known as section 64 grants. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will recall from his days at the DHSS that those grants are given by the Department to approved voluntary bodies undertaking work that the Department might otherwise have to do for itself.

I was unable to give assistance to GLAD because of the rule that such grants may be paid only to voluntary organisations that operate nationally. With the disappearance of the GLC and the met counties, it would be far better to extend the rule so that section 64 grants may be paid on a regional as well as a national basis. That would be far more satisfactory and a more helpful proposal than that contained in clause 46 for joint funding by the boroughs.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the major problem in the proposals in clause 46 is subsection (3), which instructs the Secretary of State to place a maximum limit on the grants that can be made available by the new process? Is not the hon. Gentleman worried that the amounts announced by the Secretary of State so far are wholly inadequate to replace the grants currently made available by the GLC?

Sir Hugh Rossi: No, I am not worried about that. I know the generosity of the DHSS to voluntary organisations that are doing a useful job. Those organisations are not such doubtful bodies as are some of the voluntary groups sponsored by the GLC. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The matter could be left to the Secretaries of State concerned.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will also recall that in the recent debate on his departmental Estimates I proposed, on behalf of the Select Committee on the Environment, that power be given to the Department of the Environment and the Home Office to make section 64 grants.

I conclude with a parochial matter—the future of Hampstead heath, part of which is in my constituency. I note from clause 42 that Kenwood, which adjoins the heath, is to be vested in the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, along with an unspecified amount of land. I ask that the whole of Hampstead heath should become the specified land. It would be undesirable for Hampstead heath to be split between the three boroughs whose boundaries it crosses —Barnet, Camden and Haringey. That would be a recipe for disagreement and inaction.

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is what the Bill is about.

Sir Hugh Rossi: If the hon. Lady had listened to my speech, she would have heard me express my views on the Bill.

If Hampstead heath cannot be transferred to the commission because that body is not designed to husband large acreages of land, I suggest that the Secretary of State for the Environment should consider designating the heath as a royal park, so that it can be taken over by his Department.

I welcome the Bill's overall objective of the abolition of the GLC, which I have sought for many a year—if I had had more influence at the time, the council would never have come into existence—and I welcome the transfer of most of its powers to the borough councils. However, there are improvements to be made to the Bill which I invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider and about which he should have second thoughts.

5.24 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): It was originally proposed that this year's House of Commons Christmas card should show the fire that destroyed the Palace of Westminster in 1834—150 years ago last month. Instead, our Christmas card shows an etching made in 1889 and the note inside the card says:

"In this vintage year, Barnum and Bailey's Circus opened at Olympia; Gilbert and Sullivan's *Gondoliers* enjoyed its first night; and the London County Council was formed."

As the card states, Lord Salisbury was the Prime Minister at that time; the LCC was set up under a Conservative Government. The card records other notable events of that year, including the birth of Charlie Chaplin—in my constituency—and the writing of "Three Men in a Boat".

Since 1889, there have been 28 occasions when the citizens of London have voted for their council. The Government propose that that will not happen again. Since 1962, after the publication of the Herbert report, my party has argued consistently that there should be regional government throughout Britain, including London, and, at the lowest possible level, a single tier of local government for local services.

That view was also put forward by the present Secretary of State for Education and Science when he was the Minister of Housing and Local Government. Moving the Second Reading of the London Government Bill, the right hon. Gentleman said that there was wide acceptance of the Government's conclusion in 1957 that a Royal Commission was needed. He said:

"The Commission sat for nearly three years and received evidence from a wide range of local government and other bodies and individuals. In a masterly Report . . . the Commission set out its reasons for its unanimous conclusion that the present structure is inadequate to deal with the many major problems of the present day."

The right hon. Gentleman said:

"We must be sure that the structure of local government allows locally elected people to play their part in tackling these great problems, which go to the very root of all that makes for the character of a town and, in large measure, for the quality of living which its people enjoy. The obvious basic requirement . . . is that the organisation should provide the means for the interlocking problems of local government to be comprehensively studied over a sufficiently wide area to make possible both effective planning and the effective execution of the plans."

The right hon. Gentleman concluded:

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

". . . Greater London is, in a very real sense, a single city. Admittedly, it embraces many places of distinctive character which attract strong loyalties."

However, the right hon. Gentleman suggested that it should be considered for strategic and Government purposes as one area. He pointed out that the Royal Commission had rejected the alternative of central Government filling the gap in the local administrative structure, because that

"would be the death knell of responsible local self-government in Greater London."

The right hon. Gentleman said on this point that the commission was "plainly right". The commission also decided that ad hoc authorities were unacceptable and, in the passage that I quoted earlier to the Secretary of State for Transport, the Minister gave a good and continuingly convincing reason for rejecting joint boards.

Local government reform should be judged by a simple test. I am happy to agree that test by quoting from the speech made on Second Reading of the London Government Bill by my predecessor for the Bermondsey part of my constituency. Mr. Robert Mellish said that there could be only one test:

"the real test, and the only test, is whether the new structure will mean services as good as we are getting now or better than we are getting now . . . if the Bill fails on this test, there is no case which can be sustained for saying that these London boroughs and the outer areas all have to be changed." — [*Official Report*, 10 December 1962; Vol. 669, c. 51-143.]

The then hon. Member for Orpington, now my noble Friend Lord Avebury, whose grandfather was the first chairman of the LCC spoke for the Liberal party. With some reservations, we supported the Bill. The Labour party opposed it.

Less than 10 years later the Redcliffe-Maud Commission reported, and in November 1971 the present Secretary of State for Energy, then the Secretary of State for the Environment, introduced another Bill. This Bill dealt with a much greater range of local government reform, including the establishment of the six metropolitan county councils. I could make many relevant comments about that debate, but I shall make only two.

The Labour party and my colleagues in the House at the time opposed the reform in relation to the metropolitan counties because it fell short of our objective of having proper regional government and real local government. However, we accepted the point made by the Secretary of State for the Environment when he said:

"I do not believe that people in Whitehall are particularly good at fixing matters like this"—

referring to minutiae, such as fixing ferry fares, approving burial fees and fees for markets—

"which would be much better left to local discretion."

Many of the proposals now before the House are of the same level of local detail, but will end up being decided by Secretaries of State for the Environment. On that occasion the Labour party voted against the Bill, describing it as having

"the uninhabitability of the half-way house." — [*Official Report*, 16 November 1971; Vol. 826, c. 234-250].

We agreed with that criticism then, and now make the same criticism of this latest Bill.

The Bill could have achieved a great deal. It could have provided for regional councils for London, the north-west of England, Yorkshire, the north-east, the west midlands and the rest. It could have created regional government. London comes closest to it at the moment; that is why we in the Liberal party have only ever supported the disappearance of the GLC if it were to be replaced by a fully regional government in London. In abolishing the metropolitan county councils, the Bill could have transferred strategic regional powers to regions and the remaining powers to the districts. It could and should have set up urban or parish councils in all metropolitan areas. People often say that their nearest tier of government is far too big. They say it in Southwark and I know that they say it elsewhere. They want to have a very local tier of government, which deals with local matters that affect the community that they know and love. The Bill could have achieved that, but it has not.

The Bill seeks to abolish the GLC for no good reason. I remind the Government that the share of the vote that the present GLC administration received at the last GLC election was higher than that which the Government got at the last general election when they sought their mandate. The Bill seeks to abolish the metropolitan counties, but offers no proper democratic regional structure in its place. Unlike the two previous pieces of legislation, which were at least progressive and therefore merited their names, the Bill is wrongly named. It should be called, "Interference with Local Government Bill".

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) who spoke yesterday about the principles to which any such Bill should adhere. There should have been proper deliberation, but there was not. The argument that there will be savings has hardly been made and has certainly not been proven. There will be more central control, not less, more muddle and less clarity. There will be quangos, such as the planning commission in London. The Secretary of State knows how often planning decisions made by him when a matter goes to him after a public inquiry are greatly resented by local communities.

There will be joint boards, such as that for the police. I was amazed that yesterday the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) made a speech in relation to the police that completely vindicated the Opposition's position on everything else, when he described as a danger the fact that local police authorities would be able to opt out in metropolitan areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) and my colleagues on Wigan borough council and in the peripheral areas of metropolitan counties may not find it difficult to advance the argument that their boroughs could sustain a local police force, and that that is what local people want. There are to be residuary bodies which will have ever-increasing powers. Finally there are the enormous powers of the Secretary of State.

Even more worrying, it appears from clause 86(2)—I stand to be corrected by the Minister if I am wrong—that the Bill is to be retrospective. Clause 86(2) states:

"if at any time since 23rd July 1984 and before the passing of this Act any of those councils has done anything that would have been a contravention of the foregoing provisions . . . the same consequences shall follow as if those provisions had been contravened".

It cannot be right that, in addition to providing that the Act governs other Acts passed in the same Session, it should have retrospective effect.

The Bill is so bad that it has apparently united the Opposition parties. All Opposition Members must agree that the majority groups on metropolitan county councils are opposed to the Bill but that many of their colleagues in the districts support it because they would like to have

back the powers that the metropolitan county councils have had. There is also a further contradiction in the Labour party because on the one hand it protests that it will not co-operate, and on the other it appears that the west Yorkshire county council policy committee will pass later today or tomorrow a motion that its senior officers and members should co-operate with the Secretary of State.

The Bill would have been unnecessary if the Secretary of State had accepted the validity of proportional representation. Foolishly he prefers to deal with those he dislikes in this more complex and convoluted way.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) alluded to one of the fundamental proposals about which there is much objection. The Bill provides no guarantee for many voluntary organisations in the seven counties. At the moment about £60 million is supplied from the seven counties to fund voluntary organisations. In Greater London £24 million is spent on agencies of great importance, £3·7 million is allocated to help the single homeless, £1 million to assist with curing drug abuse, £2 million to deal with the problem of alcohol abuse and £1·5 million to help the elderly.

Many information or advice centres and support agencies need money, yet there is no guarantee in the Bill that they will get it. The Government suggest that £5 million a year for the four years after 1986-87 is sufficient to ease transitional problems following abolition. The Government will fund 75 per cent. of that directly, but that is the total that they guarantee to make available.

Mr. Chris Smith: Would the hon. Gentleman like to comment on the fact that the Minister of State, Home Office, in "Voluntary Action" in June 1984, was recorded as saying in relation to the GLC's funding of voluntary organisations that he would not describe the vast majority of bodies funded by the GLC as anything other than sensible? Does he agree that that makes nonsense of the Government's claim that the GLC dishes out money to unworthy organisations?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is correct. There has only ever been valid criticism against a small minority of the grants made by the metropolitan councils, or by any county. Another important point for those organisations and the people whom they serve is that there will be uncertainty.

The Liberal party is strongly represented in each of the metropolitan county councils. In metropolitan counties, there are more than 250 Liberal councillors. They are represented in each metropolitan county, including London, and on nearly every metropolitan district and London borough council. In many cases they hold the balance of power. They are certain that the problems of London and each of the metropolitan counties are different. The Government should have allowed for that diversity, and recognised that difference. Those regions and cities have different histories, separate characteristics and different needs. If a Royal Commission had been set up or if a series of public inquiries were now initiated, that would be the conclusion, not this sledgehammer approach to the problem.

As well as its reputation for supporting voluntary bodies, the GLC has a responsibility for planning and especially for roads in London. The people of London are unwilling to hand over that responsibility to the Secretary of State. The Government's proposal to make trunk roads of already overcrowded London roads is greatly resented.

Time does not permit me to deal with the many other powers that make ILEA and other agencies dealing with specific services extremely unhappy about the way in which planning and services in London will be run in the future. Not least among their worries is the planning commission—on which everyone will be appointed by the Secretary of State — which is to replace a democratically elected planning authority.

From my borough, as from every other, a large number of groups have written to the Secretary of State seeking assurances for the future. They include the local council for voluntary service, the Cambridge University Mission in Bermondsey and the Greenhouse Trust, a Christian youth organisation which wrote to me describing the answer that it received from the Secretary of State as

"All frustrating waffle and no concrete basis to launch such a change".

The job creation agency, Elephant Jobs, Tooley Street tenants association, housing societies and consortium have all expressed great dissatisfaction, because they fear that the services that they provide will not be able to continue.

Criticisms can be made of any elected authority, but the Government seem not to accept that there have also been many achievements. Greater Manchester, for example, is in a radial metropolitan county in which some services cannot be segregated. Public transport in Salford, just across the river, cannot be separated without making nonsense of transport planning in the city, although other approaches might be adopted in areas such as Stockport, Wigan and Rochdale. There have been achievements in dealing with river valleys and country parks. There has been work on the central station to deal with urban decay. One of the best science museums has been established. Clearly, the districts cannot possibly cope with refuse disposal in the Greater Manchester area. Arts support has been generous but it seems that the arts, like sport, will suffer considerably as a result of the Bill. The transport policies for rail support as well as for buses will also suffer. As in the west midlands, there are many other specialist services — the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) referred to consumer services — which will not be replaced by anything so satisfactory.

Most important, as in all other counties, the economic development needed for the more deprived, less well off and less well supported areas will no longer be provided in the absence of the agencies that at present are at least trying to co-ordinate what is being done for the economy and infrastructure of our urban centres. It was a Tory Administration who set up the economic development corporation for Greater Manchester. Clearly, the Tories there regarded that as a good idea. The GMC is also fighting for the third airport to be somewhere away from London, where it will be more used and needed rather than at Stansted.

On Merseyside, there have been objections to the county council from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), because the Liberal party on Merseyside has always opposed the creation of a Merseyside authority rather than a fully-fledged regional authority. None the less, the county has espoused some valid causes—the airport, the ferries, the tunnels and economic development generally—and there is good reason for services at that strategic level to continue to be provided regionwide.

[Mr. Hughes]

I am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak, but I make no apology for speaking at some length as there will be only two or three opportunities for alliance members to speak in the debate and I must speak on behalf of colleagues in Tyne and Wear, south Yorkshire and the west midlands, on both county and district authorities. In the west midlands Liberals appreciate the merits of the enterprise board, the black country route, the new airport terminal and the consumer services department. Last of all, I speak on behalf of my colleagues in west Yorkshire, one of whom has brought to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) the fact that, as with so many other services, the Government's proposals for the archive service have not yet been thought out at all. Having encouraged the district to put their archives with the county, the Government are now saying that that was thoroughly foolish and that the archives should have remained with the districts.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The hon. Gentleman referred to west Yorkshire. He also said that he spoke on behalf of Liberal councillors throughout the country. In view of his prominence within the Liberal party on local government matters and, apparently, his national reputation on these matters, what advice will he offer to Liberal district councillors on whether they should encourage their councils to enter into discussions with the Government about, for instance, provision of transport services in the future?

Mr. Hughes: That has been discussed. My colleagues and I agree that until the Bill becomes law there is no duty to comply when there are not yet legal requirements. When there is a duty to comply, they will do so, but not before then.

Mr. Fatchett *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: No, I will not give way again as other hon. Members wish to speak.

The White Paper was entitled, "Streamlining the Cities", but the result of this Bill will be fragmentation of local government. The Secretary of State for Education and Science used an amazing phrase in yesterday's debate. Perhaps he will tell us whether the 64 statutory instruments and the 59 ministerial directions, approvals, consents and guidances foreshadowed by the Bill are at the democractic or the autocratic end of the spectrum. The Government's attitude was made clear to my colleagues and me when we went to the Department of the Environment last week. The Under-Secretary of State told Liberal metropolitan county leaders and the Liberal leader on the GLC,

"You put up the arguments and we will knock them down".

Various analogies have been made with regard to the roles of the Secretary of State, who is just leaving, and the Minister for Local Government. Perhaps the Secretary of State should be seen as the Water Rat while the Minister of State plays the Mole of Mole Valley. The following passage would then be appropriate, with the Rat speaking first:

"'Believe me, my young friend, there is *nothing*—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.' . . . 'Look ahead, Rat' cried the Mole suddenly. But it was too late. The boat struck the bank full tilt."

The Water Rat and the Mole are steering the boat of local government into the bank. Not many weeks ago, one of their Tory colleagues wrote a pamphlet saying that London should have a voting people. So should all the counties. That is what local government should be about.

5.48 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Rippon (Hexham): I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not follow the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on all the points that he made; but he has certainly made it clear that there is a wide range of anxieties among hon. Members about the application of the Bill.

There is nothing especially sacrosanct about the boundaries or functions of local government. They are frequently changed in the same way as—sometimes to our cost — constituency boundaries are changed as circumstances alter. I make it clear from the outset that I have no objection in principle to this Bill such as I had to the paving Bill. As I have already explained on many other occasions, I do not subscribe to what the Lord Chancellor has called the false doctrine of the mandate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) pointed out that the fact that a suggestion is made in a manifesto goes no further than to show the general lines of policy. He was right to tell his constituents that before he would support this measure he would want to know what is to replace the Greater London council and the metropolitan boroughs.

The most that can be said—and I am prepared to say it tonight—is that the Government have the authority to introduce for Second Reading a Bill with these purposes. However, I am bound to say that, like many other right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who have already spoken, I would expect the Bill to be subjected to radical change before it was presented to us for a Third Reading.

It may well be that the Government are right to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties. Those authorities, over a period of time, have become in many ways remote and bureaucratic. Many frequently and seriously abuse their discretionary powers, some of which there may be justification for curbing; but if that was thought necessary it would be a comparatively minor matter of altering the terms of section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

I do not believe that the arrangements in the Bill as it stands can be said by the Government to be either more democratic or more effective, or more likely to be more efficient or less costly. The onus of proof is on the Government to refute, as the Bill is discussed, the case about the cost which is brought against them.

I have no objection to joint boards. Historically, in the 19th century and thereafter, they played a useful role. I used to be a member of the Hogsmill Valley joint sewerage board, which fulfilled a worthy function in a creditable way. However, while there may be a case for joint boards in certain cases, I abhor the proliferation of bodies envisaged in what one can only describe as likely to be a veritable witches' cauldron.

I feel desperately sorry for the unfortunate Ministers who have been designated—it is not just a question of giving them fatigues, because they are good chaps—to bring the cauldron to the boil. They will have a miserable time, whether they are standing on their heads or their feet —and I am not sure in what position my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup left them.

I am especially concerned about the increase in the number of bodies which are, for example, to have rate-precepting powers or the equivalent. There will be about six non-elected precepting bodies in the metropolitan area of London. That arrangement will bring no joy to the ratepayers.

Even on the Government's most optimistic estimate of savings — which I do not at the moment believe is credible—the savings to ratepayers will be minimal. It should be made clear to the ratepayers that the Bill is not designed to reduce rates, and is unlikely to do so. There may be a slight reduction for some people, but many more will certainly pay more because of the way in which the equalisation grant operates. The truth is that there will be no joy at all for the ratepayers until my right hon. Friend the Minister of State carries out the substantial reorganisation and review of local government finance which is necessary and which should have preceded the presentation of the Bill.

Meanwhile, we can look forward to added confusion. I cannot count the number of separate organisations which are to do what is now done by one. I thought that the number was 60. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke of 59. It is hard to count the number of bodies, powers and functions being shifted around. There will have to be an army of co-ordinators between the bodies. I remind the House of the American definition of a co-ordinator: "A man with a desk between two expediters". He will have to be paid for by the ratepayer.

It is the proposals relating to the structure that is to replace the GLC that are most open to objection. Last night, I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), who is a Conservative member of the GLC and who made it clear that the majority of Conservative members are not opposed to the abolition of the GLC as such. However, the Government should give great weight to the case presented by the leader of the Conservative party on the GLC. Mr. Alan Greengross, who has said that there should be a Londonwide body to pick up those Londonwide functions which cannot be devolved to individual London boroughs. That is a reasonable summary of the sort of amendment to the Bill that is required.

There has long been a better case for abolishing the Inner London education authority altogether than for making it the one directly elected body in London which will have responsibility for speaking for and representing London as a whole—which is what it will do if it is the only directly elected body for the whole of London. That collectivity of educationists of all parties will express its views on a wide range of topics.

Those may be regarded as matters of organisation about which there may be legitimate differences, rather than matters of high principle. However, there is one respect in which the Bill strikes at the heart of our democratic society. Many hon. Members have referred to the powers given in the Bill to the Secretaries of State. I believe that those powers are intolerably far-reaching and unacceptable.

The Times rightly denounced those blank cheques in a leading article yesterday:

> "Exception should be taken whenever the phrases 'The Secretary of State considers' or 'joint arrangements' crop up. They are a recipe for private government and the abuse of power."

To many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, Professor F. A. Hayek is the great guru of the modern Conservative party. I was glad to see that Professor Hayek was made a Companion of Honour in the new year's honours list. He was honoured for his services to economics, but it is his services to political philosophy that we ought to honour and that should be fundamental to Conservative thinking.

If there are some members of the Government who believe that they are in the Hayek tradition I must advise them to re-read carefully Professor Hayek's "The Road to Serfdom". Perhaps some of them have not yet read it at all. Referring to what he called

"the deadly blight of centralisation",

Professor Hayek claimed:

> "Nowhere has democracy worked well without a great measure of local self-government, providing a school of political training for the people at large as much as for their future leaders".

I regret the way in which the Government, perhaps unintentionally, have appeared from time to time to underestimate the work that councillors do. I should like to refer to a journal which is neither Left-wing nor anti-Government. On 28 August, the *Daily Telegraph* said:

> "The Conservative Party has found that fighting local elections is no longer just a matter of winning votes. There is now a major preliminary hurdle: finding people willing to stand as candidates."

We have to bear that factor in mind.

The Bill certainly contains, by any definition, what Professor Hayek called

"the deadly blight of centralisation".

There are more than 60 powers available to control essentially local decisions, including the manpower, management and organisation of the joint boards, and there are sweeping powers to amend legislation by order. It is not just a case—as the Secretary of State has said —of the Opposition attacking clauses 80 and 93. There are other clauses that were referred to in the leader in *The Times* yesterday—for example, subsections (1) and (4) of clause 59, and clause 88. I believe that the reserve powers given to the Secretary of State should be cut to ribbons in Committee. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, Parliament should not grant powers to Ministers who it believes will use them wisely, as is the case with my right hon. Friends, but withhold power from bad Ministers who might abuse them.

The idea which is sometimes promulgated, that, once the views of the majority are known, they must prevail, is not a true or correct view of democracy. My message to the Conservative party today, as it has been since I abridged "Road to Serfdom" for the great man, is, "Get back to Hayek". He said:

> "Democratic government has worked successfully where, and so long as, the functions of Government were, by a widely accepted creed, restricted to fields where agreement among a majority could be achieved by free discussion".

The alternative, as he said,

"is a plebiscitarian dictatorship in which the head of the government is from time to time confirmed in his"—

I was about to say "her"—

"position by popular vote".

Let us hope that never in our lifetime do we have to heed the final warning that Professor Hayek gave:

> "Hitler did not have to destroy democracy; he merely took advantage of the decay of democracy".

My final observation to the Government is that they can say that they have a sufficient mandate to introduce a Bill of this kind and for these purposes, but there is a need for

[Mr. Geoffrey Rippon]

much more effort to achieve agreement, in Professor Hayek's terms, by free discussion, before the Bill is fit to go on the statute book.

6.1 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Last May, when I had the privilege to speak on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill, I described it as bad and nasty. My description of this Bill is bad, nasty and mean. It is clear that, after about 11 hours of debate on the Bill, no Conservative Member can put up a case for it. Some of the younger elements on the Back Benches, who have their eye on political careers, have attempted to make a case for it, but they would be wise, as would the Government, to listen to the elder statesmen of their party whose political futures are behind them. We can always rely on hearing a little more of the truth from those who have no more political ambitions.

The Government have tried to make respectable the case for the abolition of the GLC and the six metropolitan counties. They have failed miserably. We have had the geriatric mumblings of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the peak of arrogance, even by his standards, of the Secretary of State for Transport. The Secretary of State for the Environment told us that he was discussing and considering such a Bill 12 months before the last general election. The House will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) nailed that one yesterday when he referred to the answer given by the Minister of State, Home Office, who was a Minister in the Department of the Environment in February 1983. The Minister said that the then Secretary of State, now the Secretary of State for Defence, had no plans to alter the present system. If "lie" was not an unparliamentary word, I should be tempted to use it. It is clear that that was an attempt not to tell the whole truth.

I can understand why the Conservative Benches are now sparsely populated and why members of the Conservative Front Bench are running for cover having listened to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon). Although the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham said at the beginning of his speech that he does not oppose the Bill in principle, he ended up by telling us that he does. I hope that, at this late stage, if it is not possible to persuade the Government to change their mind, they will at least listen to the wise counsels of some of the elder statesmen in their party. The Minister for Local Government is smiling. I take that as meaning that he has no intention of listening to them.

If there were a miracle and we could sway the House so that everyone told the truth, we should come to only one conclusion—that the Bill was conceived and born purely and simply for the Government to settle scores with the leader of the GLC. The six metropolitan counties have fallen victim to the Government's desire to do that. The case for the GLC has been covered. I shall consider the metropolitan counties and especially West Yorkshire.

I represent a met county area constituency which bears the scars of the industrial revolution. There is much derelict and despoiled land and there are limited job opportunities. West Yorkshire metropolitan county council, through its strategic planning, transport, environmental and economic development programmes, has done a great deal to improve matters in the past 10 years. Major land reclamation and environmental improvement work has been completed in my constituency at Pontefract park and at the old Prince of Wales colliery site. The Government have tried to frustrate such activity by axing the council's programme. Elsewhere, the Government have abdicated their responsibilities completely. When Government policies have created unemployment in my constituency the council, through innovative schemes such as its small firms employment fund and job incentive scheme, has tried to create jobs.

The Minister for Local Government, who has sat through most of the debate, said in an article in last Thursday's *Daily Telegraph* that the metropolitan councils were busy inventing roles for themselves. There is no need for them to invent roles. The Government are hell bent on abandoning roles and responsibilities. Socially responsible local authorities of all political views at district and county level are stepping into the vacuum that the Government are leaving.

What will happen if West Yorkshire metropolitan county council is swept away? It is most unlikely that Wakefield metropolitan district council, one of the smaller district councils in west Yorkshire, will be able to recruit the specialist expertise that is currently deployed by the county council in strategic planning, environmental improvement and economic development. With a budget of only one third of that of the county council, the district council will not have the financial muscle or flexibility to maintain the programmes it inherits from the county council.

At present, the county council invests in new schemes in the light of a conurbation-wide assessment of need. If the Wakefield area happens to have the worst problems of dereliction, as is the case, the county council gives priority to schemes in the Wakefield area. Under the Bill, strategic planning, environmental improvement and economic development responsibilities are to be fragmented between the five west Yorkshire district councils. Moreover responsibility for deciding whether schemes in Wakefield should have priority over schemes in Leeds, at present a responsibility of directly elected members, becomes the responsibility of Whitehall civil servants. That is wrong in anybody's language whatever his political views. Locally elected members are in the best position to make these decisions.

This is a badly drafted Bill. Anybody who doubts that should look at schedule 1(12)(3). More importantly, the Bill raises fundamental value-for-money and constitutional issues, and its sheer complexity is another worry. In the explanatory and financial memorandum, the Government assert that abolition of the six metropolitan county councils and the GLC will save £100 million per annum. Half of this sum is supposed to be attributable to the six metropolitan counties. Where is the evidence for that? The Government's analysis in the five pages published last Friday provides no answer.

Coopers and Lybrand has costed the Government's proposals. I have a copy of its report, and no doubt most other hon. Members will have one as well. It says that at the best there will be minimal savings. At worst, the more likely option, there will be additional costs of up to £69 million a year, £6·12 per annum for every man, woman and child in the metropolitan counties. There is no doubt

that the Government have lost the argument on savings. In fact, they have lost the argument on every other part of the Bill.

As I said in May this year, the Government, by denying metropolitan county electors the opportunity to vote on policies about fire, police, and public transport functions, are creating a category of second-class citizens. On top of this attack on the electors themselves, the Government are proposing, in the main body of the Bill, to take 67 additional controls over the operation of services in the metropolitan areas. These controls are not to apply to the shire county areas yet.

Clauses 40, 80, and 93 offer wide-ranging powers to the Secretary of State. The proposal that such wide discretion should be allowed to the Secretary of State is pernicious and must be resisted.

One issue overlooked in the media coverage of the Bill's provisions is the way in which embedded in it is a new town and country planning Bill. The proposals for a unitary development plan scheme should be the subject of separate legislation. To try to slide these changes through in the context of an abolition Bill reflects poorly on the Government. If changes are to be made to our town and country planning system, they should be applicable to all parts of the country.

The provisions of the Bill, if they are implemented, will complicate local government administration in the metropolitan areas. That assertion has not been refuted, and no case has ever been put against it because it is not possible to put one.

In west Yorkshire, the Government's proposals, will mean that, instead of two bodies—the county council and the district council—competing for the pound in the ratepayers' pocket, seven bodies will be doing so. As hon. Members are aware, these bodies are the fire, police and public transport joint boards, the probation and grants to voluntary bodies joint committees and the residuary body. How on earth are electors and ratepayers to be able either to understand the new system or to find those responsible for running a particular service? The proposals are a nightmare.

We have all had experience of what has happened with the water authorities. It is a nightmare for any consumer who wishes to get in touch with anybody who can give him guidance and advice outside the local office. There are no elected members, so there is nobody to whom the consumer can go. We cannot read the deliberations and results of the meetings in the media and press because the meetings take place behind closed doors, as will those of the quangos. The quangos will also be situated miles from the consumer and public whom they are supposed to help.

Last week, I received a letter from the Yorkshire and Cleveland Local Councils Association; many other hon. Members may have received it. We are all aware that it is the umbrella body for parish and town councils. It wrote to urge me to oppose the legislation, declaring that it

"strongly feels that the proposed legislation will be detrimental to the metropolitan areas."

This is the grass roots showing concern about the Bill and saying that they believe that it will be a retrograde step.

No case has been made out for the Bill. I do not think that the Government themselves believe the case that they are putting. The reason for it is spite and malice and an attempt to get back at individuals they do not like. This is similar to the way in which they have caused great tragedy and chaos in the mining industry. The only way out is for an in-depth inquiry to be held before the legislation is put on the statute book.

6.16 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I hope that the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) will forgive me if I do not follow what he said, except to say that, knowing the leader of Wakefield council and its Member of Parliament, I think that they can cope with most things.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), but probably pre-date him in my opposition to the concept of a GLC, because I never thought that that body was worth creating. Therefore, I am delighted to welcome the Bill. This day has long been awaited by most Londoners—not the few thousand who have answered the loaded and slanted public opinion polls paid for by ratepayers.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who gave an interminable speech yesterday.

The Bill is welcomed by genuine Londoners, not by those who mindlessly tear out coupons or sign duplicated letters, which are often sent to the wrong Member of Parliament anyway, so little do these people understand the workings of parliamentary democracy. Many of those people are innocent dupes, duped by the £10 million that the GLC and other Labour authorities have spent. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) will no doubt agree, that was never the way that somebody such as Ike Hayward would have permitted a penny of ratepayers' money to be spent.

A reading of the election manifestos of both the Labour party and the alliance parties shows clearly that there were moves to a unitary form of local government which must have involved the disappearance of the Greater London council. Only the Conservative party was honest enough to spell it out directly, and in this, when we put it to the electorate, we were supported by over 2·25 million voters.

Much of the campaigning against the Bill and the White Paper that went before it has been by a barrage of terminological inexactitudes and half-truths. Some Socialists even imply that my constituency GLC member, Alan Greengross, is against abolition. That is wholly untrue. He has been quite specific in saying that he supports the manifesto commitment for abolition.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is not true.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) puzzled me. I say with great sadness that I think that he is wholly wrong not to support the Bill. I am sad because he put himself out in 1970 to help me win back Hampstead, and I shall never forget that. However, he is wrong because the commitment was in our election manifesto, and having looked at his election address, I have found that he did not dissociate himself from that commitment. It may be that, as he said, he addressed meetings, but every one of his electors will have had his views by post, and he did not dissociate himself from the manifesto.

More than that, my right hon. Friend participated in the drawing up of four general election manifestos. He knew

[Sir Geoffrey Finsberg]

what was behind general election manifestos and he intended, when he was leader of the party, that they should be implemented. Indeed, as a candidate who fought three elections under his leadership, I know that it was made very clear that he expected total adherence to what was in the manifesto. I understand that before my time, when he was Chief Whip, he was even more firm, and that there were many hon. Members who smarted under him in regard to the EEC, for example. So I do not want to hear him dissociate himself in that way.

It is interesting to see my right hon. Friend's new-found interest in London and London's local government. I found his personal attack upon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport one of the lowest points that I have encountered in 14 years in this House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame".] It may be done by Labour Members but I have never heard it done by colleagues and Privy Councillors in this House before.

The subject of London local government reform has been under discussion by London Members of Parliament in the London Members group for many years. I do not recall seeing my right hon. Friend once at the London Members group. Therefore, it ill becomes him to say that he believes that London Members are behind him in his attitude. It may be that ex-Prime Ministers do not attend meetings of party groups, but the favourite refrain of Chief Whips and Whips is, "If you have a point to raise on something that you do not like, go to your party group meeting." My right hon. Friend did not do that.

My right hon. Friend also forgot to tell us that his own London borough of Bexley supports the abolition of the GLC and opposes a second-tier elected authority. That is what local government people in his own constituency have to say about the issue.

I want to deal with two London issues and one constituency issue. On London issues, I want to talk first about street names. It may be very unimportant to some people, but it is of importance to those who live in streets such as Rhodesia road in SW9, where Lambeth borough council decided to change the name overnight, in spite of the objections of a Jamaican, a Pole, an Italian, an Irish person and a Russian Jew, all living in the street. The whole street was determined that it did not want the name changed to Zimbabwe road. They at least have a right of appeal at present to the Greater London council. So far, I have not been able to find in the Bill what right of appeal they would have in future. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to say that they can go to the courts to get some sort of justice if they object to what is being proposed by a loony council such as Lambeth.

Hampstead heath is an issue on which I feel deeply. As my hon. Friend knows, I have made representations to him and his right hon. Friend since "Streamlining the Cities" was produced. I do not believe that Hampstead heath can be taken over by the boroughs of Camden, Barnet and Haringey. *[Interruption.]* Unlike some Labour Members, I have always said that a variety of options are possible. I think that the best option is the one that I put to my right hon. Friend—that Lord Montagu's Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission ought to have the rest of Hampstead heath, along with Kenwood. I remind the House that those responsible for Kenwood, not those in the present GLC who try to flog off some of its treasures— *[Interruption.]* The Friends of Kenwood and the relations of the Iveagh family supported the transfer to Lord Montagu's commission, and I think that it could run Hampstead heath.

With regard to clause 64, it is very necessary for the Secretary of State to have control over the budgets of the new authorities for the first three years in order to stop the nonsense that, for example, took place in Camden under the reorganisation of London local government, when we ended up with three town clerks, three borough treasurers and a couple of engineers. That is the sort of nonsense that has to be stopped. *[Interruption.]* In my 25 years in local government, officials were not appointed because they were party politicians. They are now—for example, the new director of social services of Camden, who is a Hackney borough councillor and has made some appalling political statements. Officials of local authorities, like civil servants, ought to be above and beyond party politics.

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Then there is the issue of the Londonwide bodies. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way".] In 1965, the London county council was vehemently supported by the London Labour party. In the years 1949 to 1965, when I served on the Hampstead borough council, nobody on either side of the political fence in London believed that the London county council was a voice for London. Indeed, it was hated by members of both sides and by officers, and it was described as "Big Brother". People did not think that it spoke for them. In fact, the person who spoke for them was Norman Pritchard, the Labour leader of Battersea borough council, who was the chairman of the metropolitan boroughs standing joint committee. That represented London far better than the London county council. What voice, in that sense, is needed?

The GLC has been in existence for 20 years. What has it done? It has been disliked almost as much as its predecessor, irrespective of political control, in spite of what Desmond Plummer and Horace Cutler have valiantly tried to do. Is it a vehicle for promoting legislation for London boroughs? Of course it is, because it is convenient. There is absolutely no reason, however, why one London borough could not do it in exactly the same way as the GLC now does.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that Sir Horace Cutler is very much opposed to the Bill and has said so publicly?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Is my hon. Friend also aware that Harrow borough council supports the abolition of the GLC and does not want a second-tier authority? That is the point that I want to make. It is important to realise that the ordinary people of London want the Bill to go through and want the abolition of the GLC.

I want to come to a conclusion, because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment needs to consider whether the London Boroughs Association requires some statutory backing in regard to some of the issues that it may have to undertake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green was worried about grants. When I served on the LBA, there were no interminable delays when organisations wanting grants put their budgets to us—none at all. I see no reason why there should be in the

future. If a co-ordinating body is needed, it certainly ought not to be directly elected. That is the view of 19 Conservative-controlled borough councils in Greater London.

Mr. Rippon: Will my hon. Friend agree that ILEA should not be directly elected?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My right hon. and learned Friend touches a rather sore point. Long ago, I believed that ILEA should not have been created. That was when my right hon. and learned Friend was a Minister in the Government that did it. I fear that he, along with others, succumbed to the blandishments of the other place, so I would rather not reopen that argument, if he will forgive me. We crossed swords then and we shall go on crossing swords now.

I believe that it is possible that the so-called residual functions could be looked after by the London planning commission, with elected councillors appointed to it. That is a policy for my hon. Friend the Minister to consider, as also is the idea of a London Grand Committee, suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir. P. Goodhart).

Of one thing I am certain. I have no doubt that the GLC's abolition will come on the appointed day. Its abolition will save money. Although my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham, who is a brilliant lawyer, a superb politician and a good local government man, did not believe the savings that are in the Bill, he must realise that those savings are possible just as a result of the elimination of duplication. The policy changes will add tens of millions of pounds extra savings for the ratepayers. I believe that the ratepayers will find a change in their rate bills after abolition.

Abolition will place power in the hands of those who matter—the London borough councils. I think that that is the level of democracy that our mutual friend, Professor Hayek, talks about.

6.29 pm

Mr. Cyril Smith (Rochdale): I hope that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) will forgive me if I do not follow him, if only because all his remarks dealt with the issue of the GLC. As the hon. Gentleman properly dealt with the area he represents, I propose to do the same with the area I represent. That area has nothing to do with the GLC. In view of the hon. Gentleman's comments about the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), his election address and manifesto, the line I propose to take is the one I took in my election address in 1983 and in speeches during that election.

For 21 years, before I became a Member of this House, I was a member of the Rochdale county borough council. For 116 years that county borough council did a superb job. It existed until the Tory Government of the time abolished it. Labour opposed the abolition and the creation of the metropolitan county councils. Having come to know this place during the past 12 years, I suppose that that follows. Attitudes are usually decided by the two main parties, according to the side of the House on which a party is sitting when a Division is called.

I was one of those people in 1970-71 who gave evidence to the present Secretary of State for Defence, who at that time had a lesser role in the Department of the Environment. I pleaded then for the county boroughs to retain their status and for the metropolitan county councils not to be established. Nothing I have seen or experienced since that time has convinced me that I was wrong on that occasion.

Too often, politicians fiddle with local government. The trouble is that, when they do so, they are concerned with government and not the local aspects of government. I have always believed, and I believe now, in one-tier local government. I believe in councils big enough to be economically viable but, within that confine, as small as possible so as to be as close to the people as possible.

I am the Member for Rochdale, not for one of the London boroughs, and I view the Bill on the basis of what I believe is necessary for the people of Rochdale. I therefore welcome and applaud the abolition of the Greater Manchester county council. That is not a criticism of the officers of that county council—I have always found them to be extremely helpful and efficient—or even a criticism of the council's decisions. I believe that local government should be local.

Having said that I take this stand not because I criticise the GMC's decisions, I do not mean that I agree with all its decisions. Frankly, some of the county council's recent decisions appal me, if only because they have nothing to do with local government. One decision which is going through at the moment convinces me that the present set-up is wrong. I shall not bore the House with all the details. Suffice it to say that in Rochdale there is a three-way dual carriageway known as Newgate that the county council believes should be a two-way system. That scheme is opposed by the Rochdale borough council — across parties—by the local police, the borough engineer and the chief executive, but it will go through. That will happen because the county councillors who are passing that measure have no connection with Rochdale, know nothing about Rochdale and live 30 miles or more from Rochdale. That is what is wrong with metropolitan county councils. Local government is not local any more. People at county council level are taking decisions affecting the local community of which they know nothing and when they live 30 miles away.

I shall now consider what is to replace the county councils. The proposals are not ideal.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: My attitude will not surprise the hon. Member. We have debated this issue on television in the north.

Mr. Snape: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman. Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the question of the county council's attitude towards Rochdale's transport, will he tell the House how much financial support the county council gives to the Rochdale-Oldham-Manchester railway line? Would the borough council of which he was a proud member have ensured the line's survival in the same way as the county council has?

Mr. Smith: The borough council of which I was a proud member would not have secured that line simply because it had nothing to do with us. It was run by a railway system. I keep hearing the Labour Front Bench yapping on about concessionary fares. I must tell the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) that my

[Mr. Smith]

borough council pays the Greater Manchester council transport committee for the concessionary fare passes that are given to old-age pensioners in my constituency. It is the borough council, not the county council, that pays the concessionary fares in my constituency. Let us have no more claptrap about that.

What is to replace the county council? I accept entirely that the proposals are not ideal. Frankly, there is not the slightest reason why bus services and fire services could not be returned to the county boroughs. There is a need for cross-borough interconnection of county transport services and county fire services. That existed before we had county councils controlling county boroughs, and could exist again. There were always, for example, arrangements in the fire industry for one station's fire engines to be put on alert when another station's engines were all out. Local authorities are perfectly capable of making those arrangements across boundaries. They do not need a county council to do so, nor did they ever need one.

The membership of joint boards is to comprise elected councillors, not councillors appointed by ministerial decree. That is why I do not believe that "quangos" is the correct description for those joint boards. The joint boards will be comprised solely of councillors who have been elected by people. Since such boards are hardly new or unheard of, I do not view them with the same apprehension as some of my colleagues. I am, however, apprehensive about the representation of minorities on those joint boards, especially police committees. I hope that the Minister will take on board this extremely important point. I believe that there should be some mechanism within the Bill to enable representation on police committees of certain minorities.—*[Interruption.]* I think that some Labour Members will not disagree with the point I am about to make. I believe that it would be possible to provide for two, three or four members to be appointed by the Minister, providing the Bill lays down specifically who those appointees should represent. Under this Bill the ethnic minorities in this country, and certainly those in my area, are not likely to have any voice on police committees. I hope that the Minister takes the opportunity to give those minorities direct representation in that way.

Whatever one's views of joint boards, they are certainly better than the water authorities and health authorities which have been supported by both the major parties. The appointments to those authorities are on the basis of who one knows, to which party one belongs and the party in power at the time the appointments and paid chairmanships are given out.

I make one last vital point. If joint boards are to be set up, they must fairly represent all authorities. Under part II of schedule 10, Rochdale is denied fair representation. No authority should have fewer than three members on a joint board, otherwise the opposition on those authorities is likely to be completely denied representation. Even paragraph 3.2 of the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities" says:

"This will, in general,"

that is, the right of the three seats to be shared between the opposition and the party in office—

"have practical effect only where an authority is making nomination for more than two seats for a joint board."

Therefore, if Rochdale is denied the right to have three seats on joint boards, the opposition in Rochdale—at present it is Labour, next time it may be Tory or Liberal—will be for ever denied the right to have a seat on the joint boards. I hope that as the Bill goes through that number will be altered.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) talked about treading slowly in the area of local government reorganisation. I agree with him. It is not a bad maxim to take one step at a time. If the Bill does nothing else, it takes one major step—the abolition of the metropolitan county councils—and that is why I shall vote for the Second Reading tonight.

6.41 pm

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): The approach of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) was refreshing. It was important that he should point out that much of the Bill makes local government more local rather than centralising it. That is a point upon which many Labour Members have concentrated so far.

I support some of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg). It ill becomes certain right hon. and hon. Members to oppose the Bill when they have no connection whatever with metropolitan county councils. They seem to do so simply for the sake of opposition.

Were those right hon. and hon. Members to be ratepayers in Sheffield, they would have a different view of the situation. Many of my friends and relatives are hard-pressed by the dual impositions of the county and district authorities. The combined effect of those authorities since 1974 has been to make Sheffield a ghost of its former self.

My area of west Yorkshire is the most efficient of the metropolitan county councils. Nevertheless, it is a remote authority which unnecessarily duplicates some aspects of local government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could have achieved his objectives by different means.

The activities of the councils could have been curtailed and greater controls on spending could have been imposed without some of the details in the Bill. Alternatively, the Government could have established unitary boards instead of a plethora of boards, but with similar tight financial controls. My right hon. Friend has taken a different course. He would have been wise to vary his proposals, but nevertheless I heartily support the principle that he is putting forward this evening.

It is surprising how few friends metropolitan county councils have when one gets down to the nitty-gritty. It is surprising how few people would accept their irresponsible spending, of which we have seen so many instances. In west Yorkshire £50,000 worth of free travel has recently been provided for miners' families. It is surprising how profligate the authorities can become and few people support them. My surprise is increased by the fact that Labour Members have made no commitment to reinstate the bodies for which they have such a great love. When the Bill eventually becomes law, the voters of west Yorkshire will wonder what on earth all the hullabaloo was about. They will be angry about the amount of money which has been spent on their behalf in opposing the Bill.

The buses will still run, perhaps more cost-effectively. The police will still operate efficiently, with less interference from extreme Left-wing county councils in their operations. West Yorkshire will continue to have an excellent fire service and to dispose of its waste.

Apart from those activities, which will continue regardless, the public's perception of the county council's activities in my area relates to highway maintenance, planning and traffic management. In those matters the west Yorkshire county council has imposed upon my constituency a series of measures which have practically no public support.

We have seen an aloof authority littering Halifax with controversial traffic management schemes which few wanted. Those decisions, and so many others, should have been made in Halifax town hall by Calderdale councillors, and that should be the case in other places too.

Mr. Fatchett *rose*——

Mr. Galley: No, I shall not give way.

Coming from a small metropolitan district, I must put two or three small anxieties to my right hon. Friend. There is no doubt that Calderdale, which includes Halifax, has had its capital works subsidised by other parts of west Yorkshire because of its location and topography.

First, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the debt repayments on capital works will be so arranged that the smaller authorities will not be disadvantaged? The large authorities, with large populations, which can afford to pay should pay substantially. I hope that my authority will not be greatly disadvantaged.

Secondly, will my right hon. Friend ensure that factors such as location and topography will be taken into account in determining grant-related expenditure formulas? In addition, I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to give me some assurance that the proceeds from the sale of assets, which I hope will take place, will not be frittered away. I hope that there will be a fair share-out to the local authorities which make up the county councils.

It would be disastrous if my authority, a small one in west Yorkshire, were, through a quirk of the system, to be faced with an increased rate demand as a result of the Bill. I know that my right hon. Friend will take his usual care when he deals with consequential matters after the Bill receives its Second Reading tonight.

Another anxiety that I want to press upon my right hon. Friend relates to the work load of local councillors who take on additional work. Being a district councillor is a time-consuming activity and bears heavily, particularly on those with full-time employment. Further responsibility could make those burdens intolerable and deter good quality candidates from standing for election. That may be particularly true in a small authority. Therefore, I urge my right hon. Friend to consider, now or at some stage in the near future, proposals for allowing more councillors in some of the districts which will be affected by the Bill.

Another problem that is faced at present by the district council is the smooth transition to the new arrangements. Information and co-operation are needed now in order to prepare for 1986. My conversations with officials at the county council and district councils convince me that they know that the county council will be abolished and they are ready and willing to get under way the work of organising the successor authorities. I hope that today the West Yorkshire county council will agree to co-operate and that my right hon. Friend will be careful in ensuring that that co-operation takes place.

I have two more small concerns about west Yorkshire. Art and culture thrive north of Potters Bar and we need to preserve and enhance west Yorkshire's cultural heritage. District councils will need to take a lead, but it is important that Arts Council resources are not concentrated in London and the south-east. Adequate measures must be taken to sustain regional and sub-regional arts activities in the north of England.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman has expressed some concern because the district in his constituency is one of the smaller ones. Does it not follow from the Government's proposals that, without countywide provision for the arts, district councils such as Leeds, which are larger and have more resources, may be able to provide for the arts while Calderdale, which is smaller, may be unable to do so? One of the arguments for a county council — the county council's arts committee has proved this—is that it is able to allocate finances. The arts committee has been able to direct money to Halifax and Calderdale. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is supporting the Bill. Surely he does not want to cut the supply of money to his area.

Mr. Galley: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should choose to intervene on the arts. West Yorkshire county council has done nothing for the arts in Calderdale.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware that west Yorkshire has a valuable archaeology service, which should be continued. I hope that he will produce some firm proposals for continuing it.

In west Yorkshire there is considerable concentration of expertise, especially in textile labelling which states content. It is important to protect that expertise and to make it available to the whole of west Yorkshire. That expertise should not be broken up. I hope that it will be possible for one authority to take a lead on trading standards and provide an agency service to other district councils.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will take my concerns into account. I assure him of my support for the Bill. It is right that local decisions should be made in Halifax and in many other towns in west Yorkshire which are presently subject to the decisions of a remote, aloof and careless authority.

6.54 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): I am beginning to wonder who wants the Bill to be enacted. Can it be said that there is any popular support for it? It seems that the Government are relying on 66 obscure words in the Conservative party's election manifesto. Only a minority of the electorate voted Conservative in the 1983 general election and very few did so because of those obscure words. I am sure that only a few knew that they were there.

When the White Paper entitled "Streamlining the Cities" was issued, how many submissions supported abolition? There were so few that an embarrassed Government did not publish any evidence. In London, there has been remarkable unanimity against abolition, all of which has been studiously ignored by the Government. The voluntary organisations, the chambers of commerce, the organisations of architects and town planners, the Civic Trust, road federations, the churches and even the Conservative group on the GLC have been part of that unanimity. Individual Londoners have made their views clear at the by-elections.

Who is in favour of the Bill apart from the Prime Minister and a few Conservative Members who do her

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

bidding? Against them, there is an impressive body of opinion on the Conservative Benches that is against abolition. They include a former Prime Minister, a former Chief Whip and various ex-Cabinet Ministers. We know that this unloved measure finds no favour in another place. Why?—because it has no merit. There is no evidence that it was thought through, or given any proper thought. This was illustrated graphically in the answer given by the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 23 October. My hon. Friend asked the Prime Minister on what date she was committed to the abolition of the GLC and she replied:

"On 18 May 1983."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1983; Vol. 65, c. 539.]

That was nine days after the announcement of the general election. That shows the grotesque and arbitrary manner in which the issue was decided.

The Bill was conceived in political spite and malice without any proper thought or public debate by someone who cannot tolerate dissent. The right hon. Lady cannot tolerate anyone who thinks differently from her. She finds consensus a dirty word. She is someone who must be obeyed. That is realised by ex-Cabinet Ministers when they reflect on their careers on the Government Back Benches. The Prime Minister has an authoritarian and intolerant outlook and she cannot abide another view of life that is flourishing across the river.

The right hon. Lady decides to act and so it is off with their heads without any ballot or election. In this instance we can throw the ballot boxes away. The GLC and the metropolitan counties are to be abolished by an abuse of power, at a stroke, by diktat. This will happen because they think differently and because the London public have had the impertinence to support the GLC.

I think that the Government will realise that that is not a good way of doing things. They will learn to regret their decision. I am sure that many Conservative Members will regret the decision as we move towards the next general election. As this grisly saga drags on, it will drive nails into the Government's coffin. They will pay a high price for this petulant and dictatorial piece of folly. Instead of being a quick surgical operation, it will be a long drawn-out gory mess. It will be a shambles because the Secretary of State will botch it up in his own inimical manner. The right hon. Gentleman's coffin does not need many more nails. The GLC is being abolished, and along with that goes the right hon. Gentleman's political career as the Bill passes through the House. The proposal has not been thought out properly. It has been given no proper scrutiny. It has not had the advantage of reliable study.

The London Government Act 1963 established the GLC. It was preceded by the Herbert commission. The Local Government Act 1972 was preceded by the Redcliffe-Maud commission. Both commissions produced principles and plans for reorganisation which were publicly debated. In this instance there has been no study, no blueprint, no debate and no discussion of merits. The Bill is a hastily cobbled together diktat, and it is not surprising that it is badly constructed. It is no wonder that it will cause chaos and confusion. It is because the cat's cradle of quangos, consultative arrangements and joint boards will not work that the Secretary of State is taking powers to act himself. He knows that that is necessary because of the disruption that will be caused. This is the greatest move towards centralised power in Whitehall that we have seen since the war. Any pretence of democracy is being destroyed.

The Secretary of State is arrogating to himself a huge battery of powers. He will be the single arbiter. He will be able to do virtually what he likes. Especially in the first years he will have dictatorial powers. It is that which so many on both sides of the House find offensive and distasteful. The right hon. Gentleman will have the most sweeping order-making powers. We cannot but be astonished at the breathtaking range of powers that is being taken. Some of these powers will be subject to affirmative or negative procedure in the House, but on other occasions there will be no parliamentary scrutiny or approval at all.

In clause 21, the Secretary of State has power to abolish ILEA. He will be able to do so after a one-and-a-half-hour debate on a motion that will not be subject to amendment. Under clause 9, he will be able to set up a waste disposal quango if the proposed arrangements do not work. Under clause 40 he will be able to dismantle the London fire and civil defence authority. Clause 59 gives him complete control over the London residuary body.

This is an unprecedented accretion of power. The Secretary of State will be able to direct, charge, veto, regulate, intervene, abolish and give what is euphemistically described as guidance. He will be able to enforce his will and do roughly whatever he likes. It would seem that that is what modern Conservatism is about. A good example is the power over roads. Some roads are trunked, which means that the Secretary of State has complete control. Some roads are handed to the boroughs, but he then gives guidance and if it is not taken he can direct them to take specific steps in a specific period. He can take over road schemes and charge the cost to the boroughs. He can also designate roads, and as a result veto any borough proposal.

No one can deny that this legislation will make local government less accountable and less democratic and will give power to the state, to Whitehall and to central Government. It takes London back over 100 years to prior to the setting up of the LCC.

The Government seem to claim that they will save money, but typically they provide no evidence. There is no breakdown, explanation or itemisation. I suggest that that claim is the biggest delusion of all. All experience points to the reverse being true. We can remember previous reorganisations, and also what happened in the National Health Service. Indeed, hon. Members might recall what happened more recently when the changes in housing benefit were supposed to save money and staff. They are now costing us £400 million more, and thousands more staff are being employed. I would cheerfully wager with any hon. Member that this legislation will prove to be more and not less expensive.

The prospective upheaval, bureaucratic muddle and disruption will be extremely costly. Michael Wheeler, the Conservative spokesman on finance and general purposes on the GLC, wrote a very interesting letter which appeared in *The Guardian* on 1 December. He looked at all the services that have been taken away from the GLC and found that they had all become much more expensive and that their cost had increased faster than the rate of inflation.

It is surely obvious that if services are not to be abolished and will still have to be paid for, but are to be reallocated to some amorphous mass of joint boards,

quangos, boroughs, Departments and consultative arrangements, they will be less cost effective. All those other bodies will have to be staffed up. We shall probably end up with many more staff than we began with.

Therefore, structural changes will not lead to savings. Indeed, the reverse is true. Some 50 successor bodies have been identified. There will be an endless duplication of expertise and management. There will also be a need for co-operation between all of them. That, in turn, will involve a network of consultative machinery and its administration will come on top of that. There are no savings to be made by virtue of abolition. There are no savings inherent in abolition per se. The services will be there, but they will be delivered less efficiently. Only by lowering the level of services could savings be made. I believe that the most likely result is that we shall pay more for less.

It must now be obvious that political spite is a bad adviser. When hon. Members consider the chaos that will ensue and the continual effort that will be made to obtain co-operation and co-ordination from 32 boroughs that have different policies and mandates from their electorates, they will realise that that is not a stable basis for metropolitan government. The mixture of quangos and boards is totally inadequate and inappropriate to deal with metropolitan-wide matters.

Therefore, I believe that the proposals will not endure. London is not just the sum or aggregate of 32 boroughs. It is one of the greatest cities in the world, and it is impossible to deny it a voice. It has had one for a century, and it is impossible to abolish the voice of London just because the Government do not like what it says. If the Government do not like what Mr. Livingstone and his colleagues say, they should try to put better arguments and to persuade people in a ballot or election. But denying the people the right to throw out or to keep Mr. Livingstone must be wrong, and they are making an appalling mistake.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): I remind the House that from now until 8.50 pm all speeches will be subject to the 10-minute limit.

7.4 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): When I came into the House, I thought that manifestos were designed to enthuse supporters and bemuse opponents, but should not form a detailed blueprint for legislation. Thus, I believe that the time has almost come for us to free the legislative progeny of that manifesto from the mistaken belief that Londonwide democratic government is wrong.

We can relieve ourselves quite simply from that manifesto commitment. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said, the commitment was only 66 words long. It told us that we should abolish the GLC. I have no objection to that, because I believe that it should be abolished, but it did not say what should be put in its place. To some extent that manifesto commitment has already been abrogated, because it said that ILEA should be abolished, and ILEA is not to be abolished. But I cannot see why we cannot remain loyal to the manifesto and still legislate, as the Bill goes through Parliament, for a London assembly that is democratically elected to take over those residual powers that cannot be given to the boroughs by reason of their Londonwide status.

How do we arrive at that point? It is easy to look at the situation with the benefit of hindsight. At the time, it was easy to think that Mr. Livingstone could perform his last service to the Conservative party by being sacrificed on the altar of the failure to abolish rates. But the trouble with English people is that they love an underdog. They also love an eccentric underdog that is due for slaughter. Livingstone meets all of those criteria. There is no doubt that the commitment to abolish the GLC has become deeply unpopular with the vast majority of Londoners. The time has come to take stock and to see how the Bill can be improved. After all, we can improve it.

Why has the Bill become unpopular? London is a unit, and it is simply not good enough to say that it is a collection of villages. London has pride of place as one of the great capital cities of the world. It is a unit. I see no reason why we should not say that that unit should be kept as one, and that whether people live in south-east or north London they are living in one unit. The Government say, "All right, it's a unit. There are some powers that cannot be given to the boroughs and they can be safely vested in indirectly elected boards." But then one is up against the constitutional difficulty that a councillor can be elected to run local services in one part of London and can arrogate to himself control of Londonwide services. That is the fundamental constitutional difficulty that the Government labour under.

But there is a further difficulty. It is easy to say that one is on the horns of a dilemma, and that on the one hand the GLC will be left with insufficient powers while on the other it will be left with too many, and will become a load on top of the boroughs. But I do not think that a Londonwide assembly would be left with insufficient powers. Is it right to say that a Londonwide assembly would not have enough to do when it would have to run the arts, historic buildings, main roads and refuse disposal? Is not that enough for any assembly to do? I believe it is. The proposal might have been more attractive if we had talked about privatising refuse disposal, but there is nothing about that in the Bill. The Bill is not radical and is intensely unattractive.

Therefore, London is a unit and some powers simply cannot be given to the boroughs. There are those residual powers, but it is argued that there is insufficient for a London wide assembly to do. I sat on the GLC for many years, and I remember that when I was a member of the Conservative GLC between 1977 and 1981 the then leader of the Conservative opposition referred to us, and the GLC, as the jewel in her crown. We were proud of that role. We were the forerunners of what the Conservative Government would do. It seems that some of our work was not as appreciated as it should have been.

What is wrong with there being a focus of opposition to the Government in the city? We do not have a written constitution. Mayor Chirac performs that function in Paris. What is wrong with it? A great deal of what Mr. Livingstone has been producing has been disgraceful, one-sided and all the rest. If a Labour Government were going to abolish the shire counties, Saatchi and Saatchi would never produce such one-sided stuff.

There is a threat to those of us who represent shire counties. If a Government are seen to abolish metropolitan counties and a Labour-controlled GLC, is there not a

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

danger that a future Labour Government will feel that they have every justification for abolishing the shire counties? I fear that.

Those of us who represent the shire counties should also bear in mind the fact that there is little doubt that, with the complex equalisation functions that the GLC performs all over London, in the year of abolition—the year of the borough council elections—the rates in many London boroughs will have to rise if the present grant formulas are allowed to stand.

No Government who introduced this measure for the precise reason that they were bringing power closer to the people, getting rid of a whole tier of government and all those things, could allow the grant formulas to stand. They will have to be changed somewhat, but at whose expense? At the expense of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer? I doubt it. I fear that it will be at the expense of the shire counties. That is why, as a Member for a shire county, I am worried about the Bill.

I am also worried about the future of the City of London. When the GLC is abolished, there will be no Londonwide assembly. Will there not be some voices questioning on the international stage the fact that there is a Lord Mayor of London who became an elected official —an alderman—on the basis of 18 popular votes? Some aldermen are elected by just 18 votes. I fear that the City will be in an exposed position if the GLC is swept away.

All those factors lead me to question what we are doing. I am not an embittered former Minister; I am a hopeful new Member. I wish to be helpful to the Government. I do not see why we could not create an assembly—I put this point to my right hon. Friend yesterday and I am glad to know that it can be talked about in Committee, because presumably he has not said goodbye to it altogether—which would not be a local authority for the purposes of the Bill; would not have powers under clauses 137 or 142; could not give grants to the Gay Liberation Front, or whatever, but would simply be a tightly knit authority performing the functions that must be run Londonwide. It would, above all, be democratic and directly elected.

I cannot see why we cannot amend the Bill. If we amend the Bill in that way, there is one person who will be sorry, and whose campaign will have been finished, and that is the present leader of the GLC. I hope that the Government will think again.

7.13 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am pleased to be following the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), because I enjoyed part of his speech. The Opposition would not look at local government in the way that his Government have. We would not make changes in local government without thinking carefully about it and without having an inquiry to see what the causes, needs and effects of change would be. The Bill is ill-thought-out and ill-conceived.

We ask ourselves, why introduce this Bill? Why introduce the devastation that it will cause? Why create the years of problems that it will cause to the localities? It is because the Government could not find a way to fulfil their promise of putting something else in the place of local rates. That has been tried for years and years and the Conservative Government fell into the trap of saying that they could do it when others who have considered the problem for many years have not found a suitable alternative.

The Government had to do something to smooth the hairs that were beginning to rise when people found that the Government could not do what they had promised. Local government has always changed itself. We do not say that there is no need for change, and no need to consider local government's functions, because there is always need for change for reasons of efficiency and economy.

Local authorities do that. They consider the needs of the areas that they represent; they look at the provision of services needed by the people, the majority of whom elected them; and they look to the welfare of their electors and their families. Before 1974, I was a member of a small, progressive, efficient and economic local urban council—Hoyland Nether. It had a population of about 16,500 and 12 councillors for four wards. In addition, we had an elected West Riding county councillor who had his separate responsibilities. Then came 1974, with the reorganisation which, like the present proposals, was meant to increase efficency and reduce costs. Unfortunately, it did neither. Costs increased and up went the rates. In came new systems and regulations that people could not understand or did not want. People received less for more money. Councillors in Barnsley were accused of sitting on their bums instead of going round and about and looking after the locality as they used to. They were not seen as regularly. A valuable focal point of urban life disappeared and along with it community life and community functions. The 12 representatives were, unfortunately, reduced to three.

The county council's only sin is that it is successful. It successfully supplies the people's needs. My county council has a successful cheap fares policy, which has been voted for time and time again by the people whom it represents.

The county council is, and always would be, if it were not for abolition, Labour-controlled. The Government are doing away with county councils because they are Labour-controlled and because the Prime Minister does not like Ken Livingstone or the successful cheap bus fares policy that the South Yorkshire county council is following. If she cannot change it, she gets rid of it. All county councils have to go together.

The county council is also successful in other ways —with the creation of country parks, and reclamation schemes, which in my constituency are badly needed, and consumer protection, environmental, recreational and employment measures. I have always believed that if we are to return to full employment it will be through the measures that local government introduce and not those introduced by central Government.

Rather than abolish the county councils, the Government should be seeking ways to strengthen them. Some of the county councils' functions are to be transferred to district councils, but 82 per cent. of the expenditure for which the county council is responsible will be removed from directly elected bodies to selected bodies—police, fire and public transport, to name but three.

The Bill introduces 40 new powers which will enable central Government intervention. There will be over 18 joint bodies. Central Government mean to keep tight

control of those bodies by bringing them into the rate-cutting provisions for the first three years of their life. The Government mean to control the number of employees of those bodies and their structure. That will all be under the direct control of the Secretary of State.

There will be fewer local representatives who may or may not be appointed to the joint bodies. What we regard as the democratic freedom of the people is being eroded once more. That started in 1963, continued in 1974 and is carried on in 1984. That is why the Opposition say that the Bill is undemocratic.

I should like to ask the Minister a number of questions. Councillors are part-timers. They have regular occupations. What does the Minister believe will happen to them when he piles on them the extra responsibilities from the counties? What does he think that employers will say to those people who ask for extra time to carry out those extra duties? Are the Government to seek to protect those councillors? Or are we to have the democratic proposition of "Take it or leave it: either be a councillor and have no job, or have job and cease to be a councillor?" And what of the district councillors employed by the county council? With abolition, they, too, stand to lose their jobs. According to present legislation, they cannot be seen to employ themselves. Will a person who is working for the county council and who is a member of a district authority be able to apply for employment under the jurisdiction of the joint boards? Will he be able to do so without being disqualified, taking into consideration that the joint boards are joint boards and not the responsibility of one particular authority?

I turn to the effects that abolition will have on my area economically. What will the Secretary of State do about it? The Secretary of State is confident that millions of pounds will be saved by abolition. That was said in 1974. The only way that savings can be made is by a reduction in staff and personnel, or by a reduction in services, or both. Barnsley became a county town in 1974. We were proud of it because it brought into the area much-needed employment, spending power, which was greatly needed and, most important of all, people and businesses. After abolition, all that will go.

What will happen to this area? There will be vacant office accommodation. This will lead to a loss of rate income and a drop in rateable value. It means that the people and businesses that came into Barnsley will move to other areas and that there will be empty houses and a lowering of values and standards in the area. The policies of the Government have been devastating for Barnsley. The present mining dispute is taking its toll. That is the result of Government policy. It is now proposed that the counties should be abolished. The privatisation of the national bus company will mean that a third of the work force will be lost. That, too, is Government policy. What the Government have done for the people in my area will not lead to dancing in the streets. Abolition means that we shall lose out financially. We shall lose out on property values and we shall lose out upon representation and recognition. That is why the Bill should not be altered. It should be thrown out until a more sensible way of looking at the problems that abolition will cause is found.

7.23 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has mentioned a number of the human problems which will beset councillors as a result of this legislation. I believe that they deserve very much more attention than they have so far received. But that is not the point I wish to make about the Bill. As a Member for a London constituency I am unhappy about the arrangments for London which are contained in the Bill. I should like to support those who have spoken on this side of the House in favour of the creation of an elected authority to run, on a Londonwide basis, those servicese which cannot be run by individual London boroughs.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday:

"Anyone who favours a slimmed-down upper tier for its own sake has to tell us what such weak authorities would actually do. If they had substantive functions, how could they avoid the duplications, conflict and bureaucracy of which it is the Bill's intention to rid us? If they had no substantive functions, what sort of people would waste their time serving on them?"—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 28-9.]

In other words, the Secretary of State asks what those authorities would do. I suggest that the answer to that question lies in the analysis which the Government have made, which demonstrates conclusively that there are a number of very important functions which cannot be carried out by individual London boroughs. I shall take three of those important functions which have been so identified: strategic planning for London, historic buildings and conservation areas and traffic management.

I would suggest, first, that the advantage of having such a slim-line authority is that it would be a more efficient and effective way of exercising those functions than the mixture of joint boards and ministerial intervention which is proposed by the Bill. It would be more streamlined than what is proposed. Specifically, the position on planning in which a London borough would find itself after these provisions have been implemented will be more complicated. Instead of having three authorities concerned with planning — the London boroughs, the Greater London council and the Secretary of State—we should have four bodies responsible for planning: the London boroughs, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, the London planning commission and the Secretary of State.

Every planning application which is to be made in a conservation area—one must remember that in some boroughs conservation areas represent a large amount of the area — will have to be referred to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission before it can even be considered by the planning authority. I suggest that it would be much simpler if we had an elected, streamlined body for the whole of London to carry out the planning functions which are proposed for historic buildings and conservation areas, which at present are run by the Greater London council, than the system proposed in the Bill.

Secondly, I suggest that the proposal for a streamlined body is more satisfactory because it is undesirable for central Government to become involved with the details of local plans or the intricacies of traffic management. In 1968, when the Minister of State, Ministry of Housing and Local Government sought to justify the distinction between local plans and structure plans, he said:

"It is, of course, one of the main purposes of separating structure plans from local plans to rid the central Government of the responsibility for a mass of detail which is better dealt with and decided at local level." — [*Official Report*, Standing Committee G; 29 February 1968, c. 186-7.]

By making the Minister directly responsible for the local content of the unitary plans which will be produced by the

[Mr. Patrick Ground]

London boroughs, the effect is precisely to make the Minister responsible for a mass of detail which hitherto it has been thought wise for central Government to avoid.

The same is true of traffic management. When one considers that the effect of what is proposed in the Bill will be to make central Government potentially capable of intervening in traffic management schemes relating to no fewer than 8,529 miles of road in London, one can see that again there is a real danger of central Government becoming involved in far too much detail.

Thirdly, I regard it as undesirable for the only Londonwide elected authority to be responsible only for education. After what has been said by Ministers in the past, even by the Prime Minister, I find it strange that the Bill should propose the creation of an elected ILEA. I share the views of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) who have stressed their reservations about the establishment of such an authority. It would be much more desirable to have an elected Londonwide authority with a variety of essential functions, so that Members could make sensible judgments between different services and not be concerned only with education.

I am unable to support the Bill. I shall not vote against the Second Reading, but unless the Bill comes back to the Floor of the House with a clearly defined and strong role for an elected Londonwide authority, I shall vote against Third Reading.

7.31 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I respect what the hon. and learned Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) said. He made special reference to the difficulties of London and I hope later to make special reference to some of the problems in Tyne and Wear.

The Government's proposals are indefensible. The Government should have addressed themselves to the commitment in a previous Conservative manifesto to look at the basis of rates as a method of raising taxation. The Government have failed to do that, despite having promised their supporters that they would do so. The Bill and the Rates Act 1984 are intended to make up for that failing.

Secondly, the Government should have conducted a review of the structures that were changed by a previous Conservative Administration. We should have sought the views of interested parties and discussed them. Only then should the Government have come forward with legislation to build on the strengths and reform the weaknesses of the present system. The Government have lamentably failed to do that.

If there had been a review of existing local government structures, the Government's attention would have been drawn to the unique problems and stresses that confront our great conurbations. All the metropolitan areas have within their boundaries areas of great deprivation, areas where the average age of the population is increasing, areas where the density of population presents problems and areas that are blighted by high unemployment and attendant poverty. The need for an authority to take an overview of those issues, which transcend district boundaries, is widely recognised in the northern region.

The Tyne and Wear county council has performed its functions and served our region well. The House is not discussing the replacement of the county council by a more comprehensive successor authority. We are discussing giving much more power to the Secretary of State and setting up an absurd joint boards structure for the rest of the powers.

Everyone knows that the Secretary of State's powers will not be exercised by him, agonising over every decision that has to be made in our areas. His civil servants will play an important part in decision making. No one in Tyne and Wear elected the Secretary of State, let alone his civil servants.

The Government cannot claim that they have a mandate from Tyne and Wear for the Bill. The whole county returned only one and a half Conservative Members. No hon. Member from the northern region has a mandate for the Bill.

The joint boards will undoubtedly be inefficient, costly to convene and even more costly to service. They will be a recipe for endless procrastination and will lead to a slow expansion of staff, district by district, as each district authority says that it needs just one extra officer to help service its role on the joint board.

The lead authority scheme will turn out to be a load of nonsense. Does anyone imagine that the district councils in Tyne and Wear will sit down together and agree, for example, that Gateshead will get the archives, north Tyneside will have the incinerator and south Tyneside will take trading standards? We know what will happen: another authority will say, "We want trading standards." Another will say, "You can have trading standards, but we want to employ an extra officer to service our involvement in that area." Such a system cannot work. It will be a pathetic shambles.

The county structure brings together services that are delivered on a county level. It is gross folly to interfere in that mechanism for no reason except political spite. I have sat through most of the debate and I know that the Government have not come up with convincing reasons on costs or efficiency for claiming that the proposed reforms are in the public interest.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman refused to give way to me yesterday, but I am more generous than he is.

Mr. Merchant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. After abolition, would the hon. Gentleman support the reconstitution of the Tyne and Wear county council in its present form?

Mr. Brown: That matter was ably dealt with yesterday by the Opposition spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). I endorse what my hon. Friend said.

I wish to refer to two important matters in our county. The first is Tyne and Wear's economic development functions. There is no reference in the Bill to economic development. Those functions may be devolved to the district councils, but the budgets will not. District authorities on Tyneside are close to being rate-capped. No one in the northern region believes that we would have had Nissan or Findus, which are welcome to the region and

have brought us employment opportunities, if it had not been for the stupendous efforts of the county council which encouraged those companies to come to our region.

We shall not be able to do that in future, because the mechanism under which the county council operates is being removed by the Government. Rate-capped district authorities will not be able to provide it.

Secondly, the county council has provided a forum for promoting the cause of a region whose industrial base is under structural attack. The "save our shipyards" campaign has been endorsed by industry and trade unions in the region and by Conservatives on Newcastle city council and Tyne and Wear county council. That has been an important forum for putting the case of the shipbuilding industry. I know that the Department of Trade and Industry is not happy with the campaign, so the Department of the Environment is seeking to ensure that it will be abolished. That will be yet another blow to a region which has already sustained far too many blows.

In Tyne and Wear we are justifiably proud of our integrated passenger transport network, especially the metro. People come from all over the world to look at it. It is of especial pride to Labour representatives. The metro was fought for at the ballot box and the Labour party won the election having made a commitment to provide it. In an area where the rate of car ownership and personal transport is one of the lowest in Great Britain, it is not surprising that the electorate voted for a party which would provide good, solid, public transport. By undermining our ability to fund that transport and by taking power out of the hands of local representatives, the Minister is undermining something for which the region has voted. That must be wrong.

My final charge is that if Governments genuinely care about the nation's democratic institutions, especially its local government structure, they have a duty to embark upon change with care and to ensure that any contemplated change is not introduced in an authoritarian manner. The Government must take care to avoid the charge that they are abolishing institutions primarily because they are controlled by the Government's political opponents. Lamentably the Government fall short of that test.

There is no justification for the Bill except political expediency. It is yet further evidence that this most authoritarian of Governments will tolerate no dissent, even from councillors and authorities which can also claim a democratic mandate.

7.41 pm

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): I hope to serve on the Standing Committee which will consider the Bill in detail. Nevertheless, I wish to react to the implications of the speech of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about sport and recreation, and to talk about the important issue of the excellent and necessary provision of sport and recreational facilities in London in future.

It is important to place the matter within an overall strategic policy and to understand the substantial changes in socio-economic policy which have led to the need for a sports and recreation strategy. There has been a marked shift in the House from quoting the 1944 White Paper on employment to quoting Lord Stockton's maiden speech in the other place. However, he was right to say:

"the third phase has come, based upon the computer, silicon chips, automation . . . We have got from now to think out what this means in human terms . . . It is a complete revolution in thought. . . . We shall refer to the proper use of leisure, and how to deploy it. We shall wish to ensure that this new leisure which man at last will be able to enjoy is properly used for his mind and education, for sport and other leisure purposes." — [*Official Report, House of Lords;* 13 November 1984, c. 240.]

A recreation policy is essential to such a vision. It must stretch from assistance for our international athletes to the promotion of participation among all ages and sections of the population. Therefore, I was concerned yesterday when the hon. Member for Copeland said that the Government's proposals constituted an attack on sport and recreation which would diminish the quality of life in London.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether any significant sports organisations support the abolition of the GLC or any of the metropolitan councils?

Mr. Moynihan: When the hon. Member has heard my speech, he will be able to draw to the attention of any sporting or governing body what I am about to say and the figures which I shall quote. He will then be able to persuade it otherwise.

The most crucial statement on the subject was made on 11 April 1984 by the Secretary of State for the Environment. He said that it would be for the boroughs and districts to take over the sports and recreational responsibilities of the GLC and MCCs, but that proposals would be brought forward in consultation with the Sports Council and other interested organisations for a limited extension of central funding via the Sports Council to complement the contribution of boroughs and districts towards some sports facilities, events and schemes of wider local interest.

In the same announcement, the Secretary of State made it clear that the Government intended that the Sports Council should consider the importance and continued use of Crystal Palace. It has already been announced that Crystal Palace will survive strongly, not least because Bromley council, with its vigour, enterprise and energy, will assist the Sports Council to ensure that. The figure, which the Sports Council has considered, for the amount spent nationally on events and schemes of wider than local interest is crucial.

It is interesting that the figure nationally for events and schemes of wider than local interest is less than the central administration budget of the GLC for leisure and recreation last year. We should consider last year's figures. A figure of about £40 million has been bandied about as that spent on sports and recreation. By the GLC's own figure, last year's budget on sports and recreation was not £41 million but £13·275 million. To achieve the £41 million figure, one must include all the arts centres, the cultural facilities, grants and contributions, promotion for tourism, central and departmental catering, other recreation, leisure and cultural facilities and £6·7 million worth of central and departmental administration.

For every £100 which the GLC spends on sport and leisure, £15 is spent on administration, despite its having an opportunity to centralise and reduce the overheads. The 32 separate boroughs spend £10·50 of the £100 on administration.

If one considers the £40 million, one sees that the arts facilities and arts grants are the responsibility of the Arts

[Mr. Moynihan]

Council. Crystal Palace has been announced separately as a continuing and important contribution to sport and recreation.

The proposals for Lea valley have been announced and clear guidelines set down. The master of misinformation, Mr. Pitt, has again reacted by wrongly stating three important points in his press release. He talked about 80 per cent. of total annual running costs which are to be split between 32 London boroughs. That is not true. London's share of the £3·7 million quoted is 80 per cent. of net costs. The park authority already raises £2 million through income from facilities.

Mr. Pitt talked about the 27 remaining authorities having never been forced to contribute before. That is not true. Since 1967, through the precept on the GLC, all London boroughs have contributed to the parks authority since it was established. He then asked if the boroughs had been consulted. I know from experience on the Sports Council and the Central Council for Physical Recreation and the voluntary body, the Sports Aid Foundation, that great consultation and thought, and in-depth analysis, went into the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities".

The enrichment of the environment is obviously better handled by the Countryside Commission, Thames water authority or the British Waterways Board. Tourism is the province of the London tourist board. Only two parts of the budget are relevant to sports and recreation, and they do not add up to anything like £41 million. They are playing fields and open spaces. The recreation grants for playing fields and open spaces are £13·8 million. It is important to review the rate support grant on a case by case basis, and to use governing bodies and their expertise—many of them have far more money than before—to see how we can identify schemes and events which use those facilities, which one could get potential Sports Council assistance and funding for and governing body interest in.

On recreation grants, it is not strategic to London to finance a host of different sports organisations which are primarily the concern of local boroughs. It is surely not right for the people of Lewisham to have to pay for the Lambeth peace run. If the people of Lambeth want a peace run, they should establish it as a priority and pay for it themselves. They should not expect £10,000 from the GLC and thus from those who are precepted through the rates.

It is for the people of Camden and their elected representatives to decide whether to sponsor what the GLC describe as sports organisations, such as the Camden Chinese community or the Kentish Town city farm. It is for the people of Greenwich to decide through their councillors whether they want to spend money on the Pakistan Muslim Welfare Association. I am surprised to find overt political discrimination in funding for sports organisations. It is surely for the people of Wandsworth to decide whether to provide financial assistance for the bowls section of Battersea Labour club. The essence of the Bill is to decentralise such decisions—especially with regard to local sports organisations—to those at local level who should be best capable of determining local priorities.

The Sports Aid Foundation and the Sports Aid Trust have been mentioned by the Opposition. Since the Sports Aid Trust was established under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), its committee has obtained more voluntary pledges for the future of the Sports Aid Foundation than the GLC has ever provided. I do not for a moment seek to undermine the vital importance of the initial funds for the London and south-east body, but the foundation's fund-raising effort must not just subsidise the elite. It must encourage the boroughs, local banks, schools and shops and above all the local press to move forward along the lines that I have described.

In conclusion, the future of sport in London and throughout the country rests on four important bodies. First, the governing bodies, through sponsorship and television, have achieved a considerable increase in financial assistance. Through television, £10·5 million has been provided for the Amateur Athletic Association, Secondly, we have the Sports Aid Foundation and the Sports Aid Trust. Thirdly, there is the Sports Council, with its real increase in income. Finally, the London boroughs in their own right last year gave more than £100 million to sport and recreation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman about to conclude?

Mr. Moynihan: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

With those four wheels to the policy firmly in place, there is no need for a fifth wheel, just as the GLC has proved an unnecessary and expensive fifth wheel on the vehicle of London government.

7.52 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I intend to take just eight minutes and to sit down at 8 o'clock.

Yesterday's *Liverpool Daily Post* carried an interesting series of articles on the future of Merseyside in a four-page special entitled:

"Your county: right or wrong?"

and featuring a debate that included the Secretary of State for the Environment and various other people. The editorial states:

"Leaving aside the disputed savings issue—the proof of this will not be evident until well after March 1986—there are a number of disturbing issues which the answers in our four-page report highlight, particularly in relation to the joint boards which will run the police, fire and transport services.

These boards will comprise councillors appointed by the district councils. Many district councillors and their officers are deeply concerned at the extra work which will be forced upon them, commenting that they have enough problems to tackle without taking on extra."

It concludes:

"The Government maintains the abolition of the county councils will mean local democracy is strengthened. The evidence so far, and admittedly Mr. Jenkin has been criticised for not presenting the Government's case very forcibly, is woefully thin."

We all agree on that. The Secretary of State stated that some metropolitan councils had

"promoted policies which conflict with national policies that should be left to the concern of democratically elected central government."

That is the key to the matter.

Let us consider some of the policies carried out by the Merseyside county council. It established an economic development committee, which has created 8,000 permanent jobs in an area in which 150,000 people are out of work, largely due to Government policy. No wonder the Government are complaining that local authorities are interfering in matters which should be left to central Government, because central Government are happy to see

unemployment building up whereas Labour authorities adopt positive policies to reduce unemployment without any great assistance from central Government. Merseyside council has also established 30 workers' co-operatives, all of which are functioning very well. If the county council is abolished and the transport authority handed over to some ad hoc body, the cheap fares policy of the county council, which has done such a good job in keeping fares down, will disappear along with many other achievements.

The Government's attitude is one of pure political spite. They believe that any centre of resistance to their policies must be destroyed. The same syndrome is operating in their attempts to weaken the miners' union and the trade union movement generally. It is important to realise exactly what the Government are trying to do.

The Minister for Local Government gave a very smooth performance on television, dragging up previous statements made by Mr. Livingstone. The Minister was quite wrong, of course, and indulged in all kinds of exaggerations. Nevertheless, he may as well know that many years ago, as a city councillor in Liverpool, I moved a resolution opposing the setting-up of the county council. The Conservatives established it all the same and initially it was controlled by them. A few years later, however, when my predecessor in the House, Sir Kenneth Thompson, was leader of the county council, I became convinced that it was doing a very good job. I was convinced by practice. We always have to be convinced by practice. The Secretary of State argued that there had been conflict between the metropolitan councils and the local authorities, but that is certainly not true on Merseyside. They have worked together hand in hand to do positive things for the area and it should be placed clearly on record that they have done a tremendous job.

The real reason for the Government's attitude is that they favour centralised control. If I were a Minister, having heard the speech of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), I should withdraw the Bill, give it up and pack it in. The Opposition entirely agree with the case so conclusively made by the right hon. Gentleman when he said that the Bill was really about centralised control by the Government. The Government are showing their authoritarian streak.

There are about 70 references in the Bill to increased centralisation. The Secretary of State is to have powers to make orders, issue directions, monitor expenditure and manpower, give guidance and make appointments and nominations. The Government want to tell the people what is good for them and what is not. We say that that is not good enough for the people, and that we intend to fight the Bill every inch of the way.

7.59 pm

Mr. Allstair Burt (Bury, North): There are a number of tests of the worth of a piece of legislation. I need not list them all, but two of them could be described as acceptability to the public and popularity. From time to time, the Government have stumbled over those two hurdles. Popularity must never be the sole determinant of Government policy, but acceptability to the people will be the most important test of all when elections are fought. With my constituents, the Bill passes the tests of acceptability and popularity. Like the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith), I shall speak for my own area and not refer to the position in London.

As is well known, the metropolitan authorities have a shorter history than the regional authority in London. In my own area, there was much concern in the early 1970s at the proposal to take powers away from local authorities and give them to a body to be called the Greater Manchester council. Greater Manchester is not a unified whole. There are considerable differences between Ramsbottom and Tottington in the north, parts of Stockport in the south, Rochdale in the east and Wigan in the west. The misgivings were echoed in my own constituency by Conservative and, it should not be forgotten, Labour councillors.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burt: No. The hon. Gentleman must wait until I have developed my argument.

Those misgivings by Labour councillors are not often referred to now. If anything in this matter has been cobbled together, it is Labour Members' opposition to proposals which do not deviate very much from what they themselves had in mind.

The feeling that Greater Manchester had no identity with which people in the area could sympathise persisted and still persists. It has been difficult for people to appreciate why councillors elected in Stockport and Wigan should necessarily decide whether an estate in Ramsbottom should have double yellow lines to protect residents from bad parking.

The lack of acceptance of the Greater Manchester council was proved during the 1983 general election. Whether or not it was an issue elsewhere, the abolition of the met counties was certainly an issue in my constituency. I would not make great claims for the concept of a mandate. No one disputes that, in general terms, a mandate put forward by a winning political party at an election has some sway over the legislative programme of the following few years. It is sometimes difficult to pin down every aspect of a manifesto. It is certainly wrong to demand that legislation must be passed purely because of some reference in the manifesto. However, I myself tested the Bill on many doorsteps. When life became difficult, and my arguments for the Conservative party seemed less persuasive than usual, the greatest single successful response was always brought out by the question, "Would you like us to abolish the Greater Manchester council?" The answer was almost always positive. I can say confidently that most of my constituents knew very well that the Conservatives were proposing this measure. My constituents support it, and want to see it carried into law.

That cannot conclude the argument. There are other things to say. What is so good about the Greater Manchester council that it should be retained? What is so difficult about the legislation that it should not be carried through? There is the complexity argument. I have never sought to portray the task of abolition as a simple one—there are a number of difficulties to be fairly faced—nor have I gone on record as saying that everything that the Greater Manchester council has done is bad. A number of my constituents work for the council. I acknowledge that in many areas their work has been good.

The Government's proposals will be carefully examined in Committee, as they should be, but merely

[Mr. Burt]

because a task is complex — and clearly transferring powers to the district authorities will be a complex matter —one should not conclude that that task should not be attempted. The task would have been a great deal easier if the Greater Manchester council had co-operated with the Government from the word go and tried to ease the passage of the legislation instead of adopting a stupid and uncooperative attitude.

The Greater Manchester council cannot claim that the Bill does not embody everything that it wanted and cannot allege that it is a dog's breakfast when it made no attempt to co-operate with the Government or attempt to improve the legislation. Let me quote two areas of concern. I hope that in Committee the Government will pay attention to the question of refuse disposal. Major gains have been made through dealing with the matter on a regional basis. Those gains should not be lost. Last week, I visited the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology to look at a project dealing with the conversion of waste material into energy. Good work is being done there, and it should not be wasted. It would be possible to keep the waste disposal function, as opposed to waste collection, on a regional footing by privatising the disposal operation. That option should not be ignored.

When the question of the privatisation of refuse collection was raised in Bury, the council refused to adopt it because a better option has been provided, involving a revolutionary wheeled bin process, with co-operation from the unions. So there is no dogma on my side. But the Government should consider whether the waste disposal function regionally could be better carried out by a private body.

A second area of expertise concerns highways and, specifically, bridges. Before reorganisation, a number of bridges were neglected. Now, however, the Greater Manchester council has a good team, and it is important that its work should be continued. I hope that the Government will bear that point in mind, too.

I should now like to consider some of the nonsense talked by the Opposition. First, there is the anti-democratic argument. I have never found it convincing. There has been a scare campaign designed to fool people into believing that they would lose all right to vote locally. That was nonsense. People will have the right to vote for district councillors, who will have increased powers. There has also been the accusation about political spite.

Mr. Wareing: Did not the hon. Gentleman hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)?

Mr. Burt: I shall answer the points made by my right hon. Friend.

If they were motivated by political spite, the Government could simply seek to abolish Labour opposition. However, it is clear that, in an area such as mine, most members of the joint boards will be Labour. The Labour influence will not be lost, and it is wrong simply to say that Labour opposition has been removed. That was pointed out to the Government by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) who suggested to the Government that they might have made an error. That point certainly proves that there is no political spite behind the legislation.

Four factors have led my constituents to have no great regard for the Greater Manchester council, and have contributed to the lack of the sympathy that it was originally hoped the body would enjoy. First, like other Labour-controlled authorities, the Greater Manchester council constantly claims to be starved of funds. However, in combination with other metropolitan authorities, it can find £2·5 million to spend on an advertising campaign. That shows an element of deviousness. The council lacks the money, or so it says, but then finds it again. Secondly, it has put out utterly misleading advertising telling pensioners that they will lose their concessionary fares and others that there will be no buses. That is completely false and it has made no attempt to justify its claims. Thirdly, it has advanced the argument that the ends justify the means and that we must defeat the Bill in any way. A union member of the GMC staff circulated a letter to his colleagues in which he said that the recipient must write to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and added:

> "You might add that when you voted Conservative (it doesn't matter whether you did or not) you were not aware that you were voting for the cancellation of elections.
>
> In any of the letters, do not describe yourself as an employee of GMC."

That was devious and wrong. GMC staff who have written to me from my own constituency have told me who they work for—I respect them for that.

Lastly, the GMC's abuses and the £50,000 of ratepayers' money that it offered, with no consultation, to the striking miners' fund caused great annoyance to the ratepayers. They have no sympathy for the GMC. They regard it as a body that should be abolished and which has done nothing but try to create jobs for itself. That criticism might not be fair—the GMC has done good things—but my constituents regard this as an opportunity to do away with a body which they never accepted and which they knew we would abolish when they supported us in 1983. We shall carry the Bill through with the full support of Bury, North and its Member of Parliament.

8.11 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): The other day I watched the Conservative party political broadcast. It was an utter disgrace. The Conservative propaganda machine distorted the facts. It concentrated on the GLC and emphasised the minority groups that it supports and completely ignored voluntary and church organisations, which are vital to a balanced community and which the GLC also supports.

The Minister for Local Government had the cheek to say that the Government were not getting rid of any services. The programme did not mention the metropolitan counties and the many services that they provide. Such distortion is becoming the norm. They have resorted to a smear campaign and undue emphasis of detail, thinking that that fortifies their case. They omitted to say that it was the Conservative reorganisation of 1974—which cost hundreds of millions of pounds—that has taken many years to settle down. They intend to put the nation into turmoil at a cost of another several hundred million pounds.

I shall not develop any sophisticated arguments as it is clear that the Government will force Conservative Members through the Lobby. However, some facts must be put on the record before the Government's can of

worms is kicked over as the Bill goes on the statute book. Most people realise that the Bill is motivitated by the Government's hatred of Labour-controlled local authorities. Local authorities are often far more efficient than the Government. Local government is always found to be more accountable than the Government after the auditors have been in.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) said that he would support the Government. He said that the Bill would enable his area to have its own fire service. In what is now the Greater Manchester area there will be 10 fire services, 10 chief fire officers and no doubt 10 police organisations and 10 chief constables. The metropolitan counties appointed a firm of private consultants to investigate the validity of the Government's proposals. The Goverment are fond of private consultants and private companies but when these consultants asked the Government whether they wanted to check the figures and conclusions, the Government declined.

Planning is a major issue. I remember from my days in local government that one of the greatest arguments among districts was the strategy for a balanced philosophy. Before co-ordination, one district would vie with another because there was no such planning philosophy. The same was true for land use, housing and overspills. Inquiries and appeals caused delays that cost ratepayers fantastic sums of money. I am aware that most Tories do not like planners. They traditionally dislike control of development because plot density ratios mean profits. They always want more floors, and therefore more profits, in office blocks. I therefore understand why the Government are not keen on a co-ordinated planning system.

Transport should be co-ordinated, but the Bill will result in massive fare increases and neglect of the aged, the infirm and families without cars, of which there are many in the north of England. The problem of crossing district boundaries when negotiating concessionary fares for pensioners will re-emerge. We are also worried about what will happen to consumer protection services which have helped to establish responsible trading standards. Such services will probably go to the wall.

Greater Manchester has devoted £2·4 million to the arts. That money is now at risk. The result will be the inadequate funding of noble organisations such as the Manchester Royal Exchange theatre, the Oldham Coliseum, the Bolton Octagon and the Museum of Science.

Two clauses in the Bill should not be passed over, although the Bill is a long document and we need considerable time to examine it in great depth. Clause 93 has been described as the Reichstag clause, and gives sweeping powers for subsequent Government actions. It is the kind of dictatorial power that this Government will undoubtedly take up and which has now become the norm when they deal and liaise with local government.

Clause 83 is a recipe for local disagreements and conflicts. It refers to research and information. It uses the laboured solution that two thirds of the district must agree to whatever is suggested before it can be done. There will be conflicts and difficulties when the district representatives meet and there is no longer a co-ordinated planning authority.

The Bill will lead to fragmentation and consequential indecision, wasting of resources, duplication, added costs and chaos. All hon. Members, including Conservative Members, have received many communications from organisations, and not necessarily political organisations. I have received scores of letters about the Bill and only one has supported the Government. That letter comes from the chamber of commerce, which is the Government's only serious supporter. Naturally, the letter says that there will be savings, but, from my experience in local government, I know that organisations such as this, which are complete scoundrels, say that we should spend less, but are the first to demand more.

It would be useful——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I hate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but would he come to his last sentence, please?

Mr. Eastham: I was going to mention bodies such as the CBI council, which met in January 1984, the Trafford district council, which is Conservative-controlled and many other organisations whose views I should like to quote to the Minister. This is bad legislation and a disgrace. I hope that it will be kicked out tonight.

8.22 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I take issue with the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), who has now, alas, gone, because his speech illustrates the superficiality of so much of what we have heard from the Bill's supporters. The hon. Gentleman convicted himself out of his own mouth. He said that every borough provides its own sports facilities. I agree that boroughs provide tennis courts and bowling greens, but suppose somebody wanted to row an Olympic rowing course. I doubt that every borough in London could provide that facility. I hope that my borough will shortly be providing that facility, which will be a London regional facility. I have no doubt that in Mole valley there are facilities for sailing, as there are in the Lea valley. That is a service for the whole area.

The Herbert commission report has not been fully quoted in this debate. It advocated the creation of a Greater London council, but said that the boroughs should be the primary authority for services

"except those which can only be effectively performed over the wider area of Greater London or which could be better performed over that wider area."

That is the essence of the argument. Certain things can only better be performed over a wider area. For example, there is traffic management. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and I had experience of the Greater London council in this subject. The GLC has been active in traffic management which can only be arranged over a wider area than a borough. If one is co-ordinating traffic signals, dealing with traffic management schemes, lorry routes and parking, one can deal with it only over a relatively wide area.

The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) said that people did not like the Greater Manchester council. It is often true that people living in a lower tier authority resent the upper one, because the upper one, whether it is the Surrey county council, the Hertfordshire county council or any other of the shire councils, is responsible for wider reconciliation of interests. The Government are to remove that from the process of democratic control.

Much has been said about quangos. I have a quango in my constituency, the London Docklands development corporation, which is responsible, alas, not just for strategic planning, but for detailed planning, which is an

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

important countywide role, particularly in urban areas. It appointed a new member to the authority the other day, no doubt an excellent gentleman. The salary that he is being given for half a day a week is equivalent to £30,000 a year. I learned about his appointment through a press release. That is how the Government go about dealing with a quango, which has been set up to deal with, as they call it, the inadequacies of borough administration.

The very creation of a London Docklands development corporation shows that even this Government recognise that there are problems that cannot be dealt with on a borough basis. They have also recognised this in taking away the ambulance service from the LDDC and giving it to a quango. I bet that few people know who runs the ambulances in London. They may be surprised to know that it is a quango, the South West Thames regional hospital authority. I shall quote from its strategic planning framework, to show what the Government quangos are:

> "There is therefore an urgent need to re-appraise the use of the non-emergency ambulance service, whether or not charging arrangements are introduced as a result of the Rayner Scrutiny . . . Demand for non-emergency services is therefore likely to outstrip supply. Proposals for acute, geriatric, mentally ill and mentally handicapped services, community services and particularly for developments in day care that increase demands for ambulance transport must not be included in plans unless there is a commitment in principle from the managing authority that adequate ambulance resources can be provided."

The Government are cutting the ambulance service and restricting its proper use. It should be the responsibility of the GLC. Instead, the ambulance service has been taken away from the GLC. Not much change will come from the quangos.

Last night I had exchanges with the Secretary of State for Education and Science about the Inner London education authority. Having been mauled by the other place and by people in his own party, the right hon. Gentleman has said that everything will be all right because there will be a directly elected ILEA. However, it will be "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" and capped by the Government. The new ILEA is to be without the borough representatives. I am not sure whether it is easy to be a borough representative on ILEA, but at least that is a link with the boroughs. Clauses 17, 18 and 19 do not provide for such a link.

Under clause 20 there is to be an annual consultation between the new directly elected ILEA and the boroughs, the members of which are not elected to deal with all ILEA matters. The Secretary of State will be able to intervene to say which policies can be a matter of consultation.

With regard to clause 21, it was made clear by the Secretary of State last night after great pressure — despite his giving the so-called concession that there will be a directly elected ILEA—that in a couple of lines of subsection (5) he can disperse that ILEA to the boroughs.

By combining clauses 20 and 21, the Secretary of State will be able to say, "If you do not do what the boroughs want, or what I think you should do, or if you do not want to spend what I say you should spend, or if you do not want to concentrate on the policies on which I think you should concentrate, then I will chuck you up and give you to the boroughs." The Secretary of State can do that under clause 21(5) by means of a debate for one and a half hours in this House and one vote — a package deal. That is authoritarianism. That is the centralisation of government that the Conservative party says that it does not want to see, yet it is doing it.

I believe that we can see in the Bill the influence of the Prime Minister. She is the authoritarian voice inside the Conservative party. She is divisive not only in the country but in her own party. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said, the policy contained in the Tory manifesto was cobbled up and inserted less than three weeks before the election. It is said that it was on her insistence. Her vindictiveness against the ILEA and her contempt of parliamentary procedures have put into the Bill clause 21(5), which is one of the most authoritarian and anti-parliamentary measures in the Bill, which itself is unworthy of parliamentary consideration for that reason, if for no other.

8.32 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I should like to speak briefly in what has been a long debate on a long and complex Bill. I intend to vote for the Bill on Second Reading tonight. I am committed to do so and my intentions have been made clear in my speeches and in my election address in June 1983.

The main reason for my support for the Bill on Second Reading is that I believe that the London boroughs are the primary authorities in London, that they should have full responsibility for local government in London, and that they can do the job at a much lower cost to the ratepayer than the Greater London council, under its present administration or under any previous administration. I say that because it may well be that some colleagues in the House are unaware of the size of the London boroughs.

My constituency is situated in the London borough of Hillingdon. It is 15 miles long and has a population of over 200,000 people. It is by most standards a very big unit of local government.

My views are based on my 12 years' experience as a London borough councillor, between 1959 and 1971, in two of the old metropolitan boroughs. In those days there was constant conflict between the metropolitan boroughs and the old London county council. A feeling grew up —shared by politicians across the political spectrum— that perhaps the time had come for a different form of London government. Following the report of the Herbert commission, we embarked on the creation of a big, new strategic authority that would cover not only inner London but the old counties of Middlesex and Surrey of blessed memory.

Strategic planning was then very much the vogue, and it was that impetus that led to the creation of the GLC. We have been able, over the past 20 years, to observe how the GLC works, under the present administration and under the previous administration of my noble friend Lord Plummer and Sir Horace Cutler.

Many of us from London — those who sit in this House and those who serve on borough councils—have come to the conclusion that the GLC has not been a success. The feeling among the people of London in June 1983 was made very clear to me during the first week of the election campaign. It was that the GLC and its work was remote from their daily lives. They did not understand it. They felt that it was all taking place a long way from where they lived. My constituency of Uxbridge is 18 miles from the centre of London, and people still feel that that is quite a long way.

The only reason why the work of the GLC has become better known has been that during the life of the present administration at county hall a very large sum of ratepayers' money has been spent on a massive propaganda campaign.

During the past 20 years substantial powers have been transferred from the GLC to the London boroughs—housing, children's health, welfare and so on. I was the first chairman of the children's committee in the London borough of City of Westminster following the abolition of the London county council. Everybody said that the services would never be the same; that they would not be properly organised; that there would not be people of sufficient calibre to run them. It was said that we would not be able to cope with the out-town homes. The City of Westminster owned homes in towns as far away as Slough—then in Buckinghamshire and now in Berkshire. The fears proved to be unfounded, because we had—and still have—in that marvellous city people who were enthusiastic about the personal services, and who gave a great deal of their time to making them work, with tremendous success. Who today can point to the personal services in the London boroughs and say that they are not as well run as they were by the GLC? No one can say that.

I have given a very good example of the way in which the boroughs can handle very important services. I believe that the remaining functions, with certain exceptions, can be handled by the boroughs, and that where necessary there will be proper and adequate co-operation through the London Boroughs Association, which should be able to speak for London.

When the Bill is enacted, the electorate will be able to look to their local councillors to take local decisions. In my borough there are 69 councillors and they are accountable to the electorate. They are local people who understand local needs. People can walk round the corner to see their councillors, or they can see them locally whenever they wish to do so. That should be adequate in terms of local democracy.

I have some reservations about the Bill; I imagine that there are very few hon. Members who have not. I ask my right hon. Friend to give the House four assurances: first, that the existing balance between the London ratepayers will be maintained; secondly, that the grant-related expenditure assessments of successful authorities and any expenditure targets will be adjusted to reflect their increased responsibilities, including grants to voluntary organisations; thirdly, that there will be real financial benefits to successful authorities; and, fourthly, that there will be an acceptable distribution of block grant, which can command the full support of the London boroughs and the electorate.

I believe that the fourth assurance is perhaps the most important of all. The present system is a blunt instrument that needs very considerable reform. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government knows my views on the subject. I say to him in all sincerity that I hope very much that between tonight and the night when we sit here for the Third Reading of the Bill he will be able to give me some very clear assurances on that point, because my feelings about the Bill will be coloured by them more than by anything else.

The green belt is a treasured possession of the people of London. My borough, Hillingdon, has more green belt than any other London borough. I want assurances from my right hon. Friend that the green belt will be fully protected from erosion. I shall study the proceedings of the Standing Committee with the greatest possible care to ensure that those points are covered.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I give my hon. Friend that assurance now. About three weeks ago my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment stated in a parliamentary answer that the green belt land owned by the GLC, when it is transferred either to the London boroughs within the GLC's boundaries or to the shire counties outside London, will be considered inalienable.

Mr. Shersby: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for reminding the House of that assurance. The Hillingdon Federation of Residents and Tenants Associations will be glad to hear that, because it is one of the principal bodies to have corresponded with me, my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) and my right hon. Friend the Minister.

I speak as one who has spent many years of his life in London local government. The Bill has many provisions. It is complex and obviously arouses uncertainty and causes misunderstanding. I am confident that, if we pass the motion for the Second Reading, the House will have the opportunity to study matters relating to London government which are long overdue for consideration. I want a better deal for London ratepayers. I want the money to be spent sensibly and local people to be accountable for local public expenditure.

8.41 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I do not normally rise to speak on local government issues, because I am aware that many hon. Members have previously served in local government. It seems right that we should respect their expertise and listen to them rather than take up their time. I must, however, speak on this Bill for a number of reasons.

There is enormous antagonism in my constituency towards this legislation. My constituents are not generally the type of people who rush to take pen to paper and write letters about broad political issues. I have received a massive number of letters on this subject, often painstakingly written by people who normally do not write letters to their Member of Parliament. Those letters started with the paving Bill. People deeply resented in an instinctive and healthy way the fact that their vote would be taken from them and the fact that matters they could control by their vote would no longer be controlled in that way. Since then, I have received more letters and have met lobbies of members of voluntary organisations who are deeply worried that their work will not be sufficiently funded in future.

In the west midlands black organisations have been insufficiently funded in the past. The west midlands county council has a good record of funding such bodies. Many black organisations in the Birmingham area that are doing good work fear for their future and do not believe that they will receive adequate funding.

The issue that is causing massive concern for all the pensioners who live in the Birmingham area is the threat to their bus passes. I have received many letters on that subject. I listened carefully today to the Secretary of State for Transport when he suggested to my hon. Friend the

[Ms. Clare Short]

Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that her alarm about the threat to pensioners' bus passes was false. Nothing the right hon. Gentleman said assured us. He simply said that that matter would be up to the district authorities to consider.

We know what the Government are doing to local authorities. They are constantly taking money from the local authorities but leaving them with statutory responsibilities that they cannot fulfil. Local authorities up and down the land are agonising about which law they must break—the statutory obligations imposed on them over the years by the House to care for people, or the new laws introduced by the Government restricting their spending so that those services cannot be adequately provided. We know that that process will continue. In telling us that it will be up to the district authorities to provide these measures, the Secretary of State for Transport is telling us nothing about whether there will be sufficient money to guarantee pensioners' bus passes.

In answer to a question, the Secretary of State for Transport said:

"In setting precepts for passenger transport joint boards following the abolition of the metropolitan county councils, I shall have regard to the level of national resources which it would, in my view, be appropriate to make available for the support of public transport in those areas."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1984; Vol. 60, c. *218*.]

The right hon. Gentleman went on to talk about efficiency and the need for savings. Nothing that has been said today allows me to write honestly to my pensioners who are deeply worried about this issue telling them not to worry. It is wrong to suggest that it is irresponsible of us to put this matter forward. Pensioners are deeply worried, and no assurance that has been given can make them less worried.

Conservative Members try to suggest that this measure is popular. I apologise to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) for not knowing about his Birmingham roots, but the way in which he was talking led me to believe that he could know little of Birmingham. Conservative Members have suggested that people in Birmingham and, indeed, around the country are in favour of this measure. Our postbags and the polls tell us how people feel. Polling has occurred in the west midlands for a considerable time. National Opinion Polls has conducted the polling.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Short: No; I have only 10 minutes.

In October 1983, people were asked a simple question. It has been suggested that the questions were biased. People were asked: Should the county councils be abolished? The result was that 33 per cent. said yes and 46 per cent. said no. By June 1984, when we had been arguing about this matter and people were clearer about the powers and responsibilities of those councils, 19 per cent. of people in the west midlands said that they thought that the metropolitan county councils should be abolished and 63 per cent. were opposed to the idea. One thing that the Government certainly achieved in the process of going about abolition was a massive increase in the popularity of those authorities about which people did not know as much before this argument began. The Government are going against public opinion in every way in which it can be expressed. This is an unpopular measure. People in Birmingham and in my constituency do not want it.

Another point that has arisen repeatedly in the speeches by Conservative Members is their massively undemocratic argument. One Conservative Member says "My county council is giving money to the miners." Another Conservative Member says "I object to the fact that there is a nucler-free zone in my area." Another raises the issue of grants for day groups, and another refers to black projects and art projects, which Conservative Members do not consider desirable. Most Labour Members believe, as I do, that this is the most extreme and most dogmatic Government that we have had, certainly in my lifetime. I never imagined that I would see such a Government in my lifetime. They are doing unending harm to our country, people and economy. That harm will continue for a long time. We should say, when we take power, "We shall abolish the right of the Conservative party ever to return to government." Its policies are unacceptable and what it is willing to do to our people is unacceptable. The fact that Conservative Members can make such arguments shows the smallness of their attachment to democracy.

I wish to make it clear that the Government Front Bench have used quotes to show that we have not always thought that this was the best model of local government imposed on us by them. The Ministers have suggested that any of us who have ever said that the metropolitan county councils might not be the perfect form of local government — we have said that openly — are in favour of the abolition of democracy and of a tier of local government that is not accountable through elections. That is a hypocritical and dishonest argument. We have never pretended that this form of local government is the one we would have chosen. We are united in the House and up and down the country against the move to retain a second tier of local government and to abolish democratic accountability.

As a sponsored member of the National Union of Public Employees—I am proud to hold that office—I know that large numbers of people working in the public services for disgracefully low rates of pay and doing honourable work to care for our fellow citizens are deeply threatened by this measure. They fear that their jobs will go. In this day and age, with unemployment at an intolerable level, the Government proudly tell us that they are bringing in a measure that will destroy more jobs.

It is a highly contested matter whether the Bill will save the country any money at all. We know that Coopers and Lybrand has analysed the Bill and said that it does not believe the Government's figures, which claim to show that savings will be made. At the end of the day the only possible way that savings will be made is by abolishing jobs. I notice that on 1 October *The Guardian* said that the Treasury was reported as saying that manpower control is the only way of delivering the savings promised from abolition.

I fear that I have used up my time. There are many more arguments against the Bill, but let the Minister be clear. The people of the west midlands, and, it is pretty clear, the people of Great Britain, are against him on this measure. If he goes through with it he will pay the ultimate price. He will pay the political price of alienating the people as a result of bringing in this unjust and unacceptable measure.

8.50 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short). She said that she was proud to be sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees. I was proud to be a member of the GLC for six years from 1967 to 1973. In those days we had a great deal to do, but there has since been a huge erosion in the functions of the GLC, particularly within the past 10 years.

There was a vast heritage of council housing which used to belong to the former London county council, which the GLC inherited when it came into being in 1964-65, with a population of 1·25 million. That amounts to one sixth of the population of Greater London and is equivalent to the population of Birmingham. That was virtually all handed over to the 32 London boroughs, as were most of the GLC's parks.

The ambulances, about which we have heard during the debate, were handed over to the NHS, which the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) described as a quango. I have never heard the NHS described as that before.

Sewerage, for which the GLC used to be responsible, has gone to the Thames water authority. Within the past few months, the responsibility for London's buses and tubes has left the GLC and gone to another authority.

There are now few if any big new road schemes. When I was a member of the GLC with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), 15 or 17 years ago, the GLC evolved plans for three ringways—the inner London motorway box, the improved north circular to be linked with the new south circular, and an outer London circular, to be called ringway 3, which gave way to the M25 motorway. The three London ringways, with the exception of a few small bits of the inner London motorway box, were dropped. The construction of ringways and motorways around London was the main point of setting up a strategic planning authority.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the 1972 plans for ringways 1, 2 and 3 were thrown out in 1973 because London's electorate rejected them? Is the hon. Gentleman now saying that, by abolishing the GLC, the Government can do what they have always wanted to do, which is to destroy homes, shops and jobs in London by concreting them over?

Mr. Jessel: I did not say that at all. I said that the GLC, which it was intended should deal with traffic problems in Greater London, had failed to do so because it dropped the ringway plans which the Labour party in county hall campaigned against. That was why it was not done. That simply augments the case for saying that the GLC has now far less of a role than was originally intended for it.

The Thames barrier was discussed and decided upon within the GLC many years ago and constructed at a cost of between £400 million and £500 million of public money. One quarter was provided by the GLC and three quarters by the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Nine or 10 days ago, despite flood conditions in my constituency at Twickenham and Teddington, that barrier was not used. A few days ago I went to see Lord Belstead, the Minister of State, who promised to look into the matter. I hope that he will ensure that once the GLC has gone and the barrier comes under the control of the Thames water authority, it will be used to prevent flooding. It is ludicrous to spend between £400 million and £500 million on a barrier and then have flood conditions and not use the damn thing.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Jessel: No, I have given way once and I have only a few minutes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be kind enough to excuse me.

Whenever any of the 32 London boroughs wants a pedestrian crossing, yellow line, no right turn, one-way street or traffic lights, under the present regime it must have permission from the GLC. It usually seems to take between six and 10 months to decide on such a simple matter. It is ludicrous that large London boroughs, with populations of between 150,000 and 300,000—the size of Bradford, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Southampton or Aberdeen—are not allowed to make up their own minds about such matters.

Many hon. Members from Greater London constituencies will have had the experience of parents with children at school campaigning for a pedestrian crossing. The local borough council highways committee decides that it wants to go ahead, but it takes 10 months to get permission from the GLC. That duplicates work, adds to cost and causes delay. It is time all that went.

The same is true of planning applications, whether for small places of work, houses along main roads or metropolitan roads within Greater London. All those can be handled by the large London boroughs. So can licensing applications for places of entertainment.

What is left? The fire brigade is important, but what people want from a fire brigade is not democracy but efficiency. Just as the ambulances were handed over to the NHS, so can the fire brigade be handed over.

The arts are important within Greater London. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West often speaks on the arts and the work of the GLC. Under both Labour and Conservative regimes the GLC has had an excellent record in dealing with the arts. Let us remember that, of the 20 years of its existence, for almost precisely 10 years the GLC has been under Conservative control and for almost precisely 10 years under Labour control. But recently there was an act of atrocious vandalism by the present regime at the GLC when it booted out the Arts Council at a few months' notice from the Hayward gallery, where two or three years preparation is required to stage an exhibition. This act of gratuitous vandalism shows that the group now running the GLC is unfit to run an art gallery of any sort.

On Sunday evening I went to a concert at the Queen Elizabeth hall. I intended to enjoy some Mozart and other music. I went into the foyer and was confronted by a vast number of enlarged photographs on a large display about some scrap in a banana republic in central America. That is a foolish use of London ratepayers' money. It is time that that sort of nonsense was stopped once and for all. The GLC has some useful functions but certainly not enough to justify a huge bureaucracy of 7,500. It has outlived its usefulness, and it is time that it went.

8.59 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): We are nearing the end of 14 hours of debate on perhaps the most crucial and controversial piece of legislation to come before the House this Session. The debate has been marked by the excellence of the Opposition, with powerful, passionate

[Mr. Jack Straw]

and thoughtful speeches from 25 of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I include within the general opposition the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who made a powerful and sustained invective against the Government of a sort that is heard only rarely in the House.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup got a few things off his chest about his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that obviously he meant to say to him when he sacked him 12 years ago for his failure as a Minister in the Department of Industry. If there is one piece of advice that the Prime Minister should take from her right hon. Friend, a previous Conservative Prime Minister, it is to get shot of the Secretary of State for Transport. She should do so for the damage that he is doing to the Tory party. The right hon. Gentleman is entering the Chamber; perhaps it is appropriate to say that he has missed the bus.

The debate was opened by a speech which was poor even by the standards of the Secretary of State for Transport. It was closed last night by a 35-minute effort by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. It was as excruciating for those of us who had to listen to it as it was sadly humiliating for the man who had to deliver it. Today there was the speech—I think that it can just about pass that description—of the Secretary of State for Transport. After his performance this afternoon, he is running the Secretary of State for the Environment a close second as Labour's favourite Minister. It was his former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, who described his contribution — and well described it was—as a pathetic image of a speech and unworthy of any man occupying the Treasury Bench.

It was a leading Conservative member of the GLC, Mr. Rodney Gent, who, in a well-titled pamphlet—"'How do we get out of this mess without appearing disloyal'", which I do not think the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup has read—complained that the abolition proposals were politically unpopular because people had woken up to their implications, which would be to hand a political advantage to the Labour party. He wrote that they gave

"such an unfair political advantage to our opponents that the party has turned into a charity."

That is right. Labour's dramatic revival in London and our other great cities has been built upon the exposure by the Secretary of State for the Environment of the centralist and authoritarian nature of modern-day Conservatism. What the Secretary of State for the Environment has done for London and the metropolitan areas, the Secretary of State for Transport is surely about to do in the shire counties with his proposals to cause chaos and anarchy in bus services across the country.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Rubbish.

Mr. Straw: We look forward with relish to putting the proposals of the Secretary of State for Transport on bus services in Lancashire before the electorate.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Despite the extremely expensive and entirely misleading campaign—it has cost the ratepayers £135,000—which has been indulged in by the Labour-controlled council in my constituency, my right hon. Friend's proposals will be carried overwhelmingly by the majority of well-balanced Lancastrians.

Mr. Straw: I do not think that there is any need for me to answer that intervention, save to say that I shall see the hon. Lady on 3 May.

The demoralisation of the Conservative party has been nowhere better reflected in the past two days than in the Chamber. Yesterday—and it will happen today—the Tory party voted with its feet and stayed away. The Conservative party has nigh on 400 Members of Parliament. At times yesterday and today it could not even muster a dozen hon. Members in the Chamber to debate the "jewel in the crown" of the Government's legislative programme. As for the alliance—at present, all one of it—it showed its true concern for London and the metropolitan areas by the failure of its members to attend. Yesterday, at most, two alliance Members were present, but for part of the time there were none at all. Today the alliance had four hon. Members present. The Liberals had two spokesmen here today: the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) is in favour of the Bill and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is against it.

It was the Secretary of State for the Environment who, at last year's Conservative party conference, said:

"I am a Tory, and I have been brought up as a Tory, and I believe the burden of proof is upon the man who advocates change, and if he does not satisfy that burden of proof, then change should not be made."

By the Secretary of State's own standard of proof, the case for this change has certainly not been made.

There is, first, the record of these authorities, to which yesterday the Secretary of State made the scantest reference. He chose simply to ignore his own deep involvement in their establishment as a senior Minister throughout the Administration of his right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. No wonder the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) said of the Secretary of State:

"no matter what its destination, Mr. Jenkin always had a ticket on the train".

Of course the metropolitan counties, like the GLC before them, faced teething problems. They are inherent in any large organisational change and are another reason why further upheaval should not be forced upon those areas without the most careful consideration and the widest possible agreement.

But the authorities have made good progress, as their electors will surely discover if and when the Bill goes through. For the past four years all seven authorities have been Labour-controlled — the real reason and only motivation for the Bill. We stand by the achievements of our colleagues. Without their policies, the quality of life in London and the great towns and cities that the councils cover would have been significantly worse. There would have been fewer jobs, much worse public transport services, inadequately funded police forces, and fire brigades unable to provide proper cover.

Yes, overall, those authorities have increased their spending by more than the average, but the reasons are clear and entirely justifiable. Indeed, 60 per cent. of the expenditure of the metropolitan counties goes on highways, fire and the police service. The Department of Transport continually presses authorities to improve their highway maintenance. The pay of firemen and police officers is effectively in the hands of central Government alone, and in expanding their police forces the metropolitan counties have been directly meeting the wishes of central Government.

The remainder of the metropolitan counties' expenditure—and the vast bulk of the GLC's increase—is accounted for by public transport. In 1981 the electors in those areas were offered a clear choice by Labour. They were offered better and cheaper public transport services to be paid for by increases in the rates. They voted for the changes, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) spelled out today, they have proved popular. They have saved money overall.

The Department of Transport's study in December 1982 showed that for every £1 in transport subsidy spent in the Labour-controlled metropolitan areas—this is a Department of Transport study, not one of ours—the economies of those areas benefited by between £1·20 and £1·30. The Government worry away about wage increases, but do not they realise that the employers' own research organisation in London has pointed out that London weighting has had to be increased by far less than normal over the past two years because of the cuts in fares introduced by a Labour-controlled GLC?

Of course, in pursuing their policies over the past 10 years—or 20 years in the case of the GLC—the upper tier authorities have sometimes been in conflict with the districts and boroughs. I know that, because I used to serve both as a member of the Islington borough council and as a borough representative on ILEA. But that is no argument against these authorities. Within a democracy, tension between different centres of power can itself be creative, and can lead to a better standard and quality of decision. The Secretary of State for Transport could not understand the meaning of democracy if he tried.

Within the great conurbations of this country, there are three dimensions of the issues affecting the physical environment and the delivery of personal services—the local community, central Government and the conurbations. The present Secretary of State for Education and Science—I am sorry to see that he has not bothered to turn up for the wind-up——

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): That is cheap.

Mr. Straw: It is cheap. He is sponsoring the Bill; he spoke about introducing major changes. It was the present Secretary of State for Education and Science who, in moving the Second Reading of the London Government Bill on 10 December 1962, said:

"Yet Greater London is, in a very real sense, a single city. Admittedly, it embraces many places of distinctive character which attract strong loyalties. Nevertheless, the whole of the great urban area, which spreads out to and is contained by the green belt, is one metropolis." — [*Official Report*, 10 December 1962; Vol. 669, c. 52.]

That is as true now as it was then. It is a comment which applies equally to the other conurbations of this country, as Redcliffe-Maud recognised in his report.

The Government recognise that, inasmuch as most of the functions of the present metropolitan counties and the GLC will be continued to be administered at strategic conurbation level. It is because of that reality that we as a party are committed to the re-establishment of an elected strategic authority for London and to the re-establishment of the democratic control of the strategic services in London and the metropolitan areas.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): What the hon. Gentleman is saying in effect is that the powers that the Government are seeking to give to the people of Birmingham will be snatched back by a future Labour Government.

Mr. Straw: I do not recall saying that for a single second. What I said, and what is plain beyond peradventure, is that there are many services which even this Government recognise must be run at conurbation level. The suggestion that the Secretary of State is returning services to Birmingham is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) made clear, a canard — a myth. The Government are transferring three quarters of the functions to unelected or indirectly elected quangos but still preserving those functions at strategic levels.

In yesterday's speech the Secretary of State justified the proposals in the Bill on two grounds—that they would lead to an increase in the devolution of power to district authorities, and that they would save money. Neither argument can withstand the most cursory of examinations. The Secretary of State went on yesterday to say:

"the central purpose of the Bill is to provide a more local and a more accountable system of local government". — [*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 35.]

In support of that, the Secretary of State claimed that, measured by expenditure, only 5 per cent. of the GLC's services would pass to Government Departments or agencies and that 95 per cent. would be devolved directly to London boroughs and the joint fire authority. He implied that a similar proportion would apply to the metropolitan areas, although, significantly, he gave no figures. Perhaps he had been too embarassed by the figures that the Minister of State gave. He gave two sets of completely contradictory figures on 28 November. He told one of my hon. Friends that 75 per cent. of services would pass to the boroughs and districts. Only a few minutes later he said that, in respect of the west midlands, only 40 per cent. of net current expenditure would be controlled by the districts. The Minister can perhaps explain his contradiction when he replies.

Just who is the Secretary of State trying to mislead? Detailed and independent analysis shows that only 31 per cent. of the GLC's powers will fall to the direct responsibility of the boroughs, and that 67 per cent. will go to quangos, and appointed and indirectly elected boards. For the metropolitan areas, the proportion is even worse. The calculations of PA Management Consultants show that 82 per cent. of the spending of the metropolitan areas is being removed from directly elected bodies and that only 18 per cent. will go to district councils.

"Ah, well," says the Secretary of State "but we have had joint boards before". That is true, but what we have never had before, and what makes the Bill such a terrifying monster for centralising power, is the controls over those joint boards which this Bill gives. The Secretary of State sought to make light of the draconian powers which he is given in the Bill by clauses 20, 21, 64, 76, 80 and 93. However, when the Secretary of State for Education and Science spoke last night he let the cat out of the bag. He said:

"Clause 80 is a manpower control, which has been included in case the precept or rate-capping powers are not effective enough."

If the rack and the slow-burning fires do not work, the Government intend to apply the thumbscrews.

Since Conservative Members are so confused about the powers contained in the Bill, let me spell them out. By clause 64, all 18 new joint boards are automatically rate-capped, despite the fact that rate capping was designed to deal with authorities with a record of overspending. By definition, those authorities can have no such record. Even

[Mr. Straw]

the minimal safeguards in the Rates Act by means of clearly stated and universally applicable principles are excluded. The power is arbitrary. By clause 76, every principle about the establishment of rate support grant for these authorities is thrown out of the window. The power is arbitrary.

If that were not sufficient, by the infamous clause 80 the Secretary of State is given power to prescribe, by regulation, the manpower of the authorities—

"the authority's arrangements for obtaining any services, or any supplies or facilities"

and

"the authority's organisation and its arrangements for managing its affairs".

Yesterday the Secretary of State sought, at best, to confuse the House about the nature of these powers. However, they are contained in the Bill. They give power to him to control who are employed, how they should be employed, what they should do and how they should spend their money. These powers are unprecedented. They are a negation of local democracy.

The Secretary of State knows this. So does his party. The Conservative representative on the GLC for Wanstead and Woodford, the Environment Secretary's own constituency, is Mr. Robert Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell was chosen by the same Conservative association as the Secretary of State. But the Secretary of State has not even been able to convince him of his views. Quite the reverse. In a scornful, contemptuous article, which measured up to the invective of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, Mr. Mitchell said:

"the alleged transfer of GLC functions to the boroughs to give the electorate more direct control is, quite simply, a deception".

It was the cost savings which would arise from the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the GLC which used to be the main plank in the Government's case. They even put out a briefing note through the Whips Office in January of this year in which they claimed savings of £120 million and 9,000 jobs. However, while they used to concentrate on the alleged savings, the Government have, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland made clear yesterday, suddenly gone all coy about the savings and could scarcely find time yesterday or today to justify those claims. I am not surprised.

The Secretary of State knows, and the Government know, that the figures of alleged savings from this proposal were plucked out of the air to provide a figleaf for a commitment forced into the manifesto by the Prime Minister without consultation or consideration, even within the Conservative party. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup revealed today that this manifesto commitment not only got into the manifesto nine days after the election was called but had actually been opposed by the party's policy committee. In other words, the leader rode roughshod over the views of the party machinery.

The Secretary of State said today—we all heard him—that there had been a year-long consideration before the election of this change. If that is the case, I ask the Secretary of State why Mr. Alan Greengross, the Conservative leader of the Greater London council, only found out about this year-long consideration and this election commitment three days before it was made public in the Conservative party's election manifesto on 18 May 1983.

If we are wrong and there was a year-long consideration, perhaps the Secretary of State will explain why, when I asked him in February to spell out the details of the calculations behind the £120 million figure, the hapless Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), was put up to answer for him.

Mr. Tony Banks: Where is he?

Mr. Straw: Indeed, where is he?

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The Under-Secretary is reading his book.

Mr. Straw: Yes. The hon. Gentleman is reading his book and translating it for his hon. Friends.

All that the hon. Gentleman could say was that he had nothing to add to the answer that he had given to his hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), in which all that the Government could do was to repeat the original assertion.

Ten months later, despite repeated requests, all that we have had to justify the wild claims of savings is a written answer pushed out at the last moment on Friday, which tells us nothing more than the original wild claim.

In contrast, the metropolitan counties and the GLC have had their claim that reorganisation will cost money and jobs thoroughly investigated by outside accountants of the highest reputation. The metropolitan counties and the GLC have offered—I repeat their offer—to have a further joint, independent investigation of the finances of the authorities and the costs and savings of abolition. If the Secretary of State cared about the good government of the cities, and if he knew what was good for his own political career, he would accept that invitation with alacrity.

The Secretary of State should also examine his own record. He has already presided over a reorganisation, not in the Government of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, but under the present Prime Minister. He has a track record in these matters. The right hon. Gentleman introduced the reorganisation of the Health Service. He told us that that reorganisation would save administrative jobs. It is painful for me to reveal the facts, but there were 105,000 administrators before the reorganisation of the Health Service and 109,000 afterwards.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Proportionately.

Mr. Straw: I can lip-read quite well. The right hon. Gentleman said, "Proportionately." The Government's expenditure plans for 1984-85 to 1986-87 and the annual report of the NHS in England show that, as a proportion of NHS staff, the number of administrators has gone up, not down. I give the Secretary of State the figures. Perhaps he would care to study them before the Minister for Local Government replies.

The Bill is a disreputable and unworthy measure. It is a recipe for chaos and mismanagement. Nothing more characterises its hapless progeny than the position in which the new Minister for Local Government finds himself. The right hon. Member was once the PPS to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. Indeed, he led the right hon. Gentleman's campaign for re-election as leader of the Conservative party.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland quoted the right hon. Gentleman's pamphlet "Maybe it's because we're Londoners" in which he said:

"the strategic role of the GLC should be enhanced . . . far from the GLC being allowed greater independence, Whitehall has quite wrongly interfered more and more . . . The GLC must become a proper strategic authority."

The right hon. Gentleman has gone on in less than complimentary terms about what the present leader of the GLC once said about the authority that he now leads. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman devoted a whole party political broadcast to it recently, and no doubt such references will appear in his speech tonight.

However, there is one important difference—among many others—between Mr. Kenneth Livingstone and the Minister for Local Government. Mr. Livingstone has had the guts to admit to the words quoted against him and the honesty to say that he has changed his mind. Not so the Minister. In a display of the political frights, more craven than any I have ever witnessed in the House, the Minister sought yesterday to set the record straight by asking us to believe that in that pamphlet, in which he is clearly marked not only as a joint author, but as the single publisher, the sections of which we complain were written not by him, but by one of his co-authors.

Perhaps they were drafted by someone else, but is the right hon. Gentleman asking us to believe that he disagreed with those sentiments? If so, where is the exclusion to that effect in the pamphlet? Where, in all the right hon. Gentleman's self-serving publicity, was there a footnote to say that, although he put the pamphlet together and led the publicity, he profoundly disagreed with one of its central sections?

There are other things which the right hon. Gentleman has no doubt never written. I dare say he never wrote of the GLC:

"It has progressive and expanding programmes, it is making life better for Londoners, and it will make it infinitely better for Londoners in the 1970s and the 1980s."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 1971; Vol. 813, c. 1741.]

He said that when he sponsored the Greater London Council (Money) Bill, and piloted it through the House.

The right hon. Gentleman expects us to believe his claim, made on BBC's "Today" programme on Radio 4 the day after the GLC by-election. He said:

"I believe and have always believed in the abolition of the GLC consistently since I represented London back in the 1960s."

The right hon. Gentleman does not know what "consistently" means. The words which I quoted were not an aberration, nor a momentary brainstorm in a political career which was otherwise unsullied by support for the GLC. In speech after speech, year after year, while he sought to ingratiate himself with the previous leadership of the Tory party, he supported the GLC.

When the right hon. Gentleman moved the Second Reading of the Greater London Council (Money) Bill, he applauded the doubling of the GLC's capital expenditure. He said:

"however concerned the Conservative party . . . are about . . . the rise in public expenditure, how important it is to spend sums of this sort in the centre of our cities to maintain and improve the basic public services."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 1971; Vol. 818, c. 303.]

He did not stop in the early 1970s. In a lengthy speech he concluded:

"That is why the Conservative Party in London wants the opportunity to have a GLC election this year."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1976; Vol. 904, c. 1364.]

The right hon. Gentleman—he will not be right hon. for much longer—has complained outside the House and in a few minutes will undoubtedly complain in the House about the excellent initiatives of the GLC to fight unemployment in London. He has complained about the Greater London enterprise board and the work of the GLC.

How different it used to be! The right hon. Gentleman did not complain about the initiatives on unemployment by the GLC, but said:

"the recent conference was the first GLC initiative on unemployment matters—and it was taken by the Conservative-controlled council under Mr. Cutler and Mr. Brew."—[*Official Report*, 1 August 1978; Vol. 955, c. 391.]

It would have been wiser of him to follow the advice which he gave the House when he said:

"We should resist the imposition of new taxes and new systems of government."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1975; Vol. 886, c. 715.]

The right hon. Gentleman is a self-proclaimed compiler of anthologies and a writer of doggerel verse. He has written two volumes on the subject. However, one poem is strangely missing from the collection, considering it provided him with the guiding light, the political inspiration and the moral framework for his career. I speak of the "Vicar of Bray", of whom it is written:

"old principles I did revoke
set conscience at a distance."

The right hon. Gentleman should perhaps have tried his hand at updating that excellent and still contemporary work, as follows:

"For in my faith and loyalty,
I never once will falter
But Margaret my lawful leader be
Except the times will alter
And this is law I will maintain
Unto my dying day, sir:
That whosoever leader be,
I'll still be Minister Baker."

This measure is without principle or conviction, brought in by men without principles or convictions. It has been damned by the Conservative party's friends as well as by its enemies. It flies in the face of the century-old Conservative tradition in favour of local government. It is undemocratic and it centralises power. It will undermine vital services and cost money and jobs. We oppose it today and we shall oppose it at every turn. We invite Conservative Members to join us in the Lobby to vote against it.

9.30 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): This has been a good debate. I have listened to every one of the 59 speeches yesterday and today. If the debate had a wider audience, I believe that the House could be proud of the standard of debate and the quality of the speeches.

I appreciate that in the course of the debate the collective works of K. Baker have been dipped into fairly frequently. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) for his reference yesterday to my anthology of verse,

"I Have No Gun But I Can Spit",

copies of which are still available in bookshops at £2·95. I am sorry that no mention was made of "London Lines", my anthology of the poetry and songs of London over the years, which shows above all else that one can love London without loving the GLC.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made some play of words that I have uttered about the GLC in the past. Many Conservatives had hopes of the GLC, which the past 20 years have proved ill-founded. As several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, there

[Mr. Kenneth Baker]

has been a growing realisation that our aspirations for the GLC have not been met. I shall deal with that aspect later in my speech, with particular reference to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath).

I wish first to deal with two points about staffing. The hon. Member for Copeland, the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) and the hon. Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett) all asked about the position of staff after abolition. I am very conscious of the anxiety felt by staff likely to be affected. That is why I have placed in the Library a paper spelling out in some detail how the transfer of functions will affect GLC and MCC staff. I will outline the procedure very briefly, but I hope that hon. Members will read the paper in the Library.

Most staff will obtain jobs in the new structure. The great majority of operational staff required by the new joint authorities and the new Inner London Education Authority will be transferred by order on abolition day with no change in their terms and conditions of service but merely a new employer. Other staff will be needed by the boroughs and districts and by the residuary bodies, which will recruit them. It is important to note that those bodies will recruit within ring fencing procedures devised by the staff commission to give GLC and MCC staff the first chance of such jobs. Most staff will have continuity of service for pension and other purposes and if individuals have to accept lower-paid jobs they will receive appropriate compensation.

There will be some genuine redundancies. We estimate that about 7,000 fewer jobs will be available in the new structure. Compensation on terms outlined in the paper that I have issued will be paid by the residuary body. To date, the unions and associations have declined to talk to us, despite the fact that their members need to know where they stand. We have put our cards on the table and I urge them to reconsider their attitude. As my right hon. Friend has already done, I also urge them to talk to the staff commission, which exists to safeguard their members' interests.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister say why he has rejected the proposal acceptable to the present Secretary of State for Defence on housing transfer orders in 1982, when the Crombie code was in force? He has rejected it, and so can offer staff far less than they were given then.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my next point. We have not finally decided on the terms for compensation for redundancy. However, we have set out in the recently issued paper called "Staffing the New Structure" what we propose that they might be. The basis of the compensation terms will be the existing day-to-day arrangements prescribed in current regulations that apply to redundancies in local government. Local authorities have powers at their discretion to enhance the compensation payable under the statutory redundancy payments scheme. They are permitted to waive the upper earnings limit for the purpose of calculating the lump sum payments, and they have discretion to award added years for the calculation of pension. We propose to prescribe in regulations that for those made redundant by abolition these hitherto discretionary elements will be available to everybody. We are also prepared to consider some special further enhancement for those in the 41 to 49 age group. What we propose is not out of line with the comparable public service arrangements generally. We have yet to determine the terms for compensation for detriment—that is to say, the lump sum compensation payable to ex-GLC or ex-MCC staff moving to lower-paid jobs in local government after abolition. These are matters that we wish to discuss with the unions and the staff associations before taking final decisions.

There are four criticisms in the amendment moved by the official Opposition. I have dealt with one of them—that dealing with the staff side. Another has been raised by many hon. Members on both sides of the House. It relates to the centralising powers that hon. Members have claimed lie within the Bill. The point was raised by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). They focused on two clauses—clauses 80 and 93. I shall deal first with clause 80. As the hon. Member for Blackburn correctly said, the clause creates a system of manpower controls for the joint authorities and ILEA for the first three years. The controls are therefore transitional. The clause allows the Secretary of State to impose manpower ceilings on those authorities, and it has been criticised as interfering with the activities of the joint authorities.

Some of those who have criticised the clause have been inconsistent, in that they have been among those who have said that the Bill would result in a great expansion of local authority manpower. We introduced the clause to ensure that there is no such expansion. There was a very large expansion of local authority manpower, following the passage of the 1972 Act, in town hall jobs. We do not intend to allow that to happen this time. Yesterday there was much talk from the Opposition about councils and the rights of councillors, but no mention was made of the ratepayers. At the end of the day, the ratepayers will have to face the bill if there is a substantial expansion of manpower. We are not prepared to allow that.

Mr. Straw: Would the right hon. Gentleman not agree that clause 80 does not just give the Secretary of State power to control manpower—objectionable though that is—but also gives him power to control the authority's arrangements for obtaining any services, supplies or facilities? The Secretary of State could order from whom supplies were to be taken. He could order privatisation.

Secondly, the Bill gives the Secretary of State power to provide regulations relating to an authority's organisation and its arrangements for managing its affairs. In other words, it gives the Secretary of State power completely to control the organisation of local authorities.

Mr. Baker: The clauses to which the hon. Gentleman has referred must be read in the context of clause 81, which establishes the full scheme for manpower control. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that this control should be taken out of the Bill, the result would be a substantial increase in the manpower of joint authorities, the bill for which would have to be met by ratepayers.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) and others who asked about clause 93 have failed to see how the power can be used. It is alleged that Ministers could use the power, and the order-making powers given by clause 93, to take over county

council functions or lower tier functions. Clause 93 is more or less identical to section 84 of the 1963 Act and section 254 of the 1972 Act. Nobody regarded the provisions then as sinister implements for making major changes behind the back of Parliament. Moreover, clause 93 is for incidental, consequential, transitional or supplementary purposes. It is also for the general or particular purposes of the Bill. Therefore, any order under clause 93 has to pass both of those tests. The Bill provides the framework, which cannot be altered under clause 93. I must emphasise that to dispel misunderstanding. Clause 93 can be used only to implement what Parliament approves.

I shall illustrate that point as the powers are, for the most part, minor and transitional. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham was Secretary of State for the Environment from 1972 to 1974 and had these powers at his disposal. They were used after the 1974 reorganisation for such things as the appointments made by the local authorities to the Chichester Harbour conservancy and the court of the University of Hull. One order was laid to dissolve the Osgoldcross joint cremation board, which had no place in the new structure. I shall give another riveting example of the powers which were used by Socialist Ministers, as they laid certain orders under these powers. One provided that for:

"The Rural District Council of Chipping Sodbury and the Parish Meetings of Chipping Sodbury, Old Sodbury and Little Sodbury",

there shall be substituted

"The District Council of Northavon and the Parish Meetings of Sodbury"

—*[Interruption.]* I can only tell those who have expressed anxieties about the powers conferred by clause 93 that the examples that I have given do not represent a powerful attack on local democracy. They are incidental and consequential.

Mr. Leighton: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain the principles and philosophy of the Bill and not hide behind details about Chipping Sodbury?

Mr. Baker: I am trying to answer the debate. Several right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have argued that we are taking enormous and sweeping powers. My argument is that we are taking powers that are no more wide and sweeping than were provided by local government legislation in 1963 and 1972. These well precedented provisions are not about altering the main destination of functions or changing the principles in the Bill.

Mr. Rippon: I said that it was not just a question of the powers in clause 80 or clause 93, but of a whole host of other provisions, to which *The Times* referred yesterday, including clause 59 (4) which says:

"The Secretary of State may by order confer on a residuary body any statutory functions which before the abolition date were exercisable by the Greater London Council or a metropolitan county council"

Those are very wide powers.

Mr. Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend has held office as Secretary of State for the Environment, and he must appreciate that nearly all local government legislation must be framed with order-making powers to transfer functions and responsibilities or properties. This is how it has always been done. My right hon. and learned Friend exercised those powers when he was Secretary of State.

There have been claims that there is a centralising force in this legislation. However, the purpose of the Bill is to devolve responsibilities. Reference has been made to the fact that about 5 per cent. of the GLC expenditure is going to statutory bodies such as the Sports Council and the Arts Council. I confirm those figures as correct. Last night, the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) made an interesting and amusing speech about the Arts Council and said that it should not have new powers. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Silvester) welcomed the fact that the Arts Council in Manchester was taking over responsibility for the Hallé orchestra. I am sure that, for Londoners, the south bank complex is safer in the hands of the Arts Council than with the GLC arts committee.

There have been arguments that we are devolving little to the lower tiers, but I remind Labour Members how much we are devolving to the lower tier in the metropolitan districts. Responsibilities for the following things will now be carried out by the metropolitan districts: airports, archaeology, archives, arts, assistance to industry, civil defence, coroners, county analysts, emergencies, green belt, gipsies, highways, land drainage, local valuation panels, maps, rights of way, museums and galleries, planning, probation service, recreation service, registration of commons, rent officer service, road safety, safety of reservoirs, safety of sports grounds, school crossing patrols, supplies, sport, trading standards, traffic management and waste disposal.

Mr. Wareing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me I shall not give way, as I am about to move on to the GLC and the points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup.

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Very well.

Mr. Wareing: I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. He has given that long list, but will he confirm that only 15 per cent. of the expenditure of the Merseyside county council will go directly to the five district councils, which comes out at about 3 to 4 per cent. for each district council? That is the total.

Mr. Baker: I read out the list of responsibilities that will be transferred from the Merseyside county council, and the individual district councils in Merseyside will be responsible for the funding of those responsibilities, the joint boards and the residual debt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) spoke about a possible London Grand Committee.

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Mr. Baker: My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup dismissed this too lightly. The idea of the Committee stands apart from this legislation, and there is a general dissatisfaction——

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Mr. Baker: —over the way London matters are being debated in the House. London Members on both sides of the House will agree on one thing—that the way that the House debates these matters is unsatisfactory.

Mr. Heffer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: With respect, no.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham has made a suggestion that should be discussed by the authorities of the House because it is essentially a matter for the House and not for the Government.

With regard to a possible successor to the GLC, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup has said in a speech today tht we shall need some sort of overall authority. He has been supported by my hon. Friends the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground). I listened carefully to what they said and to the speeches of other London Members — my hon. Friends the Members for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page), for Beckenham, for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler), for Hampstead and Highgate(Sir G. Finsberg), for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel)—all of whom said that they did not want the GLC or a directly elected successor authority.

My right hon. Friend urged me to listen to Conservative councillors on the GLC. I meet them frequently. But I also have to listen to Conservative London borough councillors. There are 41 Conservative councillors on the GLC. There are 972 Conservative borough councillors. The leaders of the 19 borough councils in London where we have control have all written to me saying clearly that they do not want the GLC or a directly elected successor. That includes the leader of the council in Bexley.

I thought that the weakest point in my right hon. Friend's speech was when he said, at the end, that we might be abolishing bodies to replace them by bodies that would fall into Socialist hands at the next election. There are 19 Conservative-controlled boroughs in Greater London, and I find his defeatism—the prospect that we might lose one of them—bitterly disappointing from a former leader of my party.

Mr. Pavitt *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I turn now to the metropolitan counties. In doing so, may I ask the hon. Member for Copeland to clarify now the Labour party policy on the metropolitan county councils? *[Interruption.]* Will the Labour party restore the metropolitan county councils or will it not?

Dr. Cunningham: Why should the right hon. Gentleman think that we are defensive about our commitment to return services to democratic control? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Why should the right hon. Gentleman think that we are defensive in not rushing into a commitment — *[Interruption.]* — to re-establish the status quo? I am not at all defensive about that. Why does the right hon. Gentleman think that, after six, seven or eight years of this Government undermining local democracy and local democratic control, we shall act in the way that they have acted and cobble together — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an intervention, not a speech.

Dr. Cunningham: I am just saying, Mr. Speaker, that we shall not write our manifesto commitments with the naked expediency of the right hon. Gentleman, who cobbled together this Bill to disguise the fact that all the people on the Treasury Bench and the Prime Minister have ratted on their commitment to abolish the rates.

Mr. Baker: All Opposition Members from the metropolitan counties who have spoken in the past two days—not the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith), who is in favour of the abolition of the Greater Manchester council—*[Interruption.]* All the Labour Members have said that they want the metropolitan counties preserved. They have been putting forward the case for the metropolitan counties. May we please have some plain words from honest Jack? Will Labour restore the metropolitan counties, or will it not? I have looked at what the hon. Member for Copeland said yesterday in *Hansard*. He just added layers of gloom. He said that he wanted to "return to democratic control, management and responsibility for services at a strategic level".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 40.]
The hon. Gentleman has the opportunity to do that in this Bill, but, as I understand it, the official position is——

Dr. Cunningham: Not only will I not rat on party policy, as the right hon. Gentleman has done, but I will not rat on former leaders of my party either. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".]

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman has not answered the question—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are only a few more minutes left to this debate, and I cannot hear what is going on.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Member for Copeland has not answered the question I put to him: what is Labour policy on the future of the metropolitan county councils? This is another example of the indecisiveness of the Labour Front Bench. Its policy on this Bill towards the metropolitan county councils is a journey into the unknown. The Labour party does not know what its policy is.

Frankly, the Labour party argument that I found most repulsive during the past few days was that this legislation would reduce democracy.

Mr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman demeans it.

Mr. Baker: I will not take lectures on democracy from the Labour party. I will not take lectures from the Labour party which, at its last party conference, would not even stand by the principle of one-man, one-vote in selecting candidates for Parliament. When Mr. Ken Livingstone stands for selection in one of the five seats that have been lined up for him by his colleagues — five Labour Members will be "dead"—it will not be on the basis of one-man, one-vote. He will, in fact, be selected by a caucus of a minority. Where is the democracy in that?

Hon. Members have asked me during the debate: what is the role for the GLC? Is there a strategic role for the GLC? I say only this to them. Over the years in the debates on the GLC everyone has been searching for a role. In fact, from 1964 the GLC lost power after power. — [HON. MEMBERS: "You have taken it away".] No. The first power was taken away by the Labour Government in 1965. What used to be the largest landlord in the Western world has now virtually no houses or flats to let.

What is the role for which Labour asks? Mr. Livingstone clearly knows what the role is. He wants the GLC to be an interventionist, economic and social

planning unit. He wants the GLC to extend itself into policies. Mr. Livingstone has a foreign policy for the GLC. He has views on Nicaragua, on South Africa and everything else. Mr Livingstone has a defence policy. He has a food policy, and has set up a food commission to advise Londoners on their vitamin intake. The GLC has created an absurd role for itself. There is no doubt that there is no real function for the GLC. It is agreed that there is no function for the metropolitan county councils. There is no doubt that we intend to take the Bill through and to abolish the councils. They will come to an end on 31 March 1986.

Mr. John Cope (Treasurer, Her Majesty's Household) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 353, Noes 221.

Division No. 33] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard

Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Don Dixon.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 354.

Division No. 34 **10.14 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey

Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 354, Noes 219.

Division No. 35] **[10.27 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony

Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John

Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Archie Hamilton.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time.

10.41 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): I beg to move,

That clause 1 be committed to a Committee of the whole House:

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee:

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.

The Bill is clearly of great interest to a great many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. Therefore, in accordance with precedent, we suggest that the main provision, which is part I of the Bill, should be taken on the Floor of the House. Clearly it is impracticable that the whole Bill should be taken on the Floor of the House, and, I would suggest, quite inappropriate that such a Bill should be referred to a Select Committee.

10.42 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I understand what the Secretary of State has said about its being inappropriate for the whole Bill to be taken on the Floor of the House. Clearly we agree that clause 1 should be taken on the Floor

of the House. However, will not the right hon. Gentleman accept that there are good arguments for clause 21, which refers to the future of the Inner London education authority, clause 40, which refers to the future of police and fire authorities which will be designated under the Rates Act 1984, clause 64 and clause 80 also being considered by a Committee of the whole House?

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order, and not a speech.

Mr. Meadowcroft: It is a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that according to Standing Order No. 42, which relates to the committal of Bills, the motions in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends cannot be voted upon or even debated. If the Secretary of State's motion is carried, only clause 1 will be taken on the Floor of the House. If that motion is defeated, the entire Bill will go to a Standing Committee. It seems strange that the Standing Orders do not permit any addition to the motion to enable us to take more than clause 1 on the Floor of the House. Should there not be some way in which the House could vote on whether it wished to take the whole Bill on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. If the House wishes to change the Standing Order, it may do so.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills):—

The House divided: Ayes 351, Noes 196.

Division No. 38] **[10.43 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Mallins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pattie, Geoffrey

Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Roel, Sir Hugh
Roet, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamble, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allan *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allen *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That clause 1 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.

Local Government Bill [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of moneys provided by Parliament of any expenses of any Minister under that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of such moneys under any other Act.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

10.57 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): We now examine the Government's claim, in the financial memorandum, that abolition of the GLC and the six metropolitan counties will save substantial sums of money. It is that aspect, as much as any other, that undermines not just the Government's case for the Bill but their good faith in putting it.

If it were merely the case that the Government's claim of savings from abolition were wrong, the charge against the Government would be one of incompetence. As it is, that claim is not merely wrong but one that no reasonable or objective person could think established. So the charge against the Government is not one of incompetence but of deception.

Anyone charting the Government's course over the Bill would form the inescapable impression that the Government decided first on abolition and second on the reasons for it. Let us consider the manifesto upon which the Government place so much reliance for their mandate. Under the banner headline,

"Local Government: saving ratepayers' money",

it was said that the metropolitan councils and the Greater London council had been shown to be a wasteful and unnecessary tier of government.

The pretence that the principal object of the legislation was to curb waste was reiterated continuously. On 15 December 1983 the Secretary of State said in a radio broadcast:

"If we have not saved very substantial sums of money after a transitional period we will have failed."

Contrast that with the parliamentary answer of 29 November 1984, sent out as a press release from the Department of the Environment, from the Minister of State. Now we are told that "savings were not the Government's primary objective in introducing this reform." What had happened during this period? During those months, the metropolitan councils and the GLC had produced detailed and incontrovertible proof that the alleged savings were manifestly a sham and could not stand up to serious analysis. The Government have consigned the savings issue to a secondary role, not through any change of mind but in the knowledge that to hold to their original explanation of the reasons for abolition would cause embarrassment even to their abnormally insensitive Ministers.

The metropolitan councils instructed Coopers and Lybrand — accountants of national and international standing—to undertake an independent investigation and analysis into the Government's claims of substantial savings. The company's report, since updated, was the product of five months' intensive work based on its research. It concluded:

"the Government's claims for substantial savings are not supported by our analysis; indeed we conclude that there are unlikely to be any net savings as a result of the structural changes . . . and there could be significant extra costs."

The GLC has produced an estimate of loss arising from abolition amounting over five years to £225 million. That sum has been broken down into its component parts. The detailed workings are available to the Government. Moreover, the GLC's director general—director of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy —has endorsed the figures with the sole caveat that they are probably too conservative an estimate of loss.

Against that information, the Government have produced precisely nothing — no detailed figures, no breakdown, no analysis, not even a whisper of anything more substantial than assertion. Against the hardheaded and uncontradicted detail of the metropolitan counties and the GLC, the Government have put nothing more persuasive before us than the credibility of the Secretary of State and the Minister for Local Government. In case the Secretary of State is in any doubt, his credibility over abolition has moved in direct and inverse proportion to his utterances. In the short time available to him, the Minister for Local Government has proved himself a compatible deputy.

A significant indication of the Government's credibility is the breach of an undertaking given to the House that a full statement of the Government's estimates would be made. The most we have is the parliamentary answer of 29 November. As a fulfilment of that undertaking, it is abject; but it is all we have. Its figures are repeated in the financial memorandum. They fall under three heads—none are identified in any detail. The first is a claim for rationalisation savings of £100 million, an amount which seems to have been chosen because it is a round figure. That £100 million turns out to be a saving resulting from axing 7,100 jobs. Only this Government could claim as a virtue for a piece of legislation the fact that it puts 7,100 people on the dole.

Nowhere is the £100 million broken down. It is not even allocated between the GLC and the metropolitan county councils, except on a half-and-half basis. The figure has been comprehensively rubbished by the Coopers and Lybrand report. Coopers and Lybrand estimates that with a high level of co-operation, the cost of the abolition of the six metropolitan counties ranges from a possible maximum saving of £4 million a year—not £100 million —to a loss of £9·5 million a year. With a limited level of co-operation, the loss will range from £36 million a year to £61 million a year. To put the figures in perspective, given an annual operating cost of £1·6 billion, the maximum saving is, at best, 0·25 per cent. and, at worst, the loss is 3·75 per cent. No contradiction of any substance of Coopers and Lybrand's findings has been made by the Government. That is despite those findings having been available since February 1984 and despite an invitation made in express terms by Coopers and Lybrand to the Government to participate in the making of that report which was refused. For its part the GLC has estimated its cost with no refutation.

Likewise, the Government admit a transitional cost of £40 million on a one-off basis. Again, no detail is given. Coopers and Lybrand, acting for the metropolitan counties, has estimated a loss of between £50 million and £240 million. The GLC estimates a loss of £65 million. Once more, there has been no rebuttal of those figures.

Finally, the written answer of 30 November goes on to deal with a curious matter called policy savings. If anything gives the lie to the Government's lack of good faith it is that. They say that

"certain early policy savings are bound to be secured."

They continue:

"Much will depend on decisions yet to be taken by those authorities."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *613*.]

Actually, nothing will depend on the decisions taken by those authorities. That is why the Government are so confident about savings. Those new authorities in their early life will have their precept set by the Secretary of State, their manpower controlled by the Secretary of State, and, in addition, under clause 80, an effective power will be vested in the Secretary of State by regulation to manage their affairs.

If those authorities were truly democratic, the Secretary of State's confidence would be simple wishful thinking. As it is, it is based on nothing more accountable than the length of his foot. On top of that, the policy savings do not in any sense stem from abolition. They will not be the consequence of abolition but of Government controls of local expenditure. On analysis, the policy savings turn out to be no more than a chilling euphemism for Government by ministerial decree. That is where the matter stands.

I repeat that no reasonable or objective person could believe that the Government have made out a case that the savings in the financial memorandum will be achieved. The debate preceeding this debunked utterly the notion that the Bill is put forward to make local government more efficient or accountable. The only other justification is cost. That, too, on examination turns out to be false.

The truth is that the Bill is incomprehensible except in the context of political vengeance by a Government who equate democracy, not with the right of people to vote but with their own divine right to rule.

The Government are seen without credit, without honour, without support of any more principled nature than that produced by the patronage of the Prime Minister and the power of the Whips. It is a tragedy for democracy that the Prime Minister has been able to find enough Ministers to put forward the Bill whose ambition has smothered their integrity.

The Prime Minister quoted Kipling recently in a speech on democracy. There are other words of Kipling that are rather more appropriate to the occasion before us. They are these:

"For undemocratic reasons and for motives not of State,
They arrive at their conclusions—largely inarticulate.
Being void of self-expression they confide their views to none;
But sometimes in a smoking room, one learns why things were done."

In the 18 months since this thing was conceived we have not yet learned the true reason why it was done. In all the Government's puff and propaganda that has surrounded the Bill we have not learned why it was done. In the debates over two days in this Chamber we have not learned it either. Some time, perhaps, we shall hear the Government confess why this thing was done. But, frankly, knowing the Government, I doubt it.

11.10 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I declare an interest as a serving member of the West Midlands county council. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is the youngest Labour Member, and I am the second youngest.

This is a political measure that has nothing to do with saving money or jobs or protecting services. It is designed to kill off seven Labour authorities with which the Government have had a political argument. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield and others have said, the Secretary of State for the Environment talked at the outset about saving money. He said that the metropolitan councils and the GLC are wasteful and unnecessary. Apparently the rules of the House do not allow me to say that that is untrue in a sharper fashion than to suggest that if there is any justice in the Secretary of State's world, his nose would be about 3 ft long.

It is not true that the metropolitan councils are wasteful. Even the claim that they might be wasteful, which the right hon. Gentleman has made, must sit uneasy on a Government and Cabinet who in the past two or three days have spent hundreds of millions of pounds in advertising, in meeting the expenses of the banks and others and in depriving 50 million others of being shareholders in British Telecom.

The Government talk about £120 million being saved by the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan councils and it might be difficult for some outside the Chamber to come to grips with that sum. If £120 million were spent in a large city on bricks and mortar, it would provide a large new general hospital and half a dozen schools. There would be enough small change left over for 1,000 new council houses. Even if the Government's claim of a saving of £120 million has any validity, it is strange that in the past nine months the same Government have spent £4,500 million trying to defeat the miners. That sum could provide 40 cities with a new general hospital each, schools and council houses.

The Government's argument cuts no ice. Their central point of attack, of saving money by abolition, is one that they have been unable to sustain. In recent days the Government have spoken about an annual saving of £50 million. That will be achieved only by the abolition of over 7,000 jobs. Coopers and Lybrand, that renowned firm of chartered accountants which has been mentioned more than once in the past two days, has estimated that the real cost of abolition could be up to £69 million a year. There is a difference between the Secretary of State's figure and Coopers and Lybrand's of £1,000 million in a decade. The Secretary of State seems to have his sums wrong by rather a large amount. That must lead us to the conclusion that the Department of the Environment has the same accountants as the National Coal Board, who are adept at frying books and not merely cooking them. Those accountants must have given similar advice to the Secretary of State as that which has been given to the Secretary of State for Energy. They have been advised to answer no questions, to give no factual information and to confuse with generalities. That is all that we have had from the Government over the past six or seven months.

A study which the Government have often quoted was concocted in the late days of April and early days of May. It was a con. It was designed to show that money would be saved. It was conducted in seven district councils out of 36 and in only three of the six metropolitan council areas that they intend to abolish. Of the seven district councils on which the estimates were based, two had withdrawn their support within days. The study was

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

completed in four working days and rushed out shortly before the May elections. It did the Conservative party no good in the west midlands. Indeed, it only lost it seats. That is the level of information and argument that we have had from the Government over the past few months to try to justify the House passing a Money Resolution to give the Secretary of State power and the necessary finance to implement the abolition Bill.

I spoke at length during the debates in May on the paving Bill—at least for longer than I shall be able to speak tonight. I illustrated then how the Bill will cost more money than the Secretary of State says it will save. I gave the example of consumer services in the west midlands. The director of consumer services has estimated in recent days that if the Bill is enacted, at least 50 per cent. more than the current expenditure of £2·6 million will be necessary to maintain the same level of services in the west midlands.

I note that one or two Tory Members are yawning. That is because there are differences between Tory Members and their offspring and Labour Members and theirs. Over the next three weeks we shall be walking round the same shops looking for toys to give to our kids at Christmas. One of the protections in the west midlands is a central regional service which investigates examples of shoddy toys. In the past year alone, that department has caused 22,000 visits to be made to trade establishments, resulting in the finding of 6,500 infringements of safety and other legislation. Such things as kids' toys are affected.

If the Bill is enacted and the consumer services are split up between the seven district councils in the west midlands, that same level of penetration — *[Interruption.]*—and investigation into safety legislation will not be possible. That may amuse Conservative Members and their kids. If they shop in Harrods perhaps they do not have to worry so much about safety. But some of the back-street shops in the west midlands and elsewhere need an efficient consumer organisation that can check up on safety legislation.

I shall turn briefly to another aspect of the county council's abolition as it will affect my constituents, and the west midlands as a whole. In the past five months we have had one example of the Government taking more central control of transport. They took over what is now called London Regional Transport. In the past five months, we have had an example of what will happen to the transport authorities in the six other metropolitan county councils after abolition and the setting up of joint boards. Only five months after the Government took direct control, London Regional Transport has a proposal to increase fares by 25 per cent. That is what will happen. According to all the studies, in the west midlands only 20 per cent. of the services will go back to the districts, and 80 per cent. will come under more central Government control or under the joint boards, which will have their targets and penalties set by the Government.

The west midlands needs a regional and strategic authority that is elected and accountable, and capable of tackling the massive social problems that arise from the unemployment and poverty in our area. One third of all families in the west midlands are on, or below, the poverty line. We have the worst long-term rates of unemployment in the country. We need a massive increase in public works, housing, rail, buses, hospitals and schools but instead, if the Government continue on their course after abolition, we shall get cuts that will not be alleviated by the minimal level of regional assistance that the Government announced last week.

In the past fortnight, I have had hundreds of contacts with constituents and members of the public in Coventry, particularly on the subject of transport. This afternoon the Secretary of State for Transport derided those who predicted dire consequences for transport after the Bill is enacted. In our passenger transport area we have a three-year plan that will culminate in 1986-87. It provides for revenue support of £42 million and for concessionary fare support for the elderly of £26 million. That growth in revenue support is at least at variance with the growth outlined in the Government's proposal to cut protected expenditure limits by 25 per cent. over the next three years. That "proposal" for joint boards of transport authorities will be not a proposal but an instruction to the boards to cut that expenditure by 25 per cent. over the next three years. That will mean reducing concessionary fare support for the elderly in the west midlands from £26 million to £9 million.

The present concessionary scheme in the west midlands will not be able to continue. The results will be simple. There will either be a rise in fares or a cut in services, with a consequent loss of jobs. The existence of special services for the hospitals and the disabled will be under threat. But at the top of the list will be the most loss-making route in the whole of the west midlands. It is in Coventry and is called the Coventry Easyrider route.—*[Laughter.]* That is right—joke about it. Come on—laugh a bit more. Conservative Members should realise that it is a special bus that has been converted to take to town disabled people who would otherwise be locked in their houses and on their estates. It allows them to go shopping. But that route will be at the top of the hit list of a joint board whose fares subsidy has been cut by this Government.

But of course, that is what we would expect from a Secretary of State for Transport who wrote the Tory policy in 1978 and not only attacked the miners, but was the author of the disgraceful cut that involved increasing the disregard for £15 to £16 and thus reducing the amount of benefit paid to the families of those who go on strike.

A Government who would cut 50p to £1 from 200,000 single parents, from unemployed men between the ages of 60 and 65, from pensioners between the ages of 70 and 85, and from the blind, the disabled and the families of striking miners would have no compunction about cutting expenditure support from joint boards of transport authorities and seeing the end of pensioners' passes.

That will not go through as easily as the Secretary of State thinks. If the Bill and the resolution are not defeated in the House this evening or in Committee, the Bill will be frustrated in the country when the Secretary of State tries to operate it.

Ministers asked what Labour's policy was on the metropolitan county councils. I shall leave the House with the two clauses from the Labour party conference at Blackpool this year. The Labour party conference resolved "to conduct a campaign in May 1985 in those areas to be deprived of a vote to bring home to the electorate the Tories' undemocratic, unjustified and bigoted policies."

I shall play my part in that campaign. In five months' time, at the termination of my term of office in May 1985 with the other two county councillors from Coventry, South-East Labour party, I shall resign my seat. That

Labour party, although it will not select me to fight as a county councillor in May, will fight that election in the west midlands and expose everything that the Government have tried to do.

When the Government ask what Labour's policies will be towards the metropolitan councils when it returns to office, the answer is a single sentence: the Labour party conference

"calls on the next Labour Government to establish that an elected tier of government controls regional services."

The next Labour Government will do that. The Government's intentions and hopes will be frustrated and defeated by the working people of this country.

12.21 am

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): It is always interesting to follow the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), who seems to make a parade out of pouring vinegar on to the chip on his shoulder.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What a silly thing to say.

Mr. Conway: It may be a silly thing to say, but that is an interesting challenge coming from a public school boy on the Opposition Benches. What the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East forgets when he is trying to champion the working class is that not everyone on the Conservative Benches shops at Harrods for Christmas. Many Conservative Members come from working class homes and benefited greatly from that background.

We do not need the shouts of Opposition public school failures to tell us what this legislation will mean to people who live in urban areas.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) asked at the end of his poetry, "Why was it done?" I, unfortunately, could not support the Government over the paving Bill. I thought that it was wrong to bring it in and that it was brought in at the wrong time. Before I came to the House, when I led 44 Tory metropolitan county councillors in the north of England in 1981, I warned the policy and resources committee of Tyne and Wear county council that it was facing a short future. That was not just because of the rumblings in the Conservative party about the excesses of metropolitan county councils and GLC spending but because of the rumblings from the Labour-controlled metropolitan borough councils within those areas.

Time after time, one would attend joint committees of the Labour-controlled borough councils and the county councils, and there was a constant stream of niggling. The metropolitan borough councils' campaign to do away with the metropolitan councils was in some ways effective. This is by no means one-sided action by the Conservatives. The knife in the back has been skilfully placed by Labour councillors in the metropolitan boroughs, and it is they whom the metropolitan county Labour councillors must blame for a lack of support and for their demise.

Initially, it could be argued that the metropolitan county councils had a job to do. It was a Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment who urged them to get on with their structure plans. When they were doing that, perhaps with some degree of political naivety, they did not realise the excessive amount of financial expenditure that would be involved. The metropolitan county council on which I served put its completed structure plan to the Secretary of State for the Environment for approval. It retained the 26 members of that structure plan team to give advice on regional policy. The expansion of the consumer departments was carried out, admittedly at the behest of Parliament, when a Labour Government were in power. That increased expenditure.

Another matter that forced a conflict between the metropolitan borough councils and the metropolitan county councils was economic development. I feel, having served and worked with Labour councillors on economic development committees and on the regional promotional body, that it is by no means a sour political arena. There was a great deal of concurrence in the north of England about the need to take action. At that time the Tyne and Wear county council played a valuable and leading role and has a record of which it can be proud. But it then deteriorated into a farce, because economic development was not covered in local government legislation. The county council took it upon itself, because of its resources, to lead the way. Labour councillors, jealous of what the metropolitan councils were up to, said that they were going to get their fingers in the pot, too. This went on to the point where even the parish councils were getting in on the act of economic development. It deteriorated from a noble idea to a municipal farce.

The constituency of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), who I see is here tonight, was one of the first I visited as a member of the highways committee, believing myself to have been elected to a strategic authority concerning itself with strategic highway matters. We visited Houghton-le-Spring to view a traffic island that was causing problems outside the post office. It was a genuine problem that needed attention, but whether it needed the attention of what was supposed to be a strategic authority one very much doubts. Perhaps the downfall of the metropolitan county councils was embedded in their inception.

There were too many members of the county council ever to make it work. They were not sure what to do and they had to look for jobs to do. This does not mean that the record of the metropolitan counties must stand as a failure. I do not believe that to be the case. I am proud to have been associated with them. There were very many good, hard-working Labour councillors, as well as those of my own party who served on the metropolitan county council, where I led the Conservative group. Sadly, however, in the past year local government has brought itself into disgrace and declined because of its expenditure upon trying to save itself. It has put the cost of advertising on the rates, a matter which is not to be tackled in the Bill. I believe that it would make a considerable difference to the financial memorandum, were it to be tackled. But the metropolitan borough councils are determined to proceed along the political propaganda route that has been set out for them by the GLC and the metropolitan county councils.

I believe that it is an issue that will come back to the Floor of the House. Political propaganda on the rates should be on a very short fuse. Despite what the hon. Member for Sedgefield said in his poetic opening of this discussion, the financial memorandum will no doubt be considered in great detail. When that consideration occurs the proof of the pudding will indeed be in the eating. It will show that savings will result from the legislation.

11.29 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I wish to state why I shall oppose the money resolution. This Bill ought to be defeated. The Secretary of State for the Environment said yesterday:

"The central purpose of the Bill is to provide a more local and a more accountable system of local government in London and the metropolitan counties. People in these areas will have only one local council to deal with. They will look to their local councillors to deal with complaints and queries".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 67, c. 35.]

I have lived in the village of Maltby in south Yorkshire for nearly 30 years. Before the reorganisation of local government in 1974, the Maltby urban district council had 15 councillors from the village whom people could consult on local matters. There was also one councillor on the old West Riding council. There has always been a dual-authority system in the present south Yorkshire area. The idea of a unitary authority never arose until the election of the present Government.

Since the 1974 reorganisation, Maltby has three councillors on the Rotherham metropolitan council and one on the South Yorkshire county council. When the village had an urban district council, its population was about 14,000. Now, it is over 20,000.

As a result of the Bill, Maltby will have only three councillors. I cannot see how people in that village will have more contact with local councillors if 25 per cent. of their representation on councils is to be cut.

The Secretary of State may say that some areas have parish councils—there are some in my constituency—or town councils. But he spoke of local councillors taking decisions that would be relevant to local people, and only the South Yorkshire county council and the Rotherham metropolitan council in my constituency have any real decision-making powers. A cut in council representation in the communities that I represent will weaken the links between councillors and local people.

I received a letter yesterday from a Mr. Wilson who lives in Aston in my constituency. I should add that I have never met Mr. Wilson. He wrote:

"As a professional civil engineer I am used to arriving at decisions through reasoned and logical argument. I have looked high and low through the various pronouncements put out publicly by the Government to find such arguments to support the proposed Abolition. To me none are apparent that hold more than a teaspoonful of water and I presume it is merely an act of political pique pushed by a stubborn, unthinking, uncaring executive!"

I could not have put it better.

No public inquiry has been conducted into the disputed allegations that the Bill will save money for the ratepayers of South Yorkshire county council or anywhere else. Until that inquiry takes place—the county councils favour such an inquiry; they do not claim to be perfect—it is indeed unthinking and uncaring of the Government to push the Bill through Parliament.

11.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): The opening speech by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was his maiden speech from the Opposition Dispatch Box, and I am sure that I speak on behalf of the whole House when I say that the hon. Gentleman spoke with confidence and authority.

I do not agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said and it is worth reminding him that the House gave the Bill a Second Reading by a majority of 135—comfortably in excess of any majority that Labour Governments have achieved for their measures of social reform in the past 30 or 40 years.

Some of the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of Ministers in my Departments were aimed as much at Conservative Members who support the Bill, and I think that many of them will resent what he said.

This major piece of legislation has necessarily to deal with a number of local government functions that are exercised under a range of powers in many Acts

There will be savings for ratepayers resulting largely from the reduction of bureaucracy, but this is not the occasion to debate that side of the coin, because the money resolution relates only to the financial implications for moneys voted by Parliament. In practice, that mostly means grants of one kind or another paid from Votes to the local authorities involved.

The Bill gives rise to expenditure from Votes in a small number of cases. These include, first, an increased share of the expenses of the Museum of London. Clause 41 provides for the Secretary of State to meet two thirds of the expenses of the museum, instead of one third. Effectively, the Secretary of State will take over the share previously paid by the GLC. Secondly, they include the expenses of any new trustee body for metropolitan museums set up under clause 44.

Thirdly, clause 60 gives power to commute into capital payments certain, previously regular, small payments made to the expiring authorities in relation to smallholdings and certain housing functions. Fourthly, the expenses of the London planning commission to be established under schedule 1 will be met out of moneys voted by Parliament.

In some other cases there are changes in the expenses falling on Votes as a result of amendments being made to existing legislation. Generally, these involve grant becoming payable to successor authorities in place of the abolished authorities.

I shall deal with changes in block grant arrangements. First, clause 65 brings the new joint authorities and the new Inner London education authority into the block grant regime as direct recipients of block grant. Secondly, clause 11 provides for grant towards the expenses of magistrates courts committees in outer London to be paid to the borough councils, rather than to the GLC. Again, there is nothing in the Bill to change the total amount of grant.

Thirdly, under schedule 3, national parks grants will in future be paid to metropolitan district councils instead of to the county councils. Fourthly, schedule 11 provides that police grant shall be payable to the Northumbrian police authority, which is reconstituted by the Bill.

Finally, schedule 14 applies to the new joint authorities and the new Inner London education authority, the legislation which enables grants to be paid to authorities in urban areas with special social problems and to authorities with high-concentrations of immigrant population.

In all those cases, there is nothing in the Bill which will directly affect the total amount of grant being paid to local authorities. It is simply that the recipient authority will change.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) intervened. I took the precaution of having two copies of my speech made, just in case he became aroused.

He threatened the House with a by-election for the West Midlands county council next May. Before he does so, I urge him to recall that on 15 November there was a by-election for the county council. The Conservative candidate stood on the ticket of scrapping the county council and won with a 5 per cent. swing.

I have no doubt that the Coopers and Lybrand report, which the hon. Member for Sedgefield mentioned, was a professional job. However, the report was carried out for the metropolitan county councils. Actual savings will depend on decisions by the districts and other successor authorities, not only on the joint boards, as the hon. Gentleman implied.

Mr. Blair *rose——*

Sir George Young: It was agreed that there was scope for savings if there was co-operation. There are oddities in the report's figures. No figures of savings from highways are postulated, but we expect substantial savings from removing duplication.

Mr. Blair *rose——*

Sir George Young: I have tried to let a large number of hon. Members intervene in the debate by reducing to a minimum the time for the Government to speak on the money resolution. There have been only two speeches from Conservative Members.

In the explanatory and financial memorandum, we have set out our best estimates that savings from abolition will be about £100 million a year after transitional costs. They will come from rationalisation — from eliminating an entire tier of government and the accompanying duplication. That is not all. The GLC and metropolitan county councils are planning an overspend this year of £432 million. No one can believe that savings cannot be made from that enormous sum. I have to emphasise that savings will depend on how the boroughs and districts decide to discharge the responsibilities and functions devolved to them.

At the end of the day, what matters is not who can spend most on expensive propaganda campaigns or who can recruit the most expensive firm of accountants to try to forecast the future, nor on who said what, at which column of *Hansard* and when. Those matters may be of great importance inside the House, but they are a matter of enormous indifference outside. In the real world, two things will determine the real answer to today's debate — what happens to services and what happens to the rates. With regard to services, I am confident that most members of the public simply will not notice that the top tier authorities have disappeared. As for rates, I am confident that they will be lower than they would otherwise have been. That is the commitment that Ministers have to deliver and I am confident that we can do so.

In three years' time the rash commitments that Labour Members have made about exhuming the dinosaurs and putting them on a life support machine will be a source of grave embarrassment to them and to their party because people will have seen that those bodies were irrelevant, unnecessary and extravagant and a party that pledges to bring them back will have disastrous election results. For that reason, I hope that the House will support the money resolution.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): We still have not had an answer on one aspect of this. We understand from the Secretary of State and the Home Office that extra civil servants will be required to control the police expenditure of the new joint authorities. That is not a normal practice. Indeed, it is a most unusual practice. Is that accounted for in the money resolution?

Sir George Young: Under part IV, the financial effects of the Bill include precisely those considerations and subsume the manpower implications for the Government and for the local authorities concerned. The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is in the Bill.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister tell us, as his colleague failed to do so earlier, the exact cost of making staff redundant as the Bill proposes and how he intends to safeguard the career prospects of those refused re-employment by any of the new authorities——

It being three-quarters of an hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted Business).*

The House divided: Ayes 333, Noes 188.

Division No. 37] **[11.43 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy

Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
McCrindle, Robert
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. John Major.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald

Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Don Dixon.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of moneys provided by Parliament of any expenses of any Minister under that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of such moneys under any other Act.

Railway Accident (Salford)

11.54 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about today's railway accident.

The accident occurred at 10.45 this morning. The 10.5 am Liverpool to Scarborough passenger train, which consisted of a diesel locomotive and seven coaches, ran into the back of a stationary oil tank train about half a mile on the Manchester side of Eccles station, Salford. The locomotive and the first two coaches of the passenger train were derailed, as were a number of the oil tank wagons. Spilt gas oil from the tank wagons caught fire.

The local signalman was able to stop other trains from approaching. The emergency services were quickly on the scene. Traffic on the M602 motorway, which runs immediately adjacent to the railway, was stopped and, as a precaution, residents were evacuated from about 30 of the surrounding houses.

An inspecting officer of railways has reported from the site. Our latest information is that the driver of the passenger train died in the crash and that one passenger has since died in hospital. A total of 67 passengers and railway staff were taken to hospital, of whom five are detained with serious injuries. I am sure that the House will wish to join me in expressing condolences to the relatives and friends of those who were so tragically killed, and our good wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured.

There will be a formal inquiry into the accident and the report will be published. Meanwhile, it would be wrong to speculate on the cause of the accident.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): On behalf of the official Opposition, I join the right hon. Gentleman in expressing our condolences to the relatives and friends of those injured.

Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on British Rail's safety record in 1984? If my calculations are correct, there have so far this year been no fewer than six fairly serious accidents involving passenger trains, and a total of 18 passengers have been killed in moving traffic accidents. Has he any information about the signalling system on this stretch of line? Was it signalled by modern colour light signals, and was British Rail's automatic warning system in force? Does he know whether British Rail plans to amend its automatic warning system so that the driver of any train using such a system will have some aid in differentiating between a signal showing caution and a signal showing failure?

Mr. Ridley: It would be better to judge the accident record of British Rail in relation to the details of each accident that has occurred, when the results of the inquiries have been published. To draw conclusions from global figures might be misleading, and the House would be wise to await the answers about the details of the accident, the signalling and what happened on this occasion, about which the hon. Gentleman asked, until the inquiry has been completed and published.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): I join my right hon. Friend in his expressions of sympathy to the bereaved and to those who have sustained injury in this tragic accident. I also congratulate the emergency services on their prompt action, and the hospital services, particularly Park hospital in my constituency.

[Mr. Churchill]

Would it be possible, even outside the scope of the inquiry, for my right hon. Friend to undertake to ensure that consideration is given to the possibility, whenever volatile chemicals are being carried on the railways, of having two empty buffer cars at the end of each train, and one interposed between the engine and the first of the chemical tankers? In this case, if the train had been made up in that way, there might not have been an explosion of flammable liquid.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with him about the splendid work that the emergency services and hospitals have done today. I am sure that the House would like to pay tribute to their response to this tragic accident.

Before the accident, the Health and Safety Commission was setting up an inquiry into the transport of dangerous goods by rail, which would include the question of the fuel oil involved in this accident. I think that in making its recommendations the inquiry will see what lessons can be learnt from this accident.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): As the Member of Parliament in whose constituency this tragic accident took place, I express my deep regret at the loss of life and injury involved.

The hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) asked about barrier wagons. Can the Secretary of State say whether such wagons are still in use on trains carrying dangerous cargo? If a change in practice has taken place, when did it start?

The inspecting officer, in his report for 1981, raised the question of restraints on public expenditure which may have an effect on rail safety. Will the inquiry consider that important aspect?

Mr. Ridley: I am not able to say when any change in the regulations concerning barrier wagons came into force, but I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman with the information that he seeks.

I do not think that anything can be deduced from the inspector's report to suggest that the safety of the railway system has been impaired. I am certain that British Rail would not accept financial targets which involved any impairment. I recommend the right hon. Gentleman to study the inquiry reports, when they are published, into each of the recent regrettable and sad accidents on the railway before coming to any conclusions about the causes.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): In echoing the words of sympathy from hon. Members, may I say that I hope it will not be inappropriate to mention the signalman, who appears to have done a great deal to prevent a serious accident in this instance.

I hope it will not be inappropriate to ask my right hon. Friend to point out to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)—who I am sure did not intend to imply that British Rail had a bad safety record—that, if there have been 18 fatalities on British Rail this year, it roughly equates to the number of people killed every day on our roads.

As Parliament, quite properly, has for generations laid safety requirements upon the railways, is it not therefore also incumbent on us to will the financial means to enable British Rail to employ the most up-to-date and modern safety equipment that man can devise?

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend that the local signalman did a great job this morning, as I mentioned in my original statement. I should like to pay tribute to him.

I would counsel my hon. Friend against drawing conclusions from tragic accidents without knowing the cause. One of the regrettable factors is that it takes a very long time before the inquiries can be properly conducted and their reports published. I have asked whether the reports can be printed and published a little earlier so that hon. Members may know the full facts. I strongly urge my hon. Friend to wait and see what were the causes of the accidents before jumping to conclusions.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Tribute has rightly been paid to the emergency services and their role after this grievous accident. By all accounts they were superb. Can we be assured that none of the impending further cuts in local public spending will affect the efficiency of those services?

Mr. Ridley: I feel that that is intruding a wrong note into this tragic occasion, particularly when the emergency services have behaved so remarkably well. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not give that impression or make that slightly unworthy suggestion on an occasion of some solemnity and sadness.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I join with those hon. Members who have expressed sympathy. Is my right hon. Friend aware that more than 300 people have been killed and injured in railway accidents this year—the worst year for fatal accidents since 1975? Will my right hon. Friend ask British Rail to carry out an urgent review of safety procedures?

Mr. Ridley: I would not entirely accept my hon. Friend's figures without checking exactly what period he took, but I do not believe that there is anything statistically unusual about the record of accidents so far this year compared with the record in past years. I think that there have been statistically worse years than this year. Careful inquiries are made of each accident by careful, professional and impartial railway inspectorate staff and a report is published. We must collate the information that is published in those reports before ascribing the accidents to one cause or another. That would be the wise course for the House to follow on this occasion.

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): I should like to associate myself with the remarks by the Secretary of State about extending sympathy to the bereaved and wishing the injured a speedy recovery. Because I know the site at the edge of my constituency, I believe that, had the emergency services not worked efficiently, this could have been a major horrific tragedy. It would have involved damage to the railway line, the roadway, the urban area and the population within that area. For that reason, and because the hospitals worked quickly, I should like the Secretary of State to insist that the inquiry takes great care to consider the effect of moving dangerous loads through urban areas.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. There will be an inquiry into the causes of this accident. At the same time, a committee is being set up by the Health and Safety Commission to inquire into

the general question of the safety of the transport of dangerous goods by rail. That inquiry will surely include consideration of this accident in its studies.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): As the Member in whose constituency the driver of the passenger train resided, I associate myself with the condolences extended by the Secretary of State. I should especially like to mention my sorrow for the family of the driver, Edward Croxford, who lived in Mab lane, west Derby. On such occasions, the real responsibility of so many working men, including train drivers, is brought home to us. I understand that 300 passengers were on the train, and that imposes a huge responsibility. When talking about the pay of such people, we should always think of their responsibilities and the occupational hazards that they undergo.

I do not want to be party political on such an occasion. This is not the time or the place for that. I hope that there will be a full inquiry into not only this case but the many other tragic cases this year. If the cut in financial assistance to British Rail is found to be one of the possible causes of the accident, I should like an assurance that action will be taken to ensure that resources are available to British Rail and that proper precautions are taken.

A suggestion has been made that the facility of drivers to override signals should be examined. I should like an assurance that there will be some separation of dangerous fuels transported on railway lines from passenger trains.

Mr. Ridley: I join with the hon. Gentleman in mourning the death of the driver and in extending my condolences to his family, relations and friends.

Implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question is the suggestion that cuts in investment in the railways could be a cause of this accident. I make it clear that I do not wish to prejudge the cause of this accident. If the hon. Gentleman studies the details—I am sure that he will see the point of this—of the last few serious railway accidents and comes to the conclusion that they were nothing to do with cuts or safety records, I ask him to join with me in assuring passengers that those aspects are not a factor in these matters. I think that we can give the undertakings mutually, and I believe that that would clear up any attempt to make party political capital out of this sad matter.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): May I first and foremost thank the Minister for making the statement urgently today? May I also be identified with his expression of deepest sympathy for the deceased and the casualties? One of the deceased was, sadly, a constituent of mine and I add my deepest sympathy to his relatives.

The Minister says that there will be an urgent inquiry, but time is not on our side because of the great importance of such accidents. There is increasing concern at the growing number of accidents and I am given to understand that the shadow spokesman on transport wrote to the Minsiter on 1 August 1984 asking for an urgent inquiry into the growing number of accidents.

I do not want to pre-empt any of the judgments of the inquiry, but there is a strong feeling nowadays that there is a reduction in track maintenance and that line maintenance, once on a four or five-week cycle, has now been extended to seven or eight weeks. If that is the case, it is most serious and must be urgently reconsidered, even though we may have to pay a lot more for such maintenance.

Mr. Ridley: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. It was because of the serious nature of the accident that I sought earlier to inform the House of it and I am delighted to respond subsequently with an oral statement which can be questioned.

The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the accident might have something to do with track maintenance is, indeed, to prejudge the inquiry. I do not intend to do that. It is wrong for any hon. Member to seek to prejudge the inquiry in case a misleading impression is given to the public.

I beg the House to await the results of the inquiry before trying to infer what the causes of the accident might have been.

Mr. Cyril Smith (Rochdale): May I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the expressions of sympathy and good wishes to those who are in hospital, and, indeed, the congratulations to the emergency services on the part that they played?

Will the Minister accept that, while in no way wishing to prejudge the inquiry, some hon. Members find it reassuring to hear him say tonight that the result of this investigation and others into accidents on the railways this year will be collated? Many hon. Members would be extremely interested to learn whether there is a common factor among the number of accidents that have occurred on the railways this year.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The chief inspector of railways has recently published his annual report giving a summary and collation of the accidents. I merely urge that the House would be wise to reserve judgment as to the cause of those that have not yet been reported upon.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): May I associate myself with the expressions of sympathy? I learned with shock the news of this tragic accident in my neighbouring constituency. I offer the deepest sympathy to the families who have suffered bereavement and join hon. Members in wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

But, as has been said, train crashes appear to be occurring with frightening frequency. In this case a freight train was on the same rail as a main service passenger train. I hope that no expense and effort will be spared to find the cause and that steps will be taken to make sure that this type of accident does not occur again.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I can assure him that the inquiry will be independent and full. In my opinion, the reports that I have seen hitherto have been comprehensive and convincing. I pay tribute to the inspectorate for the painstaking, thorough and convincing task that it undertakes on these inquiries.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): As the third Salford Member, I wish to associate myself with the expressions of sympathy for the bereaved and the good wishes to those who unfortunately remain in hospital.

Will the Minister speak to the Secretary of State for Social Services about the emergency services, especially the ambulance service, which reacted superbly? My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones)

[Mr. Terry Lewis]

recently had meetings with the health authorities. They expressed the worry of many of us in the locality that there is the possibility of a major disaster that could not be coped with by the emergency services.

It seems that the most recent disaster could have been much worse. I want to make it clear that I am not criticising anyone. However, I should like an appraisal to be made of the reaction of the emergency services, especially the ambulance service. I hope that it will be carried out by the Department and that the findings will be communicated to the House.

I emphasise that I am not criticising any of the emergency services on the ground. I am certain from telephone conversations that everybody reacted remarkably well. However, some of us are worried by cuts in the emergency services. This is not a political point. I hope that the appraisal will be carried out and the findings communicated to the House.

Mr. Ridley: I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. I pay tribute again to the work of the ambulance service on this occasion. The evidence is that it was able to cope magnificently.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I associate myself with the condolences which have been expressed and ask the Secretary of State whether he is sincere in his statement that any cuts in British Rail have not been cuts in safety standards. Can he give us an unequivocal guarantee that he repudiates the assertion in the Serpell report that safety standards are too high and that there is a case for lowering them? Will he urge British Rail henceforth to examine its safety standards and to make them as high as they were in previous years?

Mr. Ridley: No conscientious railway board would accept safety standards other than of the highest and no railway inspectorate would allow safety standards other than of an equal level of excellence. British Rail's safety record has been improving steadily. To suggest that the unfortunate few accidents which have happened recently in some way represent an unsafe railway or deteriorating position is to misread the situation. I pay tribute to the railways for their good record. No message should go out this evening that there is a deterioration in railway safety just because of one accident.

Petrol (Lead and Benzene Content)

12.19 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7805/84 and 9613/84 on the lead and benzene content of petrol, and other vehicle emissions; and supports Her Majesty's Government's endeavours to secure the introduction of unleaded petrol throughout the European Community at the earliest opportunity.

There are two documents for the House to consider in this debate. Document 7805/84, which was published by the European Commission in June this year, includes an incomplete draft of a new directive relating to the lead and benzene content of petrol; and a directive on the gaseous pollutant emissions of motor vehicles. The two directives were considered briefly at the Environment Council on 28 June, to which I will return later. The second document that we are to consider this evening, document 9613/84, was published in September this year by the Commission, and completes its June proposals for the new petrol-lead directive — principally fitting in gaps on the octane ratings of unleaded petrol, and proposals for colouring leaded petrol.

The Commission's proposal for a new directive on lead in petrol arises in part, of course, from the United Kingdom's initiative last year when, together with the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark, we called for the introduction of unleaded petrol throughout the European Community as soon as possible and certainly no later than 1990. The House will recall that this decision by the Government was announced by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment on 18 April 1983, following the recommendation of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, in its ninth report, entitled "Lead in the Environment".

I turn first to the lead-in-petrol directive. Lead is widely dispersed throughout the environment. Our environmental exposure arises from a number of sources—food, water, industrial emissions and paint, as well as vehicle emissions. Since the 1920s, lead has been added to petrol as an octane booster. Over the past 10 to 15 years the amount of lead added to petrol in the United Kingdom has been progressively reduced. The current level is 0·4 g per litre, and in 1981 the Government announced that it would be reduced to 0·15 g per litre by the end of next year—which will give an immediate reduction in petrol-lead emissions of some 60 per cent.

The level of 0·15 g per litre is the lowest that can be used in the present car fleet without necessitating petrol engine redesign. This is for two reasons: lead is used, as I have said, as an octane booster and its removal will necessitate a readjustment of the octane levels of petrol, and so a new generation of cars will need to be designed to run on it. Secondly, lead functions as a lubricant of the valve seats, which must be hardened or redesigned to function properly without it.

For these reasons, the current directive governing the lead content of petrol in the European Community—78/611/EEC — stipulates that Governments may not require petrol sold in their markets to contain less than 0·15 g per litre. This directive needs to be altered or replaced before Governments can require the provision of

unleaded petrol. Therefore, the Government decided in April last year that the United Kingdom should move to the introduction of unleaded petrol together with the rest of the EC.

I deal now with the text. Article 4 is of obvious importance. It requires member states to ensure that unleaded petrol is marketed throughout their territory from 1989. This would, of course, be in addition to leaded petrol, which will continue to be needed by older vehicles —as the owner of a classic car, I have to declare an interest in that—for several years after that, until they reach the end of their useful life. Incidentally, in the case of 1948 Bristol motor cars, that is never. This date is, of course, very close to the target announced by the Government last year for the introduction of unleaded petrol in the United Kingdom. It would give the oil and motor manufacturing industries enough time to make the necessary preparations to move to the production of unleaded petrol and of cars capable of running it. Our own industries have confirmed that this date is reasonable.

The article also allows member states that wish to do so to require that unleaded petrol is made available on their markets from 1986, and obliges member states to allow its marketing in their territories from that date. That is also acceptable to the Government, as I shall explain when I turn to the directive on vehicle emissions, because there would be no requirement for new cars to run on unleaded petrol before 1989. We see no point in requiring its provision before then, since there will be only a few cars able to use it. However, we would certainly welcome any moves on the part of the oil industry to supply unleaded petrol earlier than 1989 if it sees a market for it among drivers who wish to use it and whose cars are capable of running on it.

I turn to article 6, as amended by the second of the two documents before the House tonight, document 9613/84. In its original document the Commission had envisaged that there should be two mandatory grades of unleaded petrol—one "premium", one "regular". This would have meant that petrol stations would be obliged to sell two grades of unleaded petrol in addition to the two grades of leaded petrol presently provided—making a total of four different petrol pumps on each forecourt. Because this would involve considerable additional investment in terms of oil companies' distribution systems, the Commission revised its proposals in September, and has now suggested that there should be a single mandatory grade of unleaded petrol — "premium" grade, with minimum octane requirements of 85 motor octane number and 95 research octane number at the pump, and optional provision of a second, lower octane "regular" unleaded grade.

The figures of 85 MON/95 RON proposed for premium unleaded petrol are based on a study carried out by the Commission in conjunction with representatives of the European car and oil industries. They studied the relative additional costs in terms of crude oil requirements, industry investment and costs to the motorist of providing unleaded petrol at different octane numbers. Basically, a higher octane means higher crude oil consumption, oil industry investment in new refining plant, and a higher cost per gallon; but lower car industry investment and greater fuel efficiency. Lowering the octane level means that crude oil consumption, oil industry investment cost per gallon all fall, but car industry investment goes up and cars are less fuel-efficient than they might be.

A decision on octane levels necessarily involves judgments about the future technical evolution of the oil and car industries. Although there are inevitable technical uncertainties, two things have become clear from the Commission's study and from discussions with our own oil and motor manufacturing industries. First, the total additional costs to the United Kingdom of moving to unleaded petrol are small in absolute terms. We are talking about something in the region of 4p extra on the cost of a gallon of premium petrol. Secondly, for the United Kingdom the total additional costs are at a minimum in the 94-95 RON range.

There is no single figure that can fully satisfy the needs of the oil and motor industries. After consulting with industry, and because we cannot ignore the number of member states who have already expressed their willingness to agree to the commission's proposal of 95 RON at the pump, the likelihood is that the Government will settle for that level if it is the way to achieve agreement.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): I know that my hon. Friend, as always, is trying to be helpful to the House by making as full an explanation as possible. After his Department's discussions with the oil industry can he give an estimate of what it will cost, in round terms, for this country to move to unleaded petrol, because in February 1982 that figure was put at £500 million annually?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall write to my hon. Friend, if I may, to give him the latest figures. I shall be surprised if the figure is as high as that.

I shall deal rather more quickly with the remaining substantive articles of the petrol-lead directive.

I have explained that leaded petrol will still be needed for other cars for some years after 1989. In article 2, the Commission proposes that from that date leaded petrol should contain no more than 0·15 per litre. Article 3 makes provision for derogations for member states with specific difficulties in meeting this. It seems sensible to us to accompany the move to unleaded petrol with an interim reduction in the lead content of leaded petrol while it is being phased out, and of course the United Kingdom is already taking this step at the end of next year.

Articles 11, 12 and 13 deal with the linked questions of encouraging the use of unleaded petrol, and at the same time discouraging others from using the wrong type of petrol in their cars. Clearly, it would defeat the object of the exercise if drivers of cars capable of running on unleaded petrol used leaded petrol; on the other hand, using unleaded petrol in a car that needs leaded petrol could cause serious mechanical damage. Therefore, article 13 encourages member states to take steps to promote the use of unleaded petrol and to ensure that the price of unleaded petrol does not exceed that of leaded. Article 11 and annex 2 propose that leaded petrol should be coloured to prevent "mis-fuelling".

The rest of the petrol-lead directive is straightforward. Article 8 is intended to ensure that there is a free market in petrol throughout the Community. Article 5 is intended to ensure that the benzene content of petrol is not increased unduly beyond present levels if alternative additives are used as octaine boosters in unleaded petrol. Articles 10 and annex 1 specify test methods and procedures; article 14 requires member states to give the Commission information when required to do so on the development of their lead-free petrol market.

[Mr. Waldegrave]

Let me now deal with the second draft directive contained in document 780584.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): The fact that we are debating this statement is in no small measure due to the lead that my hon. Friend has given in this country and Europe, and we pay tribute to him for that.

My hon. Friend said that the 95 per cent. unleaded octane level would be accepted in part because it was effectively a harmonisation measure within the Community. Some of us who would like to see the widespread introduction of unleaded petrol before 1989 are a little worried by the fact that he said that he would welcome the oil industry seeing whether it could be brought in earlier. We should be reassured if, instead of welcoming that, he encouraged the oil industry to do it and at the same time gave us an assurance that the introduction of unleaded petrol will not be unduly delayed by further harmonisation efforts within the Community.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's kind tribute. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) deserves the principal tribute, but I am pleased to have been able to keep up the momentum. It is very important to recognise that the urgency of agreeing on an octane number is closely related to allowing the oil industry to get on and start producing unleaded petrol. It is crucial that there should be no further delay. That is why it is important to agree on a figure, in order to make the progress he demands. So I believe that he should welcome this attempt to agree a figure at the next Council meeting.

I turn now to the other document, which deals with gaseous emissions from vehicles and proposes limits below those required by the most recent directive. Additionally, the draft directive would permit approvals to be given for petrol engine vehicles capable of operating on unleaded petrol. The need to provide for type approval for vehicles capable of running on unleaded petrol directly follows from the intention to remove petrol lead.

The Government also welcome the initiative to seek further reductions in the gaseous emissions from vehicles. However, technical solutions must be cost-effective and must not impose expensive technology when the scientific evidence is insufficiently clear as to the benefits to justify the cost. The Government do not believe that the imposition in the United Kingdom in the 1990s of the technical solutions developed for the conditions in the United States and Japan in the 1970s is justified.

Current United States emission limits imply the use of the so-called three-way catalyst technology. This is an expensive technology requiring not only a rhodium and platinum catalyst to be fitted to each vehicle but special combustion conditions which are not compatible with the next generation of fuel-efficient European engine technology. The use of three-way catalysts reduces fuel economy by around 5 per cent. The three-way catalyst and its associated control equipment could increase the cost of a United Kingdom car by up to 10 per cent. and add a significant amount to annual motoring costs. Nor is it clear that, averaged over the road life of the vehicle, the performance of the three-way catalyst technology is significantly better than that obtainable through much cheaper future advances in engine design.

The Commission's draft directive proposes a staged approach to reduce vehicle emissions. This framework is to be welcomed as practical recognition of the developing state of engine design in Europe. The first stage would require that from 1 October 1989 member states would no longer be able to issue an EEC type approval certificate for a new type of vehicle unless it complied with the provisions of stage 1 of the directive. Member states would also be able to refuse national type approval if it did not comply. From 1 October 1991 member states will be able to prohibit entry into service of all new vehicles that do not comply.

These proposed stage one limits represent reductions of about 30 per cent. to 60 per cent. in carbon monoxide and 25 per cent. to 45 per cent. in combined hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide emissions, depending on vehicle size.

The second proposed stage is to introduce by 1995 vehicle emission limits for all cars equivalent to standards currently applied in the United States of America and Japan. For the reasons I have explained, this proposal is unacceptable to the United Kingdom because it would effectively imply the use of three-way catalyst technology. Although the vehicle emissions directive does not prohibit less onerous national type approvals, we believe that member states must seek a Community solution. The solution needs to maintain the integrity of the internal market while acknowledging that because vehicle emissions are not significantly a long-range problem there may be differences in requirements between member states.

We expect new proposals to be brought forward by the Commission, and the House to have an opportunity to debate the issue further. In the meantime, we must not lose sight of the importance of fixing a date for ensuring new cars can run on unleaded petrol through the type approval system. The Commission has proposed that from 1989 all new models, and that from 1991 all new cars, should be capable of running on unleaded petrol. As I said at the June Environment Council, the Government believe that this timetable is too slow, and we shall continue to press for all new cars to be able to run on unleaded petrol from 1989.

At the Environment Council meeting on 28 June this year, there was general agreement in principle that unleaded petrol should be introduced throughout the Community no later than 1989 and that efforts should be made to resolve the remaining details quickly — if possible, at the December Environment Council in a few days' time. That, of course, was very welcome. Negotiations have gone well since June, and I hope that we shall be able to make substantial progress in Brussels later this week. I commend the documents to the House.

12.35 am

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): We welcome the opportunity to debate lead in petrol, though it is odd that we should be debating such an important issue, which will have a profound, if almost unseen, effect on millions of people — motorists and citizens alike — at such a late hour.

The Opposition welcome the decision to eliminate lead from petrol, because it will remove a dangerous health hazard and a dangerous environmental problem and we believe that the attempt to reach a Europewide solution

will make it much easier for our car manufacturing industry to cope with what will inevitably be a problem for it.

I think that we all agree about the necessity to remove lead from petrol. I hope that we will not hear any argument about that. Strong evidence has been produced by the Lawther committee set up by the previous Labour Government, and in the ninth report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. A report in *The Times* this week said:

"Excessive concentrations of lead have been found in 15 streets and 50 school playgrounds in London in measurement of dust and air. The 'hot-spots' were discovered in an assessment of lead pollution from traffic emissions".

There is a wealth of evidence that lead in petrol is particularly dangerous.

Mr. Best: The hon. Gentleman quoted the Lawther report as part of his authority. Presumably, he accepts what the report said, including:

"We have seen no firm evidence that the contribution made by lead from petrol has caused harm"

and:

"We have seen that in the vast majority of the population, airborne lead, including that derived from petrol, is usually a minor contributor to the body burden. Normally food is the major source, and we have seen no evidence that this is substantially enhanced by contamination by airborne lead."

Dr. Clark: I have the main pronouncements of the Lawther report in front of me. The report was published in May 1980 and since then the Government and various other bodies have set up monitoring programmes to check the danger in lead. The report includes a list of recommendations calling for Government action. It recommended that an air quality standard should be introduced—the Government agreed to that—and that there should be an EC directive on the subject.

I do not want to trade quotations with the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best), because events have moved quickly; I have here a 1981 *Hansard* which includes the statement of the then Minister for Local Government and Environmental Services that it would take 25 years to phase out lead. We hope to achieve that objective in a mere handful of years. I stand by my point; august scientific bodies have produced irrefutable evidence supporting the removal of lead from petrol, paint, water pipes and industrial emissions. We support the Government and expect them to take action in all those areas.

I hope that the Under-Secretary does not approach the debate in the same way as his Department appears to approach it. An inspired leak led to a report in *The Times* today, which said:

"Parliament will debate the lead in petrol issue tonight to give . . . the Under-Secretary of State . . . a free hand at the European meeting on Thursday."

I hope that that is not the Minister's attitude—I am sure that it is not—but that he will listen to the House. I hope that our message will be that the Minister should go to Europe and press forcibly for action Communitywide and earlier than may be suggested. I hope that the Minister will get an opportunity to refute the view leaked by his Department. I repeat that the Government and civil servants are the servants of the House, and that the House determines policy. All too often we hear pronouncements from Departments along these lines.

I mentioned the time scale. We feel that January 1989 is too far away. I was pleased to hear the Minister say that he would consider the possibility of bringing the date forward. He may or may not know that the environment committee of the European Parliament has voted overwhelmingly for lead-free petrol to be on sale throughout the EC from 1 July 1986. The hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) sought to raise that point with him.

Although the directive lays down the minimum standards, there is no reason why the Government should not introduce lead-free petrol earlier if possible. I remind the House of the Minister's answer on 11 July. The hon. Member for Peterborough asked the Minister:

"Will he assure the House that if this country is able to introduce lead-free petrol before 1989 we shall do so and not wait for the rest of the European Community?"

The Minister made a succinct, brief and to-the-point reply: "yes, Sir—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 1025.]

When the Minister said that, he had the support of all Opposition Members and, I think, the hon. Member for Peterborough.

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): Does the hon. Gentleman realise the implications of what he is saying? If the lead content in petrol is reduced to below 0·15 g. per litre, a further three octane numbers will be lost. That cannot be rectified by any severe refining processes but will require a double action on engine modifications for lean burners which cannot be accomplished in time. Everyone in the United Kingdom would have to have catalytic converters. We would probably use more oil in the long run, which would cause many difficulties. Does the hon. Gentleman realise that that would add considerable expense to all motorists?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. My point is that lead-free petrol should be available. The Minister conceded the point that the oil industry may bring the date forward. I re-emphasise the point made by the hon. Member for Peterborough that the Minister would have the support of the Opposition and many Conservative Members, if he encouraged petrol companies to introduce lead-free petrol as an option at an earlier date. There is nothing in the EC directive to stop the Government legislating for earlier action.

If we had listened to the petroleum industry, we would still be waiting. Only when it is forced will it concede that it can tackle the problem. The latest date which the industry gave was 1992. The tragedy of British industry is that it must be lead screaming to every innovative function, which is why we lose markets so often and so quickly.

The EC regulations also ask Governments to ensure that unleaded petrol is not more expensive than leaded petrol. What plans do the Government have to tackle that problem? The Germans have already announced an increase in the price of leaded petrol to overcome the problem. I am not suggesting that the price of leaded petrol should be increased, but how do the Government intend to tackle that problem?

We are worried that the Minister may not press the case as hard as he can with his European colleagues, so this debate is especially timely. I hope that the message from the House to the Minister, before he goes to the Council of Ministers, will be that we recognise the danger of lead in petrol, that we want speedy action and we want the Government if at all possible to act even faster than the EC proposes. We urge him to press the EC very hard indeed. He claims that he has taken the lead. I hope that he will

[Dr. Clark]

continue to do so and that he will go along with the Germans who, I believe, have taken an even stronger lead. We are not giving him a free hand. We want him to press very hard indeed for early resolution of this problem.

12.46 am

Mr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I support the Minister's stance on gaseous emissions, as I believe that the development of lean-burn engines is far preferable to the fitting of catalytic converters, but not all Conservative Members are so ready to support his stance on the introduction of unleaded petrol.

As the House knows, in terms of both cost and energy consumption lead additives are by far the most effective means of increasing the octane quality of petrol. It may also be aware that in this country those additives are exclusively produced by the Associated Octel Company. That company's principal manufacturing plant is at Ellesmere Port in my constituency and the company has a fine record of export achievements. In 1983 it made a net contribution of £100 million to our balance of payments. That is £36,900 per employee. It is one of the top five chemical-exporting companies in this country and has received the Queen's award to industry for its export achievements and, with its associated companies, it controls 70 per cent. of the world market for lead additives outside of north America. In my constituency alone more than 2,000 people are currently employed in producing lead additives for petrol.

The people who produce those additives, the company and I myself recognise that in no circumstances can we risk the health of the nation, the development of our children or damage to the environment, and those are the fears on which the campaign against lead in petrol has largely been based. Yet the Medical Research Council report on the neuropsychological effects of lead on children recently concluded that available evidence suggests that moderate elevation in the body lead burden found in some British children has little effect on IQ. Even more recently, the Select Committee on the Environment concluded that if there are links with acid rain they are relatively minor compared with other emissions—notably from power stations. Yesterday the Government said that £1·5 billion was far too much to pay for the control of those emissions. Yet the price that we are asked to pay for taking lead out of petrol, which is far less damaging to the environment, is many times greater.

In the light of that new evidence, why are the Government in such a hurry to phase out leaded petrol? Let us be clear about the penalties to be paid for eliminating lead from petrol. First, there is the penalty of investment by the oil industry. In Europe it is estimated that between £3·2 billion and £5 billion will have to be invested by the oil industry to take lead out of petrol. A few weeks ago the Secretary of State visited my constituency and opened a new high-octane blending component plant costing £56 million. That plant was heralded as a significant contribution and an investment in the future, but the truth was that the building of that plant is only part of the price that the oil industry is having to pay to stand still in the face of legislation to reduce lead in petrol.

Secondly, there is the penalty of investment by the European motor industry, conservatively estimated at some £240 million. Thirdly, there are the job losses. It is impossible to predict how many jobs will be lost, or when, but there will certainly be net job losses, whether they result from natural wastage or not. The new high-octane blending plant built at a cost of £56 million has produced 15 new jobs, whereas 450 jobs have already been lost in Associated Octel simply because of the reduction to the current level of lead content.

Fourthly, there is a massive penalty to pay in terms of energy. An extra million tons of crude oil each year will be used in the United Kingdom because of the elimination of lead from petrol. There is also the overall cost penalty. The Minister gave a figure of 4 per cent. but I estimate that, when we have taken account of both investment and energy penalties, the cost of petrol will rise by about 10 per cent. over the period during which we eliminate lead additives. Finally, there is the balance of payments penalty of at least £100 million a year.

Together those penalties add up to a substantial case for retaining lead in petrol rather than eliminating it. That is the price that we are paying for unproven advantages. We wish that the Government had taken more note of those penalties, but we reluctantly accept that lead in petrol is to be phased out. We accept that the decision has been taken. Associated Octel accepts that it must diversify into new product areas. It must use its technical and marketing skills to try to preserve the jobs that are to be lost in connection with lead additives.

Any diversification that the company undertakes will naturally lead it into the production of bromine, chlorine and sodium. Those are all energy-intensive processes, and all processes in which the company suffers a massive disadvantage of up to 20 per cent. against companies on the continent which enjoy high user electricity tariff concessions. The Government might consider that point too.

We do not ask that lead should be retained in petrol. We ask only for assurances from the Minister that, first, sufficient time will be allowed for diversification by the company and, secondly, United Kingdom producers will not be disadvantaged as against overseas competition. That does not mean the introduction of unleaded petrol at the earliest possible opportunity. It means the introduction of unleaded petrol on a reasonable time scale.

I ask the Minister for four specific assurances. First, can he assure the House that the Government will strenuously resist any attempt to introduce unleaded petrol throughout the Community before 1989—a move that could lead to significant job losses in the lead industry? Secondly, will he confirm that the Government will support the derogation in the draft directive which will allow Italy and France to retain the maximum of 0·4g per litre, thereby securing, over the next four years, a vital market and vital employment that will allow the lead industry time to diversify into new products?

Thirdly, will the Minister resist the suggestion that, when leaded and unleaded petrol are both available, unleaded petrol should be offered at a price advantage, possibly by means of adjustments in taxation? That would be unfair to the users of older vehicles and to the lead industry.

Finally, in the light of the new evidence that is available and the French and Italian positions, will the Minister reconsider the decision to reduce the lead content statutorily in this country from 0·4g to 0·15g from 1 January 1986?

My hon. Friend's replies to those questions will show whether the Government are prepared to do what is necessary to help the lead industry in the transitional process and to set a realistic time scale for the introduction of unleaded petrol rather than, as the motion suggests, the shortest possible time scale.

12.54 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I understand and appreciate the constituency interests of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Woodcock). I am aware of the difficult balance that must be struck between employment prospects and environmental issues. I have to step out of line with my party's view that the lorry ban in London is necessary immediately, because many of my constituents depend on the haulage industry as they drive, maintain or service lorries. Indeed, many of the lorries that go through London are based in my constituency.

I also will be interested to hear the Minister's reply. Not surprisingly, I shall press him somewhat in the other direction. I support almost entirely the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). Although there might be problems for the industry we are concerned with a poisonous product — leaded petrol — which the Royal Commission on environmental pollution confirmed as the largest controllable source of lead in the population. It is therefore desirable that we stop using it as quickly as possible. Lead in petrol leads to a much more permanent form of pollution — it lasts decades, even centuries in some cases. The Minister and his colleagues in the Council of Ministers are rightly anxious to reduce its use throughout the Community.

The Minister is to meet his colleagues in the next couple of days. I should like him to confirm explicitly that it is now possible, as the Federal Republic of Germany has established, for countries to move more quickly. Although 1989 is the general deadline, Germany has unilaterally declared that it is willing to go ahead. The Minister suggested to my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) earlier this year that Germany might be in breach of a European treaty. Presumably, with the passing of the directive, the use of lead-free petrol will apply to us from 1986. Will the Minister encourage that step, especially in the industry here?

I understand that there are many outlets for lead-free petrol in Germany. Nobody suggests that there is an immediate obligation on all outlets to have only lead-free petrol. That permissive quality recognises the needs of the industry and technical difficulties, although it is now possible for the industry to adapt without much difficulty.

Lead-free petrol is increasingly a British export to our partners in the Community. Conoco exports it and users are exempted from certain levels of car tax.

One understands that there may in the first few years have to be a choice because, as the Minister said, people inherit or have vehicles that are not easily adapted, but there may be ways in which the Government could encourage the move, and encourage people to purchase in such a way as to make the phasing out of lead in petrol much easier than it might have been. We would welcome that.

When the Under-Secretary goes to meet his European colleagues later this week, as well as agreeing on the directive, will he be able to confirm with them, in some form of declaration or communiqué, that cars can run as well, if not better, on non-leaded petrol? This is obviously of concern to the motorist, and to the less technically minded in particular. If he is confronted at the petrol station with a choice between different sorts of petrol, he may not know what the implications may be.

Will the Under-Secretary also confirm that it is now possible for our producers—who we want to make sure are adapting quickly to retain their market lead—with the technology that they now have, to produce unleaded petrol at the current octane ratings? The phasing out of lead additives in petrol is not a necessary implication of those two propositions. We could introduce unleaded petrol earlier than 1989, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will accept that, while phasing out leaded petrol sooner rather than later.

Mr. Skeet: Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to recommend these catalytic converters to all his constituents who are car drivers, when they will cost them between £300 and £500 per car? If the hon. Gentleman doubts my word, he should have a look at the *Financial Times* of Wednesday 5 December, where these figures are laid out.

Mr. Hughes: Nobody is suggesting that one must suddenly impose on people or countries the requirement of lead-free petrol. No hon. Member has yet suggested that. It is not necessarily the better solution to have catalytic converters. It has quite properly been suggested that there are other equally acceptable solutions, and I hold no brief for one over another. However, one has to seek from the Under-Secretary, as the representative of the Government, a lead that says that we shall be enabling our fellow citizens to be spared the poison and the disadvantage to health that continuing use of lead in petrol, first as an inevitability, and secondly as a norm, necessarily involves. One cannot impose conversion tomorrow at the costs that the hon. Gentleman set out, and which I accept, but the turnover of motor vehicles is now extremely quick. We are getting to the stage where people are buying new cars every two years, or at least changing them.

The Government's encouraging start should be continued. The Under-Secretary paid tribute to the Secretary of State, but that start now appears to have slowed down. We should like to encourage them to move as quickly as possible, and not to be either the last or one of the last to move in the Community. Let us be one of the first, and we can be one of the first, without disadvantage, if that is the way that the Minister states we shall go when he meets his European colleagues later this week. We would encourage that and hope to hear a positive result, not only tonight but when he comes back from his meeting.

1.4 am

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I am sure that, in being invited to take note of this directive, the House will wish to register its approval of the fact that this directive and those measures that preceded it show that there is wide recognition of the need to reduce the pollution of the atmosphere caused by the motor vehicles that proliferate on our roads.

In so far as the directives indicate target dates and provide a mechanism whereby we may move in concert with our European allies, I strongly commend them.

[Mr. Peter Griffiths]

Nevertheless, I was a little alarmed by the Minister's comment that the oil industry and the motor car industry see no objection to the suggested target dates. If they see no objection to the suggested target dates. If they see no objection to those dates, they could meet considerably earlier target dates.

Our task as Members of Parliament is to try to ensure that the degree of dangerous emissions, lead and other, from car exhausts in Britain is reduced as soon as possible. I am unimpressed by arguments that it may not be possible to identify the emission of lead from petrol-burning motor vehicles as a direct cause of illness in any individual. We know that lead is a poison, that it is cumulative in the body, and that it is very slow to be excreted. Therefore, we know that it is a desirable feature of environmental improvement that lead be removed from petrol as soon as possible. Our aim in Britain should be to encourage our European partners to make as much progress as possible. Nevertheless, it is also practical for us to set an example.

There is no reason why we should not have unleaded petrol on sale in Britain before the target dates for its achievement by the whole of the European Community. It would encourage motorists who were buying new vehicles—particularly the fleet operators, who buy more than half the motor cars purchased in any one year—to consider the purchase of vehicles capable of using unleaded petrol. We need to convert motorists so that they recognise the need for reduction in the emission of lead.

I would favour an arrangement whereby leaded petrol would never have a price advantage over unleaded petrol. It should never be advantageous to damage the environment, as opposed to not damaging it. We should try to ensure that as far as possible the prices of leaded and unleaded petrol are similar so that those who were unable to use unleaded petrol because of the age of their vehicles would not be directly disadvantaged. Nevertheless, we would not have the opposite effect, which would be the disadvantaging of those who wished to help to improve the environment.

We might well consider making tax changes to ensure that vehicles capable of running on lead-free petrol did not cost more initially than vehicles which were not capable of so doing. That might be achieved by the efforts of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in recognising the contribution which people make, by using vehicles with lead-free petrol, to the health of the country.

Mr. Best: My hon. Friend puts a persuasive point about the need to have similarity between the prices of unleaded and leaded petrol. He will know and accept that it costs more to produce unleaded petrol. Does that mean that he is prepared to recommend to the Government that the price of leaded petrol should be artificially raised beyond what is commercially necessary so as to bring it into parity with unleaded petrol?

Mr. Griffiths: I suggest that the prices should be equalised. The prices of leaded and unleaded petrol sold commercially should be fixed at a level that would provide a reasonable return to the oil company. The differential between the prices of leaded and unleaded petrol should not be exaggerated. I believe that last summer in the United States the difference in the prices of those fuels was between 4 cents and 5 cents an American gallon—the American gallon is slightly smaller than ours — representing a price differential of between 5 per cent. and 6 per cent. That differential is not so great that equalisation could not be achieved.

In focusing on lead, we should not forget that the purpose of the directives is to look at the totality of emission. I want to refute absolutely one statement. It is not fair or even true to say that, to reduce emissions from motor car engines using petrol, it would be necessary to introduce catalytic converters to achieve standards better than those envisaged in the directives.

The catalytic converter was introduced 15 years ago to meet conditions in Tokyo and Los Angeles. It represents the type of technology that was necessary for the type of engines built in Japan and the United States, which had marked similarities. Given a reasonable time scale, there is no reason why the new generation of engines produced in Europe, Japan and the United States, which are designed from the start to have lower levels of emissions, could not meet higher standards than is envisaged in the directives, without the use of expensive catalytic converters. Obviously we need to encourage research and development, but we should not decline to accept a challenge simply because we do not like a solution developed some years ago.

Mr. Skeet: If we accept the Commission's time scale, we must introduce catalytic converters to get rid of the emissions. There is a great problem. Does my hon. Friend recommend the time scale advocated by the Commission or is he prepared to allow the development of the lean-burn engine, which we all recommend and which is not available at present, so that we can remove emissions in the combustion chamber?

Mr. Griffiths: I accept much of what my hon. Friend has said. While it may well be extremely desirable to find a way to reduce the emissions to meet these targets and improve upon them, it is not right to challenge the targets simply because we do not like a previous form of emission control. I have experience of such forms of control, and I believe that regular inspection—such as the inspection by MOT testing—would make it possible to insist that the converters were maintained and their linings replaced at adequate intervals. The use of catalytic converters is a possible solution to the problem of emissions, but they were a technical solution to the problem of 15 years ago, not the 1990s.

My objective is to reduce the level of emissions in the air as quickly as is technically possible. I do not believe that we should rely on the views of the motor car and oil industries. The oil industry's tears about costs will not wring the hearts of many of us. I should like cleaner air at the earliest possible time.

1.14 am

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): My hon. Friend the Minister will know my views on this topic. We have frequently been in correspondence about it since I was elected to the House. He knows my view that the campaign against lead in petrol was one of organised hysteria, fomented by a mendacious and sensational public relations campaign.

It is a great pity that the Government were bounced just before the general election into changing their policy on this issue. Since that time, a great deal of evidence has

been published which calls into question the conclusions of the ninth report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Woodcock) mentioned the recently published Medical Research Council study on the neuropsychological effects of lead in children, which was a review of the research done in that field between 1979 and 1983. Paragraph 5.15 of that document says conclusively that all the published evidence in this field is that there is no statistically significant association between body lead burdens and IQs after allowance has been made for the confounding factors.

The great campaign which was got together to frighten the population of Britain into believing that we were producing a generation of microcephalic idiots as a consequence of lead in petrol is now proved to have been pure hysteria.

An article in issue No. 6 of 1983, of the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics", a document that I am sure lies by the bedside of my hon. Friend the Minister to help soothe him to sleep, says that in 1981, 35 blood lead surveys were carried out in the United Kingdom as part of the European Community's screening programme on lead. Of those 35 surveys which were carried out all over the country, in only three instances was the reference level set by the EC for the lead content of the blood breached.

It is worth spending a minute looking at those instances to disprove the case which has been put by some hon. Members this evening. The first of three instances of the breaching of those reference levels was in Ayr in Scotland, where such breaches as took place were entirely due to the high concentration of lead in drinking water and nothing whatever to do with lead emissions from motor cars. The second was in the Archway road in Islington where it was discovered that such breaches as took place were because three men had been exposed to specific adventitious sources which in this instance were stripping old leaded paint and working in the scrap metal trade. The third was at Gravesham in Kent where one child was above the medium level for lead content in the blood.

In all the other surveys it was concluded that the reference levels were generally met by comfortable margins. The final conclusion was that blood lead concentrations of adults living near major roads, where one might expect major variations proving the case of those who are against leaded petrol, showed that blood lead concentrations were not very different from the general population in the same area. So, once again, it appears that the conclusions of the Royal Commission are called into question.

In addition, studies have been carried out in the EC. An instructive one was done in Germany, which has been ahead of us in reducing the lead content of its petrol from 0·4 g per litre to 0·15. In Frankfurt, an industrial city with a dense traffic problem and a few industrial sources of airborne lead, the study was helped because it was possible to show exactly what the effects of lead from exhaust emissions would be.

It was discovered that, as a result of making the changes which the Government propose for Britain, the lead emissions from exhausts in cars were reduced by 60 to 80 per cent. but that that produced only a 10 per cent. fall in blood lead levels. In 40 per cent. of men and 50 per cent. of women there was no change in the blood lead concentration. In some instances, perversely, there was an increase.

I produced the evidence to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and in a letter to me of 12 June he explained the reasoning behind the Government's case. I told him that the Government were reversing the burden of proof which requires one to prove that damage is being done. He wrote that he agreed that there was no conclusive evidence to show the toxic effects of lead at typical United Kingdom levels. He added:

"But equally it is a fact that lead is toxic at higher levels and there is no conclusive evidence that there are no toxic effects at typical UK levels".

If the Government were to take that view on acid rain, for example, and the nuclear industry—I am glad to say that they have not—we would have no nuclear power stations. We would be unable positively to prove the negative—that no damage would be done by discharges and emissions from nuclear power stations. Nor could we prove the opposite of what is stated in *The Times* as the Government's view on acid rain. It is reported in *The Times* that the Government

"does not accept that discharges from sources in Britain are a main contributor to acid rain".

That cannot be proved in fact and the Goverment do not seek to do so. I cannot understand why they adopt a different sort of reasoning for lead in petrol from that which they have adopted on other highly controversial environmental issues.

I believe that the case is not proven against lead in petrol. I urge the Government to exercise the greatest caution towards the directives which are proposed by the European Commission. I do not intend to go into the cost arguments which were outlined with devastating clarity by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. I am sure that they are well known to the Minister and the House. However, when my hon. Friend deals with these matters once again in the European Community, I ask him to bear in mind the employment repercussions of the change that we all accept now as inevitable, however unfortunate it may be. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary knows that in my constituency 250 jobs have been lost as a result of the change in the Government's policy, and we regard the losses as irreversible. That means that my constituency interest in the issue has come effectively to an end.

The result of my investigation is that I have become greatly concerned at the way in which Governments can be bounced into taking decisions which are highly adverse to the interests of many as a result of the pressures that are put upon them by flashy lobbies.

The European Assembly's environment committee has, I understand, voted to remove article 3 from draft directive 7805/84, which would prevent other countries in the Community, especially France and Italy, from maintaining their present lead levels in petrol. I hope that the Government will take the view, and press it strongly in the Community, that if the Commission were to adopt the advice of the Assembly on that issue we would veto the proposal. There is no doubt that it would do grave damage to the interests of constituents of my hon. Friends the Members for Ynŷs Mon (Mr. Best) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston. Associated Octel would lose almost two thirds of its market for lead in France and Italy overnight if the proposal were to be accepted.

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

The issue is not yet completely dead for us, and I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to be conservative on this issue. I hope that he will stand up for the interests of those who would otherwise lose their jobs and whose economic livelihood would be put at risk.

1.24 am

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): Two industries are involved in the two documents: the oil industry, from which we have heard a lot, and the motor industry. As the House will know, I represent the motor industry, and it impacts on my constituency. With great respect, the motor industry does not seek to fight old battles, accepts the challenge of lead, and is prepared to respond to it. Indeed, it accepts the present timetable of 1989-90.

I understood my hon. Friend the Minister to announce 95 research octane and 85 motor octane as being the levels that he looks forward to with regard to lead-free fuel. I believe that the motor industry accepts that one can quite acceptably go down from 96 RON to 95 RON. I know that it has expressed some concern about motor octane numbers on the basis that the silent-knock additive is the more crucial of the two, and that there is some danger in lowering from 86 to 85. If we go to that sort of level of additive, it will enable 50 per cent. of existing cars to switch straight away to lead-free fuel in 1989, and that must be a good reason for wanting to go down that path. As I have said, the industry is forced to accept that we are moving in that general direction, and is prepared to meet the challenge.

I turn to the emission announcement. No mention has been made so far of the extent to which we have been overshadowed by the West Germans' unilateral announcement. The European manufacturers accepted the phase one proposals, agreed that they should be implemented and agreed broadly on the timetable. But they all agreed to reject the phase two proposals until they had been much further researched to establish what system of emission control would be most effective, and whether we were looking at catalysts as a long-term solution or at lean burn.

I think that it is fair to say that until recently the conventional environmentalist thinking was that pollutants causing acid rain, defoliation of forests and so on, would be best checked by the use of catalytic converters. I am not a chemist or a great expert, but I understand that recent evidence throws some doubt on whether catalytic converters are doing the job required of them when it comes to acid rain, defoliation, and so on. The administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency testified before the sub-committee on health and the environment on 29 March 1984. He spoke first about the problem of die-back in trees and defoliation in the United States, and then said:

"In Europe, different and more extensive types of tree damage have been observed, involving at least ten species. We do not know the true extent or meaning of this damage, the speed at which it is taking place, or what factor or combination of factors is causing it. We do not know if the causes are the same in Europe as in this country. Many investigators believe that several interconnected factors are at work, and that air pollution of some sort may be important among them. Our current knowledge, however, does not tell us whether the offending pollutants are sulfates, nitrates, oxidants, or heavy metals. This new information, while troubling, raises the possibility that if we act too quickly, we may control the wrong pollutant.

This situation illustrates well why waiting for further research to be completed before initiating a control program is a rational decision. If, as many believe, sulfate depesition is not a major contributor to forest problems but oxidants or nitrates are, a significant reduction in SO_2 emissions could inadvertently result in elevated levels of oxidants or nitrates. Our current understanding of atmospheric chemistry indicates that if we were to reduce SO_2, it might result in increased levels of oxidants. Additionally, excess oxidant could then combine with the NO_x to produce more nitrates. Thus, in either case controlling the wrong pollutant could conceivably make matters worse."

We all deduce from that that the assumption that we had hitherto in general accepted as credible — that the catalytic converter was the answer to all our problems, now appears to be somewhat wide of the mark.

I understand that after a number of years of operating catalytic converters in the United States, there is no perceptible improvement in environmental despoliation, and the United States agencies are forced to look elsewhere for the prime cause. That may be because in the experience of motor manufacturers catalysts do not work well. They can readily be misfuelled. Misfuelling can be accidental and deliberate. In the United States, my understanding is that it is more often deliberate than accidental. They can be made to malfunction if they overheat. That is something about which the motor industry is worried.

When the catalytic converter malfunctions, the malfunction is effectively undetectable by the driver. An innocent driver may be driving along in a vehicle that he believes to have an efficient catalytic converter but which has no such thing. Whereas the lean-burn development is essentially cheap because it is a continuing development in terms of the engine, the three-way catalyst, it has been estimated by the motor industry, could add about £2·5 billion pounds annually to motor vehicle costs, with no detectable advantage.

There are two good reasons for strongly opposing the German unilateral announcement when my hon. Friend goes to the Community meeting. First, it is misconceived technically, and the argument now appears to be that it does not solve the problem. I appreciate that the Minister is broadly sympathetic to that point of view, and I welcome that fact.

Secondly, this is an important issue, and the division that would be caused within the Community would be unacceptable. If the West German Government, who undoubtedly have environmental pressure from the Greens, were to proceed with this unilateral action it would be damaging to us. It must be made clear to them in the strongest possible terms that it is too important an issue, not least to the motor industry in Great Britain, which is our number one exporter, for any go-it-alone initiatives.

We must make progress, and I am pleased to see the way the Government have approached both these directives. I believe that the Government are on the right lines, but I urge my hon. Friend, when he goes to the Community, to put the greatest possible pressure on the Germans to ensure that this ill-conceived, ill-timed and potentially dangerous unilateral action is reconsidered by them so that we have a chance of getting the long-term solution of the problem right.

1.32 am

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): No one doubts the sincerity of hon. Members on both sides of the House when they express their anxiety about lead in the body. Lead is a poison. Therefore, I share, and everyone else rightly shares, that anxiety.

It may be said that I have a constituency interest that I should declare, and I do so readily. I have part of the Associated Octel Company in my constituency, but let me make it clear before it is used against me that I am pleased to say that the plant in Amlwch in my constituency is not affected by these proposals and is doing well with the extraction of bromine from sea water, and is thinking of expanding. I cannot be accused of putting forward a partisan interest.

So much has been said that is grossly ill-informed on this subject that I wonder whether the public, let alone hon. Members, can feel confident when trying to speak with authority about it other than by referring to established documents, as has been done by a number of my hon. Friends.

Perhaps now I understand the meaning of the phrase "swinging the lead". Some of the statements from the CLEAR campaign give a new meaning to the phrase "gaseous emissions".

I believe that the scaremongering about the nature of lead in petrol and the resultant damage to the human body has been grossly irresponsible. Much is made of the fact that about 90 per cent. of airborne lead is produced by emissions from petrol exhaust. What is not said is that the total percentage of lead in the body from airborne lead from car exhausts is no more than 8 per cent. This needs to be put on the record.

I shall not burden the House with a lengthy quotation from the Lawther report, because I have already referred to it in an intervention, but this needs to be said, because the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will no doubt quote from the Lawther report. It was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Security. The report states:

"Our attention has been drawn not so much to the bulk of the population among whom, according to recent surveys done in the United Kingdom in fulfilment of the EEC directive, blood levels meet the reference values but to the small proportion which falls into the upper part of the distribution of blood lead concentrations".

The working party's report dealt with a vital area of interest. The report also states:

"There is no indication from the surveys that these relatively raised blood concentrations are due to lead from petrol; they would seem more likely to be due to a miscellany of adventitious sources, such as lead containing paint in and around the home, the use of special cosmetics, and medicines containing lead, or to tap water in some localities where the water is especially plumbo-solvent and lead plumbing is used".

How often do those hon. Members who are in the forefront of jumping on the environmentalist bandwagon—I shall not accuse them of being populist because one knows that Opposition Members do not wish to be populist in many matters—not concentrate on the real sources of lead pollution in the body, such as those which are mentioned in the Lawther report?

I mention these matters only because it is necessary for the matter to be put in context. I do not want to fight old battles. It is accepted by everybody that we shall move to lead-free petrol. It is accepted by industry and the oil companies. The question is, how fast should we move? Without suggesting that my hon. Friend has recently been down the road to Damascus with unleaded petrol or leaded petrol, there appears to be a change in emphasis by the Government which did not exist a few years ago, when the evidence was much the same as it is now. It will cost the consumer more. The 1982 estimate was that it would cost £500 million annually. This may be grossly excessive. I hope it is. What is not in doubt is that it will cost the consumer more. It is probably right that the consumer should pay for the removal of lead from petrol as being a contributor, although a minor contributor, to lead in the body and the dangers which that may cause to future generations. But let us ensure that that cost to the consumer is commensurate with the damage which is occasioned by lead in petrol. If unleaded petrol must not cost more than the price of leaded petrol, a point which was made persuasively by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), it means—and I should be interested to hear whether there is another view on this—that the price of lead petrol must be raised artificially beyond what is commercially necessary in order to equate it with the cost of unleaded petrol.

I end by making one comment about what was said by the hon. Member for South Shields. He said that we have been losing markets because the oil companies had to be led screaming to reform. He should know that if we moved precipitately to the introduction of lead-free petrol, without giving industry the opportunity to convert particularly engines in order to take lead-free petrol in time, it would lead to a massive import of Japanese cars which already are capable of being manufactured to run on unleaded petrol. It is strange that the Labour party should advocate an increase in imports of Japanese cars. However, it may be that this is a welcome turnabout from the original position, which I understood was to be one of protectionism.

Dr. David Clark: We can check *Hansard*, but I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that I did not use those words. I said that the oil producers and British technology generally had lost many markets. I was thinking particularly about the technology of pollution control. In acid rain controls, many of our engineering companies have lost markets because we have not taken the initiative.

Mr. Best: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying his remarks. I can now happily agree with much of what he said and I hope that he will reciprocate by agreeing with what I have said.

I accept that we are moving towards lead-free petrol and that we should take a lead in moving at the right pace and in being responsible, rather than merely listening to the ministrations—some of which have been irresponsible—from the lead-free petrol lobby. But my message to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is that we should not move too fast towards lead-free petrol. The dangers to health do not require precipitate action, and the penalties for going too rapidly are considerable.

1.41 am

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) has already lucidly outlined some of the problems facing the motor industry in meeting the challenge of the latter half of the century, particularly with the problem of exhaust emissions.

The difficulties faced by the motor industry can be surmounted, but the cost of providing lean-burn engines is not insignificant. Much of the work is still no more than advanced theory and the practical development and the

[Mr. Roger King]

tooling and manufacturing will cost industry a considerable sum. The main worry is whether what is left of our indigenous car industry is capable of meeting that challenge.

The other difficulty is that if our industry cannot meet the challenge as quickly as we hope, we do not want to be bounced down catalyst avenue, because that has yet to be proved a sensible way to go. The Americans, who have about 10 years' experience of catalytic burners on cars, know that after a period the device starts to fail and it is highly questionable.

Some of the major manufacturers in Germany are having great difficulty in fitting burners to normal, small production saloon cars. One cannot fit a catalyst system under a Mini or a Metro. The car has to be virtually redesigned and rebuilt to accommodate that questionable device.

The challenge could be met by concentrating on the development of the diesel engine, which is growing in popularity on the continent, but sales here have not taken off in the same way. Some would say that fiscal encouragement is needed, and perhaps we should examine ways of encouraging the sale of diesel cars by, say, reducing the 10 per cent. special car tax for purchasers.

Pollution problems are not necessarily caused by new cars. Modern, sophisticated warm-up devices ensure that choke controls can return to the zero position shortly after the engine is started and tolerances in the manufacture of engine units have been tightened. The modern new car is a low polluter.

The main challenge is to ensure that the mass of vehicles that have been on the road for several years are pollutant-free. It seems that they are prime polluters and perhaps the Government should encourage more attention to be paid to pollution levels during the annual MOT checks. Not only do we have to meet the challenge with new cars, we have to maintain standards throughout the life of a vehicle.

1.45 am

Mr. Waldegrave: We can congratulate ourselves on having had a short debate, in which all sides of this complex question have been eloquently put forward. I assure the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) that I come to the House not to ask for a free hand to negotiate a new policy but to ask the permission of the House not to have to put a parliamentary reserve on what may be the successful conclusion of a policy that the House has backed.

I admire the rearguard action fought by my hon. Friends the Members for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), for Ynys Mon (Mr. Best) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Woodcock). General Moore at Corunna had nothing on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Mon has nothing to apologise for, even if the directive affected his constituency. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, we all accept the argument for a constituency interest. I respect the case that was made.

The Government have long considered the decision, and the matter has been discussed in the House more than once. We understand the margins of error in the calculations, but considering the costs and benefits involved, we believe that it is an additional safeguard to follow this path. The position is not very different from that which we are taking on acid rain, where the costs seem to be much greater than the benefits. There is always a balance on either side.

My hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston argued about timing. We are proceeding on a realistic timetable and have fixed the date for 1989—no later, but no earlier. All hon. Members should welcome it, if the oil companies find it profitable and sensible to introduce lead-free petrol for sale in Britain before then, but we do not intend to compel them to do so.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston that we do not intend to exercise compulsion about different pricing levels. The market can sort that out. For some of the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North, it would be unfortunate if there was a wide price differential. We do not want an incentive to mis-fuel a car. We assume that the market will even out the price differentials between leaded and unleaded petrol.

The figures of £500 million mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn are pessimistic. We are now considering a final investment figure of £220 million and a manufacturing investment figure of £60 million. The original assumptions about investment costs have turned out to be pessimistic.

I do not wish to disagree with anything said about catalytic converters. They are bad technology. Moreover, there is a danger that the work that is being done to improve engine design is likely to be aborted because it will not be worthwhile if we adopted them. That relates to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris), with which I found almost nothing to disagree——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7805/84 and 9613/84 on the lead and benzene content of petrol, and other vehicle emissions; and supports Her Majesty's Government's endeavours to secure the introduction of unleaded petrol throughout the European Community at the earliest opportunity.

HOUSE OF COMMONS (SERVICES)

Ordered,

That Mr. Graham Bright be discharged from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) and that Mr. Churchill be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

West Midlands (Northern Relief Route)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

1.48 am

Mr. Francis Maude (Warwickshire, North): This is the first time that I have had the honour to raise a matter on the Adjournment. I could, perhaps, have picked a better night and I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for keeping him up so late. If we play to a less than packed House, I hope that he will accept that the subject is none the less intensely important and deserves serious consideration. I welcome my hon. Friend to his new responsibilities, which I gather largely concern the stratosphere, and apologise for bringing him down to earth with a bump in the west midlands.

It is proposed to build yet another major six-lane motorway in the west midlands. This would have a devastating effect, especially on north Warwickshire, which has already suffered inordinately from the ravages of motorway development. The M6 runs along its southern axis and the M42 is now being constructed for some 20 miles along the western side. My constituents greeted the latest proposal with great dismay and some even with disbelief. They felt that as the area had already suffered so much from motorways it should be exempt at least for a few years. But almost as soon as the first turf was cut for the construction of the M42 the proposal for a new motorway to circumvent Birmingham to the north was announced.

Mine is no Luddite argument based on opposition to motorways wherever they are and whatever the case for them. It is that the case for a full-scale six-lane motorway has simply not been made. The evidence put before the Department by the independent consulting engineers does not support the need for such a motorway.

The proposal affects not only north Warwickshire but the neighbouring constituency of Sutton Coldfield, represented by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, and the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) who, no doubt, will make their own representations. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood wishes to contribute to this debate. The generally held view is that a case has not been made out to support the type of development suggested and that the upgrading of existing roads would meet the needs at a cost, however it is measured — in human, environmental or financial terms—which would be a fraction of that of a full-scale motorway.

No one denies the need for an overflow road or some accommodation for excess traffic, but it is patent to anyone who travels through Birmingham on the M6 that there is no desperate need at present. There is no endemic congestion of the type found on the M1. Such congestion as there is occurs only at peak hours, which are considerably shorter in the west midlands than in the metropolis of London.

I wish to quote briefly from the independent engineers' assessment of the present flows on the M6 through the conurbation. The highest flows are on two sections. The assessment states:

"During the peak hours traffic flows on these sections are regularly over 5,000 vehicles per hour per carriageway and flows of over 6,000 vehicles per hour have been recorded. On the section of M6 between junctions 6 and 8 typical daily flows are in excess of 90,000 vpd and peak hour flows are again over 5,000 vehicles per hour in one direction."

The assessment further states that the maximum design flow for a dual three-lane urban motorway is 5,700 vehicles per hour per carriageway.

Even my mathematics can work out from that that the present motorway flows do not show a desperate need for an overflow route. At best, they show that there is some congestion and some need for an overflow road in the future. In support of that argument, I pray in aid the CBI. The CBI is never reticent in urging the case for capital investment in the infrastructure, but in its recent proposals for new roads and motorways a northern relief route for the west midlands is conspicuous by its absence.

The engineers' assessment and I, believe, the Department's figures suggest that between now and the design year of 2006, for which the new road is proposed, there will be an increase in traffic flows of between 20 and 50 per cent. Even the top figure does not begin to justify a proposal that would double the existing road capacity. It would, of course, justify some improvement to the existing network, and we would support that.

The assessment assumes the approval and building of the M40 between Oxford and Waterstock — the alternative motorway to the M1. That would undoubtedly attract substantial traffic travelling from London to Birmingham. In my submission, the traffic projection for the use of the M6 should be discounted accordingly—and discounted to a much greater extent than the assessment allows.

I know that the traffic projections are worked out in a very peculiar way—a way that I do not understand. However, I think that even the officials responsible accept that making a traffic projection is very much drawing a bow at a venture. I have no doubt that I will be told that previous projections have turned out to have understated the need for the road. The fact is that many motorways increase traffic flows by making possible journeys that were previously impossible or at least inconvenient. Traffic projections tend to be self-fulfilling. When a traffic projection is exceeded, that does not necessarily mean that if the motorway had not been built there would have been a need for it.

The assessment argues for a six-lane motorway. It makes the curious assumption that, in order to obtain the full benefit of a relief route, one needs a road at least as good as the route being relieved. The argument is that one needs to entice traffic from the main road to the relief road by offering a journey time no longer than the free-flow journey on the main road. That argument must be nonsense. An overflow road is needed only when the main road is congested at peak hours or when road works require contraflow arrangements. All that drivers need to know, if they are to be encouraged to use the overflow road when it is needed, is that they can make the journey by the relief road slightly faster than by using the congested main road.

By upgrading existing roads, which would cost only about 30 per cent. as much as building a motorway, we would obtain nearly 100 per cent. of the benefit of the motorway. Another benefit of upgrading existing roads is that one would not need line orders in most cases. In some cases side road orders would still be needed, and

[Mr. Francis Maude]

compulsory purchase orders, but in all probability the need for lengthy and costly two-stage public inquiries would be avoided.

There is a widespread belief in the west midlands that the proposal has been inspired by the belief that the need for a three-lane motorway stems from the lack of a long-term future for the M6. The defects in the M6 have been widely publicised. It is widely believed that, at some stage, the M6 will have to be substantially dismantled and rebuilt. In the summer I asked my hon. Friend the Minister of State whether that was correct. She assured me that a long-term future without major interruptions was expected for the M6. I urge my hon. Friend to repeat that assurance tonight. If he did so, my constituents would be greatly reassured.

There are a number of potential alternative routes that would affect my constituency. I am not indulging in the exercise of urging my hon. Friend to put the road in my next-door neighbour's constituency; I firmly argue that a full-scale motorway is not needed at all.

There are two options in terms of upgrading existing roads. One is the complete dualling of the A446, building two bridges at Curdworth and dualling from the Belfry roundabout to Bassett's Pole. That projection is rather curtly regarded as unsuitable in the consultation paper but, in my discussions, I have not found one person who can think of a reason why it is unsuitable. The idea has been envisaged before. Three-quarters of the route is already dual carriageway and it would be foolish to duplicate the existing dual carriageway by building a motorway next to it.

The second possibility is to use the existing Sutton Coldfield bypass, the A38. It is seriously under used and is sunk below the level of houses on its west side, which could be protected comparatively cheaply from the additional traffic noise. It is not used because it goes nowhere. It stops at a roundabout about one mile short of the M6. That one mile is nearly all derelict industrial land and I commend, as a considerably cheaper alternative, extending the A38 to the motorway.

All of the projected routes are funnelled through Bassett's Pole at the western tip of my constituency. Whatever happens, an underpass will have to be provided there—there is provision for it. That would give local residents better protection. Many people in north Warwickshire think that the evidence has been banked up in favour of the yellow route—a full-scale motorway thatt carves a swathe through the green belt. They think tha that is being done because it would provide an ex post facto justification for having built the M42 to three-lane standard between the M6 and the Dunton island. There is no other apparent justification, as it continues as a two-lane motorway. Details of how figures are presented also strengthen that supposition. The figures for the red route include houses on the west side of the A38, which could easily be protected from the effects of extra traffic. The figures for the disruption caused by and the cost of the red route are clearly considerably greater than for the yellow route.

Any developer, whether developing a motorway or houses, prefers to develop a green field site. Once he has got rid of the cows and the sheep and any unfortunate souls who persist in attempting to make a living from the land, he has a comparatively simple task. He has only to bring in the bulldozers and the concrete mixers. It is much more bothersome to work on an existing road. There is also the effect of the green belt. The market price of the land is reduced because private development is prohibited. The paradox is that the green belt makes development by the public utilities much more attractive because the cost of development is much lower. I urge my hon. Friend to resist such arguments as they have done much damage elsewhere. Development of the yellow route would also form a natural eastern boundary for the conurbation and make it impossible to resist development inside it, so yet more villages and hamlets would be swallowed up.

The Department's announcement of the alternative route caused widespread dismay. Nothing that Governments do has more direct and devastating effect on people's lives than building a motorway. Sound–proofing can be provided, but I know from experience, as many of my constituents were affected by the construction of the M42, how difficult that is and how often, when making representations to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I received the argument that, although there was a case for sound-proofing, the money for providing an earth mound or sound barrier could not be justified when so few people would benefit. I reject that argument, because the cost of providing protection must be encompassed within the projected costs of the road. It is no good cutting the cloth and then trying to alter the size of it later. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister, who listened sympathetically to all my representations, persistent but, I hope, reasoned, and in many cases made special provision.

There is a feeling that the Department of Transport regards the building of roads as its principal function, and I know that much pressure and persuasion comes from the roads lobby. My hon. Friend has to act as an umpire. The ordinary individual whose life and livelihood can be devastated has no lobby in his favour. He sees the apparently inexorable advance of the bureaucratic machine, propelled by its own momentum, and feels helpless in its path. He does not always feel that in the past the Department has dealt fairly with individuals. When it comes to the public inquiry, the individual feels that the game is lost before it starts. Th Secretary of State has to act as a judge in his own cause. If the Secretary of State is dealing with an airport, for example, someone else proposes, and he disposes. In this, he proposes and disposes.

Even worse is the fact that the proposals stem from civil servants who provide the advice and draft the decision. People feel that there is little that they can do. They look to the Conservative Government to protect the individual against the power of the state, and to preserve natural justice where an administrative decision can disasterously impinge on human rights.

It would allay much anxiety if my hon. Friend would announce tonight that a review of the procedures to guarantee this is to be set in hand. I urge him to conduct a most searching examination of the case for the new motorway. I am sure that he will be as concerned as we are to see that legitimate needs can be adequately met by the solution of upgrading with benefits at the same time in human, environmental and financial terms. My constituents look to him to protect them from this devastating proposal, and I earnestly entreat him to hear their plea.

2.7 am

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) for allowing me to speak in the debate. I shall be brief. He has made some cogent points, and argued his case forcefully. I shall refer to the other end of the proposed relief road, which would run through my constituency, and in particular to the bit that runs between Essington and the A38 and the A446-A5 roundabout.

As my hon. Friend has said, there are traffic jams on the M6 at peak times, and they cause severe congestion. It is accepted that some relief is necessary. The Staffordshire county council, the Cannock Chase district council and the Lichfield district council have all shown a preference for the green route, because they believe that it will provide additional motorway development for the industrial areas that they seek to regenerate. I understand this, but I have constituents who are extremely concerned, as my hon. Friend has so ably explained, at the possibility of a big six-lane motorway going through rural areas.

I support my hon. Friend in his campaign for the upgrading of the A5 and the other roads rather than making a new motorway. The A5 is a long-established Roman and trunk road, and its upgrading would be an infinitely preferable solution. It would be of particular benefit to my constituents in the village of Norton Canes as the green route would run right by the village, in parallel with the existing A5. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will pay heed to my plea.

2.9 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): I have nine minutes in which to respond to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) —ably supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) — on having raised a subject which is important not only for their constituencies but for the west midlands as a whole.

The issue has also to be seen in its national context. The M6 motorway plays a vital role in the country's national road network, and I am happy to give my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North the firm assurance for which he asks about the future of the M6. It provides the only high standard link between the major centres of population in the north-west and the south of England, as well as a main link with Scotland

Traffic aiming for the tourist attractions of the south-west, the south coast ports or the south-east, all uses the M6, and in doing so that traffic will have to pass through the west midlands, which in a very real sense, therefore, is at the crossroads of our national road network. That means that traffic flows on stretches of the M6 through the west midlands are very high indeed, as is recognised by both my hon. Friends.

Where the M6 passes through the west midlands conurbation, the traffic flows are almost among the highest in the country. Between junctions 8 and 10, for example, there is an average of 100,000 vehicles a day, and flows of 120,000 vehicles a day are regularly recorded. At peak times during the summer, one-way daily flows of 68,000 vehicles have been recorded. Those flows are, first, a powerful indication of the success of the M6, but they are also way in excess of what the road can comfortably carry.

Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for that is that much of the traffic on that part of the M6 is local. That leads to weaving between junctions, which is an additional hazard. What is more, about 30 per cent. of the traffic is composed of heavy goods vehicles, and that also means that the effective capacity of the road is greatly reduced. All this imposes a tremendous strain on a single stretch of motorway. It leaves very little scope for manoeuvre when accidents occur or when maintenance work is required. Anyone who regularly uses that stretch of the motorway will know that driving conditions, particularly at peak times, are difficult and often unpleasant.

As far as we can see for the future—I understand my hon. Friend's scepticism about some of the traffic forecasts — the traffic volumes will increase, and that will put even greater pressures on the M6. Traffic management measures will help to ease the situation a little but they can be of only limited benefit. The problem will be further aggravated by the continuing need for regular maintenance. In the long term, the only answer to the sort of traffic pressures that we are facing on the M6 through the west midlands is in one way or another to provide the additional road capacity. I think that both my hon. Friends accepted that.

None of the problems has arisen overnight. It has been evident for several years that some relief to the M6 was needed. There are only two basic choices — either to improve the existing roads, as recommended by my hon. Friends, or to build a new one. My hon. Friend has very forcefully expressed his view that the answer is to improve existing routes around the north of the west midlands conurbation. He has in particular suggested the upgrading of the A38 north of Minworth and the provision of dual carriageway on the A5 westwards to the M6.

The costs involved in improving an existing route to modern standards are in practice of much the same order as building a new route, and frequently more. There are invariably problems associated with existing properties fronting on to such routes, in terms of disruption — or indeed demolition — and of maintaining access. There are also significant engineering problems which have to be overcome — for example, with the under-passing of junctions.

We have also looked very hard at the possibility of widening the M6. Much of the M6, unfortunately, is constructed on an elevated viaduct, and the cost of widening it perhaps to a four-lane dual carriageway would be very high. It would increase the capacity in rather a limited way.

The other main alternative is to build a new road. Deciding on the best options for a new route has been a considerable task. There are many alternatives within the broad corridor through which a new road would have to pass. We have looked at over 30 possible routes. In reducing these to a manageable number, we had to take many factors into account. The choice of alternatives was the result of a great deal of detailed work.

I do not have the time to describe in detail each of the selected alternative routes for the scheme, but I shall highlight some of the salient features. All the routes would run between the M6 north of Wolverhampton near Essington to the M6 near Coleshill. This covers the most heavily overloaded section of the M6 through the conurbation. There would be a connection with the M54 motorway to Telford. Any of these routes would comprise a road some 40 km to 45 km long and costing in total between £110 million and £130 million.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

Earlier this year, we presented the selected alternative routes to the public. There were five options for the section of the route between Essington and Bassett's Pole and two options between Bassett's Pole and Coleshill. This public consultation exercise was a major effort. More than 25,000 leaflets were distributed to people living in the area affected by the proposals. A large number of people attended the exhibitions and over 6,000 people have returned the questionnaires. It has been an extremely effective exercise in consultation.

Inevitably, a wide range of responses has produced an equally wide-ranging spectrum of views. This has left us with the task of assessing all the views expressed and forming a judgment. Included in the comments received from the public are a number of alternative solutions. These include the possibility of improving the existing roads, as suggested by my hon. Friends. We will be considering them carefully before we come to a conclusion.

I am conscious of the fact that the present uncertainty, caused in part by the publishing of a number of alternative proposals for new routes, creates anxiety among those living in the area concerned and, indeed, can lead to a certain amount of blighting of property. For this reason, we are anxious to reach as early a decision as possible and make an announcement in the early part of next year. This will be followed by the publication of draft statutory orders to give effect to our proposals. There will then be the whole process of statutory inquiry and draft orders. I do not have time to respond specifically to the point about the inquiry process, except to say that it involves the joint decisions of two Secretary's of State.

Subject to the outcome of the statutory processes, work could begin around 1990. If the choice were to upgrade, my advice is that we would have to go through much the same procedures as in building new routes. For instance, a considerable amount of new alignment would probably be necessary, even on an upgraded scheme. All those factors are being taken into account. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North has raised these matters clearly. I assure him that, in our turn, we shall think carefully about what he has said.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LOCHMADDY AND EAST LOCH TARBERT (IMPROVEMENT OF PIERS ETC.) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Younger presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to British Railways: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday 11 December and to be printed. [Bill 18.]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Teacher Training

1. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for increasing in-service training for Scottish teachers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): Prime responsibility in this area rests with education authorities. I have made resources available for training related to the standard grade and 16 to 18 action plan developments, and I am offering specific grant-aid towards in-service training in certain other priority areas. I have authorised staffing levels in colleges of education which will enable them to contribute fully to in-service training programmes.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Government safeguard academic prospects for the pupils who have already started standard grade courses by substantially improving the conditions of service set down in the post-Houghton review of 1975? Will the Minister include those proposals in the terms of reference of the independent pay review for which he has been asked?

Mr. Stewart: A specific question on the independent pay review has been tabled. I emphasise that we have set out a full strategy for in-service training with the education authorities to make the best use of the resources of the centrally funded development officers and of training organisations in relation to the 14 to 16 changes and the action plan. I deplore the fact that some teachers have deliberately not taken advantage of the in-service training.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend accept that some of the in-service training will be carried out in the schools? Does he agree that thought should be given in the management of the school programme to allowing one day a week or one day a month for training, because that would not be disruptive over a long period and would be manageable? Does he accept that such an arrangement could make a major contribution to solving the problem?

Mr. Stewart: I note my hon. Friend's comment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that he was prepared to allow reductions in the school year of up to 10 days for the preparation of in-service training.

Mr. Strang: Do the Minister and the Secretary of State not understand that having to train in the evenings and at weekends is only one aspect of a host of factors, such as spending cuts and inadequate remuneration, which have driven teachers to strike today? When will the Government address themselves to the real problems in our schools, or is the strike the beginning of a period of disruption?

Mr. Stewart: I certainly hope not. Such disruption does the teachers' general standing in the community no good. Expenditure per pupil in Scotland is now at its highest ever real level.

Mr. Wallace: As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) said, in-service training is but one aspect of many justifiable grievances of Scottish teachers. Will the Minister guarantee that the standard grade examinations will go ahead as planned for 1986?

Mr. Stewart: I hope so. We are committed to the standard grade changes. These changes have been widely welcomed in principle by the teaching profession as being in the interests of Scottish education.

Local Government Expenditure

2. **Mr. Henderson** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the categories of local government expenditure in Scotland which require his prior approval.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): Local authorities may not incur any liability to meet capital expenses without the consent of my right hon. Friend. As regards current expenditure, local authorities generally speaking do not require the prior approval of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Henderson: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is deep resentment among my constituents at the extravagant way in which Fife regional council is throwing about ratepayers' money in support of Arthur Scargill's political strike, ranging from expenditure on Christmas parties to substantial payments and loans to striking miners and their families? Some of that provision is wasteful because, if it were not paid for by Fife regional council, it would be paid for by the DHSS. Is my hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents feel that if those payments are not illegal they should be made so? Is my hon. Friend aware that urgent action is needed to protect the interests of ratepayers?

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Obviously, it is up to each authority to satisfy itself that it has the power to make those payments. It is extraordinary that authorities—not just my hon. Friend's authority—which are constantly claiming that they do not have sufficient resources to service the needs of their areas can make that extra expenditure. The ratepayers are being asked to subsidise the failure of responsibility by the NUM.

Dr. Bray: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, as the Government directly control capital expenditure, they are responsible for the decay of the infrastructure in Scotland and the rotting away of services for housing, roads, hospitals and schools, which are greatly in need of repair?

Mr. Ancram: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has seen last year's allocations. We take into account the bids made to us by authorities and try to meet them within the available resources.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman has confirmed that some categories of revenue require prior Government approval. Will he confirm also that the methods of assessing the needs of local authorities require prior Government approval? When will the Under-Secretary of State introduce the proper client-group approach of assessing local authorities' expenditure?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman should look at the system that exists at the moment, because need is assessed on the basis of the client-group approach. The guidelines are drawn up on the same basis. Increasingly, from year to year, we are making sure that the distribution of rate support grant occurs in accordance with that same system.

Teachers (Salaries and Conditions)

3. **Mr. Norman Hogg** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received advocating an independent review of teachers' salaries and conditions of service; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Younger): I have been asked by the teachers side of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education to set up an independent review of teachers salaries. By the end of last week, I had received some 770 representations generally advocating a review, many of which asked for a review of conditions of service as well as salaries. I hope to announce a decision shortly.

Mr. Hogg: Is the Secretary of State aware that today throughout Scotland teachers are on strike? Is he aware also of the real grievances of teachers and their justifiable case for an independent inquiry? Will he make that decision as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Younger: However justifiable the teachers' case may be—I have undertaken to consider carefully all the points they have put to me—I honestly do not feel that industrial action does anything but the greatest harm to their case.

Mr. McQuarrie: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the joint negotiating committee first wrote to him on 14 August 1984 requesting this meeting and that he recently met the committee. I am sure my right hon. Friend accepts that, having gone through the trauma of claims and all the rest of it in the last Parliament, it is essential that he should come quickly to a decision on the question of an unrestricted independent pay review body for the teachers so that both the Government and the teachers are obliged to accept the decisions of that review body.

Mr. Younger: I note what my hon. Friend says. I have been asked by both sides to take careful account of all the facts that they put to me, and I am certainly doing that.

Mr. Roy Jenkins: Does the Secretary of State recollect that when my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and I met him five and a half weeks ago to discuss this point he said that he hoped to reach a decision within two weeks? What is causing the delay? Is the right hon. Gentleman less effective in dealing with the dogmas of the Secretary of State for Education and Science than are his own Back Benchers?

Mr. Younger: There is no dogma involved. It is a purely practical question. It is a major request that requires very careful consideration, and I am giving it that.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Secretary of State aware that, since the last major independent review by Houghton in 1974, teachers' salaries have fallen behind those of many other categories of people, such as policemen, who can now earn as much as £138 per week more than a teacher? Bearing in mind that the teachers made their demand for an independent review as long ago as August, is it any wonder that they now feel that they have to resort to strike action in protest against this reactionary Philistine Government, who must bear full responsibility for the current crisis in Scottish education?

Mr. Younger: I do not think that there are any circumstances in which strike action by teachers can ever be justified. The teachers' position would be more credible today if it were not the fact that some teachers started disruptive action even before they had given me a chance to consider their request.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend agree, in view of his statement that he will make an early decision on this very important subject, that it is unforgiveable to have strike action now and to prevent children from having education?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend. The sad thing is that teaching is or should be a highly respected profession, and action of this sort does nothing for the teachers' case.

Mr. Gourlay: Is the Secretary of State aware that the dog-in-the-manger attitude towards teachers' salaries and conditions has caused many moderate minded people, and even Tory supporters, to go on strike today? Why will he not invest in Scotland's future and help to restore Scotland to its place in the educational vanguard?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate that many teachers feel very strongly about the issues. It is for those reasons that I am taking great care in considering their request. Teachers would expect me to do that.

Mr. Donald Stewart: Is the Secretary of State aware that the industrial action is arising from sheer frustration, as the teachers feel that their case is getting nowhere? Therefore, the setting up of an independent review is extremely urgent. As their position and salaries have recently been drastically eroded, does he not think that the teachers have a fair case which should be attended to urgently and sympathetically?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate that, and that is why I am considering their points very carefully. As I said, the regrettable fact is that the disruptive action started in the summer. If I were the most enthusiastic teacher in the world, I would not feel that such action could advance my case. It has the opposite effect.

Mr. Lamble: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he is in favour of granting an independent review to

Scottish teachers, or will he at least make a substantial lump sum available to teachers for the extra work that has fallen on them? If the answer is that the Treasury will not sanction it, when will the right hon. Gentleman speak up for Scotland and tell the English Treasury to go to hell?

Mr. Younger: As there is no such body as the English Treasury, I cannot very well ask it to do anything.

I think that the hon. Gentleman is asking me to pre-empt the conclusions of the review that I have been asked to consider. I am taking into account everything that the teachers and employers have said to me.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Secretary of State recall that, exactly 10 years ago today, the House was debating teachers' pay and unrest in Scottish schools? Despite the fact that the then Labour Government had set up the Houghton committee, the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends laid the responsibility for the unrest directly at the Government's door. Therefore, will he now accept his responsibilities, set up a review body and agree to meet its costs?

Mr. Younger: I accept my full responsibility. I thought I had made that clear. In the interests of each side of the House it might be better not to recall the events of 10 years ago.

Dr. M. S. Miller: In connection with conditions of service, will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking to teachers, who entered a pension scheme with good will many years ago, that when they receive their lump sum gratuity it will not be taxed, and that any such provision will not be retrospective?

Mr. Younger: Matters of taxation are for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Further to the question of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Mr. Gourlay), we have already made provisions to help teachers with an extra work load. We have given them no fewer that 10 extra free days in the year on which to do further preparation for their teaching. We have also allowed for some extra staffing levels this year to help the minority of teachers who will have extra work to do in regard to the new standard grade courses.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: As there is independent review machinery for police salaries, does the right hon. Gentleman think that a teacher is less, or more, important than a policeman?

Mr. Younger: They are equally important, but I have not had a request from the teachers to set up an independent pay review body.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Secretary of State not accept that the lack of an independent pay review and the fact that teachers' salaries have already fallen far behind have meant that there has already been a loss of dedicated teachers from the profession, especially science and mathematics teachers? If he does not set up a review, we shall fail to recruit the dedicated teachers whom we need. Does he not recognise that an independent review is long overdue and that he should make an early announcement to that effect?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comment. I would have hoped that most teachers, irrespective of these issues, would have felt that at present teaching is more exciting, innovative and creative than for many years. The finest people in the teaching profession must respond clearly to this extremely challenging job, including the introduction for the first time of an all-graduate profession.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when teachers behave like industrial trade unionists they should not be surprised if at a future date the Government decide to introduce legislation to ensure that, like industrial trade unionists, they are subject to the Employment Protection Act 1975 and anything else?

Mr. Younger: I confine myself to saying that teachers are a highly respected professional body, but such bodies do not have their causes advanced by anything like the sort of industrial action that we now appear to be seeing.

Mr. Dewar: Does not the Secretary of State not recognise that there has been an almost complete absence of support from Conservative Members because there is a widespread realisation that teachers have fallen behind comparable groups in society? Would the right hon. Gentleman think himself a member of a respected profession if he were earning between £8,000 and £9,000 a year as an experienced secondary school teacher doing a stressful and difficult job and coping with new curricula developments? If he wants to avoid industrial action and discontent boiling over in our schools during the coming months, does not he accept that he must make a prompt and sensible decision in favour of an independent pay review?

Mr. Younger: There is not much in what the hon. Gentleman says with which I can disagree. I have made it clear all afternoon that I am carefully considering all the points put to me, and I shall try my best to make a response to the teachers. However, the hon. Gentleman must have been half asleep, because many of my hon. Friends have warmly supported me.

Student Awards

4. **Mr. Steel** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money he expects to save by the cut in the level of student grant; and how many Scottish students will be affected.

Mr. Younger: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will be making a further statement today.

Mr. Steel: Does the Secretary of State not recognise that there has been a public outcry about recent announcements because they have come on top of a steady erosion in the value of student grants since the Government took office? Does he appreciate that a 14 per cent. increase will be necessary this year to restore the grant to its level at the time when the right hon. Gentleman took office? If there is further damage to the parental contribution, will that not militate against recruitment in the Scottish universities, because of the four-year honours degree compared with the three-year standard in England?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's latter point. However, as he has noticed, in the past year I have made alterations to the Scottish system of student grants to recognise the fact that the travel pattern of Scottish students is different from that south of the border. That was widely welcomed.

Mr. Malone: Will my hon. Friend also bear in mind that Scotland is additionally affected because first-year

intake is often at the age of 17 and covenanting schemes are not available, thereby putting us in a very different position from our English equivalents?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I appreciate his point, but he will no doubt take that question up with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Secretary of State accept that these problems are taken as seriously by Scottish students and their parents as they are by English Conservative Members of Parliament? How does he relate education to industry, and are not Government policies giving students a signal that for most of them jobs will simply not be available?

Mr. Younger: I do not think that this issue, important though it is, is directly related to industry or to jobs for students. This is a question of how to finance university education. As I have said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will be making a statement later today.

Mr. Wilson: I look forward to the recantation from the Secretary of State for Education and Science, but will the Secretary of State explain why he made a statement on grant cuts several days after the statement made by his right hon. Friend, and why on major aspects of grants he appears to be a copycat Minister and rarely to give the lead?

Mr. Younger: On the contrary, I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, who is supposed to be a specialist in Scottish affairs, would know that public expenditure calculations for Scotland take place at different times from those for England because we must work in line with the formula on which our block grant is worked out. The system is highly favourable to us, and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would know about it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the fact that the majority of Scottish students at universities take a four-year degree course will be fully borne in mind and taken into account?

Mr. Younger: Yes, I can confirm that.

Mr. Ewing: Is it not a spineless approach for the Secretary of State to hide behind the Secretary of State for Education and Science? As the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) said, the Secretary of state issued a statement after he caught the night sleeper north, which meant that he was not subject to questions in the House. Why does he not tell his Scottish colleagues what arrangements he has made, and answer the question of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel)? What arrangements has the Secretary of State made to tell us what will happen to student grants in Scotland after the Secretary of State for Education and Science has made his statement this afternoon?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman has been reading too many whodunnits. It would generally be for the convenience of the House if one of the Ministers involved made a clear statement about what the position will be. When my right hon. Friend makes his statement, he will make it on behalf of all Education Ministers.

Salmon Fishing

5. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the salmon fishing industry in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): There was a modest improvement in catches in 1983 in comparison with 1982, but I share the concern of the salmon interests in Scotland that catches in the 1980s have been poor in comparison with the previous three decades and that spring running fish have been particularly scarce.

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to pay tribute to the immense contribution made to the Scottish economy by anglers on the salmon leaps, including English anglers? Will he confirm that this contribution is being put under increasing strain by overfishing on the spawning grounds of Greenland, commercial netting at the mouths of rivers and poaching? What urgent steps will the Government take to deal with those problems by way of increased pressure on our Community partners, pressure on the local authorities involved and by introducing tagging?

Mr. MacKay: My hon. Friend is right to draw the House's attention to the important part that salmon angling plays in the rural economy of many parts of Scotland. The Government are well aware of that and are worried about the decline in stocks. As my hon. Friend knows, we are considering seriously proposals put to us about tagging. We have come to agreements with Greenland about reducing the tonnage which it takes. Indeed, I noticed a recent press report that Greenland has not found the salmon to make up this year's tonnage for its fishing industry.

Mr. Mason: Will the Minister inform the House what progress is being made on the legislation, which we expect, on the salmon-tagging scheme, which is designed to cut salmon poaching? It has been under review for nearly two years. Has not consultation gone on for too long? Is he aware that the House is growing impatient with the lackadaisical approach of the Scottish Office, as distinct from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which wants to get on with the matter?

Mr. MacKay: I do not accept that the Scottish Office has been lackadaisical in this matter. My noble Friend the Minister of State and officials in his Department have had discussions with various interested organisations. It is clear that although there is considerable support for tagging, there is also considerable hostility to it. I hope that it will be possible to reach conclusions on this matter in the near future.

Mr. Currie: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is tremendous opposition to tagging of any sort among Scottish fish farmers? Does he accept that this will simply lead to legalised poaching? Might not it be far better to have a scheme of licensing game dealers to sell salmon, so that all the fish passes through them, just as game does now?

Mr. MacKay: My hon. Friend has made a valid point about licensed salmon dealers. My right hon. and noble Friend and I are well aware of the objections to tagging felt

by the Scottish National Farmers Union and by the very important salmon farming industry in Scotland. Of course, their objections have to be taken into account.

Mr. Johnston: Is the Minister aware that the sale of salmon fisheries, such as those in the river Conon, by the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board, means that the opportunities for local people to fish are being drastically reduced? Does he not feel that their opportunity to fish for salmon in Scotland is something in which he should be interested?

Mr. MacKay: There are very adequate facilities for local people to fish in Scotland. Many of them would find the situation much better if only there were more salmon. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the river Conon, but that is a matter for the hydroelectric board and I suggest that he takes up the matter with the board's chairman.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my hon. Friend introduce legislation at an early date to help the district fishery boards? What steps is he taking to put pressure on Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to prevent drift netting off the English coast?

Mr. MacKay: I cannot predict the timing or precise content of any Bill, but, apart from the possibility of salmon sales control, we are considering how to strengthen the local administrative structure of the salmon fishery boards in Scotland. My hon. Friend will know that the drift netting to which he referred is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend really accept the great importance of this asset to Scotland? If so, does he agree that the Government's prevarication on this issue, and on many others affecting the salmon, does them no credit?

Mr. MacKay: I know my hon. Friend's deep interest in this subject, and we have all heard about his success in recent weeks. The Government are not prevaricating. We are well aware of the serious position and of the importance of the salmon fishing industry to rural Scotland. We are concerned to ensure that any proposals we bring to the House are correct.

European Regional Development Fund

6. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total value of grants made towards projects in Scotland by the European regional development fund since its inception in 1975.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Total commitments and allocations for Scotland are £385 million.

Mr. Knox: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the people of Scotland are aware of the scale of those grants and of their significance to the progress of the Scottish economy?

Mr. Stewart: I certainly hope that the people of Scotland are aware of the considerable importance of European regional development fund assistance. There was a recent and important announcement with regard to non-quota funds. The types of Scottish projects that benefit are roads, bridges, sewerage systems and industrial site services. Some Scottish Members may be interested to know that, following our discussions with the European Commission, we expect it to announce soon that it is prepared to add ferry vessels to that list.

Mr. Allen Adams: I wish to raise a more parochial matter. Given the substantial sum that the Minister has mentioned, will he use the little ability that he obviously has to make sure that some of the money is used in our area to ensure that Renfrew district council can proceed with the building of its leisure centre, which it has been talking about for 10 or 15 years? I am sure he will agree that it might go to his credit if he could at least build public baths.

Mr. Stewart: I am aware of the importance that the hon. Gentleman attaches to the Paisley leisure centre, which is near my constituency. In my constituency we already have those facilities at Barrhead. The matter is in the hands of the European Commission. Our application was made seven months ago and we presented what the Scottish Office believed to be a good case for European regional development fund assistance. The Commission is not yet convinced of the contribution that the project will make to tourism, but we are pressing it to give the project favourable treatment next year.

Regional Policy

7. **Mr. Ewing** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the anticipated effect of the Government's regional assistance policy on the Scottish economy.

Mr. Younger: The measures announced on 28 November maintain a strong regional policy in Scotland and extended regional development grants to service industries for the first time.

Mr. Ewing: I should like to ask the Secretary of State about the economy of the central region. Does he realise that three of the areas in Scotland granted special development area status have unemployment rates below that of Falkirk, and that five of them have unemployment rates below that of Alloa? Why has the Secretary of State totally ignored the representations both of Central regional council and Falkirk district council about the need for development area status for the Falkirk area? Will the right hon. Gentleman consider meeting the local authorities, or at any rate the Labour Member of Parliament, to discuss the seriously deteriorating situation in the Central region?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern. I shall be glad to see any hon. Member who wishes to see me about any such matter. It is not a straight matter of slotting an area into a category on the ground of the unemployment level. We also take into account other factors such as the industrial structure in the area. I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern about the central area—a considerable part of which is still an assisted area—but I still believe that the best way to look at the matter is in the broadest sense, taking into account other factors as well as unemployment.

Mr. Corrie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that 200 steel workers in my constituency are under threat of redundancy? Will he assure us that the area will be given any aid that can be given under the scheme, to try to alleviate unemployment?

Mr. Younger: I was glad to see the deputation from the area that my hon. Friend brought to see me, and I am considering very carefully everything that the members of the deputation said to me. The decision is one for the general management of the British Steel Corporation, and

rightly so, but I am glad that, under the regional changes, the area will be in the top tier for regional policy assistance.

Mr. Home Robertson: Some areas of very high unemployment in Scotland are located in places that are no longer assisted areas, and which—as in the case of my own constituency—may not have been assisted areas for some time. What hope is there for development and job creation in such areas?

Mr. Younger: Any properly planned regional policy is bound to concentrate on the very worst areas. Under all Governments, small pockets of high unemployment can occur in areas where the general level of unemployment is not very high. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there are still powers available to the Scottish Development Agency, and other powers, that can be used even for areas that are not assisted. No doubt those powers could be used in appropriate cases.

Coal Industry Dispute

8. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what he estimates has been the cost to date to the Scottish economy of the mining dispute.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The loss of coal output directly reduced industrial production by some 2·5 per cent. in the second quarter of this year. The recovery in manufacturing output is continuing. The main effect of the strike has been the hardship suffered by the families of striking miners.

Mr. Brown: Will the Minister face facts? The Government are responsible for the crisis. It is obvious that the miners are standing firm and will not be defeated, and so something must be done to resolve the crisis by bringing both sides together. What, if anything, do the Government intend to do?

Mr. Allan Stewart: The people who should be facing facts are Mr. Arthur Scargill and his colleagues in the National Union of Mineworkers, and the fact that they should face is that there is a perfectly reasonable basis for setlement in the terms put to, and agreed by, NACODS.

Mr. Henderson: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most unnecessary costs of the mining dispute has been incurred by local authorities which insist on dishing out ratepayers' money to support the operation? That has affected not only ratepayers in the domestic sector, but businesses as well, and there is bound to be a knock-on effect on jobs.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I know of the anger that that action has caused among ratepayers, especially in my hon. Friend's area. It is indeed surprising that councils which constantly claim that they are tight on resources should apparently be so flush with funds for such purposes.

Mr. Eadie: If the hon. Gentleman will return to the original question about the effect of the strike on the Scottish economy and its cost, he must concede that the cost has been enormous. Will he note that the way to resolve the problem is to get back to the negotiating table to achieve a negotiated settlement? Is he aware that, since the Conservatives have been in Government, there has been less investment in the mining industry in Scotland? Is he further aware that there was less investment in the industry in Scotland in 1983-84 than there was in 1979, when Labour was in power?

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government have an outstanding record on investment in the coal industry. We have invested £2 million a day in it.

Mr. Eadie: Not in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: As to the adverse industrial consequences of the strike, there have been reduced purchases of mining machinery, and loss of income has hit suppliers of goods and services to the mining community. However, the recovery in manufacturing output in Scotland is continuing—it was up 5 per cent. in the first half of 1984. Scotland is in favourable circumstances with regard to electricity supply because, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the electricity boards have alternative sources of supply.

Mr. Maxton: As the Minister is so anxious to bring the strike to an end, why does he not advise the Cabinet to instruct the National Coal Board to go back to the negotiating table and start negotiating on the true facts about the viability of pits instead of the nonsense that it has talked so far? Is he aware of the report that I have in my hand, and which is marked "Confidential"? In it, five leading accountants, including two professors of accountancy, show quite clearly that the facts and figures that the NCB has used so far are utter nonsense? Will he go back to the negotiating table on that basis? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Allan Stewart: It is Mr. Scargill who has said that he has not budged an inch. The NCB has proposed a basis for settlement, which has been accepted by NACODS. Perhaps I might tell the hon. Gentleman and others who are cheering what he said that 2,267 miners are working in Scotland today. My right hon. and hon. Friends commend them for going back to work and their bravery in the face of intimidation. I know that Opposition Members regard them as scabs. That is the difference between us. We are the party of the workers, they are the party of the strikers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the point of order afterwards.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Scottish economy would have been worse affected if the Nottinghamshire miners had not continued to work?

Mr. Allan Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a pity that miners in Scotland did not get the opportunity to ballot, as did Nottinghamshire miners, as they would have been at work as well if they had had the chance.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister restrain his hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) and concur with the convenor of Fife regional council in that, first, nothing that the regional council has done in support of the miners has broken the law and, secondly, that he is perfectly right to say that, "nae wain in my region will have a hungry belly."? Do Conservative Members intend to win the strike on the basis of hungry bairns' bellies? As we are approaching the season of good will, will the

Government show good will and get the Secretary of State for Energy to call the parties to the negotiating table to achieve an honourable settlement to the dispute, or do they intend to win by attrition?

Mr. Allan Stewart: My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) did not say that the action of the regional council was illegal. He said that he deplored it, as I do. As for the emotive language used by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), I believe that the striking miners have a responsibility to take into account the interests of their families and to go back to work. Their jobs are there for them.

Mr. Hugh Brown: I am glad that the Leader of the House is in his place as I wish him to repeat what I believe he said yesterday, although it is not in *Hansard*, when he urged the NUM to return to the negotiating table. If that is indeed the Government's position, will the hon. Gentleman instruct the NCB to be a bit more conciliatory?

Mr. Allan Stewart: What I said, and am happy to repeat, is that in my view there is a perfectly reasonable basis for a settlement on the terms already accepted by NACODS. I am sure that if a ballot were put to members of the NUM as a whole on that proposition it would be accepted.

Mr. Malone: If my hon. Friend reads the report to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) referred, will he bear in mind that it was prepared by academics with little experience of the mining industry and that it was immediately ripped apart on breakfast television by a leading practical expert?

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As a former academic myself, I often take with a pinch of salt documents produced by academics.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Minister accept that his synthetic rage in the past few minutes had made him a somewhat ludicrous figure, like some demented Paddington Bear dancing at the Dispatch Box? Will he accept that the Opposition give the strongest possible support to local authorities in Scotland, which have shown concern and compassion for the real hardship being endured in their areas, and that we would welcome a gleam of humanity on this issue from Ministers of the Crown in Scotland?

Whatever the record for the United Kingdom, will the hon. Gentleman admit that investment in the Scottish coalfields has declined since 1979 and that that is one of the major problems? Will he give a categorical assurance that, to the best of his and the Government's knowledge, there is no plan to close pits and reduce the work force on the lines forecast on fairly compelling evidence by the STUC and other bodies in Scotland?

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am not prepared to comment on the status of documents which the NUM or STUC claims to possess. That is a matter for the National Coal Board. We all saw the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on television, giving support to Mr. Arthur Scargill in the Usher hall. He is now clutching at straws to hide the extreme embarrassment felt by him and some of his colleagues at the conduct of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Aid to Industry

9. **Mr. Millan** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's aid to industry.

Mr. Younger: As announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 28 November, responsibility for the administration of regional development grant in Scotland is being transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Scottish Office. My Department's funding of both the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board is being maintained at very high levels.

Mr. Millan: Is the Secretary of State aware that, even with the present disgracefully high levels of unemployment in Scotland, there are still shortages of skilled labour? That being so, does he agree that it is scandalous that there should be proposals to close skillcentres, including one in my constituency? As he is one of the Ministers directly responsible for the Manpower Services Commission, will he ensure that those proposals—the case for them is argued on the flimsiest grounds, as I have seen from the paper that is to go to the MSC on 13 December—are withdrawn and the skillcentres allowed to get on with the job which they are so well equipped to do?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman says about the centre in his constituency, and I agree that those who work in these skillcentres are dedicated people, who have done good work for a long time. However, if the right hon. Gentleman carefully studies the papers that he has been given he will find that the amount and the quality of the training that is to be done is not being reduced, but increased. All that we are trying to do is to get the premises and buildings put into line with modern training conditions, and this is long overdue.

Mr. James Hamilton: Will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the Government's policies on trade and industry are doing nothing for the people in Lanarkshire? Is he aware that in my constituency there were 32 liquidations last week? Is he also aware that in my constituency a skillcentre is closing in Bellshill? Bearing in mind that over 20 per cent. of our people are unemployed, is it not time that the Government took their finger out and did something about the unemployed and about helping to train unskilled people?

Mr. Younger: I think that it is an annexe of the skillcentre that is due for closure in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The amount and the quality of training have increased. We are merely trying to get the type of premises brought up to date. As to regional support in general, the hon. Gentleman will know that Lanarkshire has had many important new developments, and he has warmly welcomed some of them in the House.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Seat Belts

40. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many people have been prosecuted in Scotland for not wearing seat belts.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland (Mr. Peter Fraser): The number of persons proceeded against in 1983 when the seat belt charge was the main offence was 275. The provisional figure for the first half of 1984 is 93.

Mr. Maxton: In view of the very encouraging results in terms of prevention of injury following the seat belt legislation—I myself escaped minor injury in a car accident last week by wearing a seat belt—may I ask the Minister to consult his colleagues in the Department of Transport and urge them to support legislation to make it compulsory for car manufacturers to fit rear seat belts as a first step towards making the wearing of them compulsory in back seats as well?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: It is clear that the use of seat belts since the introduction of the legislation has been successful. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport has already said that she will announce the Government's intentions about making rear seat belts compulsory in the light of the Select Committee on Transport report on road safety.

Mr. Malone: Were a substantial number of the people stopped for not wearing seat belts not prosecuted? In view of the success of the policy of wearing seat belts, will my hon. and learned Friends undertake a policy of prosecuting as often as is necessary?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The figures that I gave do not show the number of offences that were recorded by the police. In the first half of this year, over 1,100 were recorded by the police. However, I make it clear that the figure I have given is of those cases where there was a main offence and prosecution for the offence. My hon. Friend will appreciate that, it is also within the power of fiscals to issue warning letters and to take advantage of the fiscal fine system. A number of people have been dealt with in that manner.

Homelocators Ltd.

41. **Mr. McTaggart** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will institute proceedings against Homelocators Ltd. of Glasgow for offences under the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: No report has been received by me or the procurator fiscal at Glasgow in respect of any contravention by Homelocators Ltd. of Glasgow under the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953, but, following the tabling of this question, I have now instructed the procurator fiscal at Glasgow to make inquiries.

Mr. McTaggart: I am grateful to the Solicitor-General for that answer, and I recognise that he is trying to be helpful in this matter. Does he agree that even if this firm is found not to have been breaking laws, it is certainly guilty of circumventing them, and in the process has caused hardship to many students who are already under tremendous pressure? Can the hon. and learned Gentleman give the House an assurance that, if necessary, he will bring forward changes to the relevant Act to make sure that these practices cease as soon as possible?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. It would be premature now to say whether there has been a breach of the Act to which the hon. Gentleman has referred or whether there is a loophole in the law that is being exploited. If inquiries reveal that an offence has been committed, we shall give careful consideration to prosecution. Alternatively, if there appears to be a loophole, that will be made clear.

Coal Industry Dispute

42. **Mr. Strang** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many people charged with offences arising out of the dispute in the mining industry have been refused bail.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: As at 3 December 1984, 18 persons had been remanded in custody after appearing in court charged with offences arising out of the mining dispute. Of the 18 persons, two were subsequently released on appeal and one immediately changed his plea to that of guilty.

Mr. Strang: Will the Solicitor-General for Scotland recognise that these are honest men who have never been in trouble with the law in their lives, including the chairman of the Lothian central strike committee, Mr. David Hamilton, who is one of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie)? Mr. Hamilton has languished in Saughton prison for six weeks. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman not understand the damage that is being done by using the apparatus of the state to defeat the National Union of Mineworkers? When will he understand that it is outrageous that these men are being penalised? When will the Government face the fact that long-term damage has been done to the police force in Scotland in many communities because of the use to which it has been put in the miners' dispute?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have already said that 18 persons have been remanded in custody. There is a clear bail procedure and a clear opportunity to take advantage of an appeal if those concerned feel that bail should have been granted to them. Such appeals have been successful in a number of cases. The hon. Gentleman mentioned a particular case and he knows that as it is to come before the courts in the next fortnight I cannot comment on it in any detail. However, he will be aware that the man to whom he has referred is charged with a serious assault. He took the matter of his bail to the appeal court and his application was refused.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I should have said before that the House must be careful about mentioning individual cases, especially those which are before the courts, and should bear in mind the sub judice rule.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Solicitor-General for Scotland at least agree to minimise hardship among mining families, although his colleagues seem determined to maximise it? Will he explain to the House why at least 100 miners have been refused legal aid by the Dunfermline sheriff court?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The granting of legal aid in Scotland is a matter for individual sheriffs. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the test that is required to be applied by the courts in those circumstances is that of the interests of justice. It is on that basis only that legal aid is granted or refused. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the prosecutor in Scotland is independent.

Nevertheless, he makes no intervention when an individual makes an application before the courts, whether it arises from the miners' strike or otherwise, for legal aid.

Mr. Dewar: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that in a letter to me of 13 November from his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State it was conceded that there were significant variations in the approach of individual sheriff courts to the granting of legal aid? These variations have been highlighted in a discreditable fashion by experience with picket-line offences. The hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that a review of legal aid is being conducted. Will he give a guarantee or undertaking that the granting of legal aid will be considered in that review and that the results of it will be made known to the House?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The hon. Gentleman appreciates that the administration of the legal aid system is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and not for me. However, it is a fact that there have been discrepancies in the way in which legal aid has been applied by the courts in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman will readily appreciate from his professional experience that discrepancies existed long before the miners' strike first emerged. I understand that my right hon. Friend is considering the matter as one of the issues to be included in an overall review of legal aid in Scotland.

Salmon Poaching

43. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many prosecutions have taken place in the latest available year for salmon poaching in the sea and fresh water, respectively.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: In the period from 1 December 1983 to 1 December 1984 there were 38 and 321 prosecutions for salmon poaching in the sea and fresh water respectively.

Sir Hector Monro: Will my hon. Friend take every opportunity, now that we have an aircraft to add to the fishery protection vessels, to ensure that as many poachers as possible on the high seas are brought to book?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Yes. I understand that "Younger's tartan air force" has already had considerable success in using aerial photography to catch those who have been engaged in illegal poaching for salmon at sea. Given that success, it is anticipated that we can look forward to further prosecutions in the Scottish courts.

Diversion Scheme

44. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he is satisfied with the progress of the diversion scheme.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Yes, Sir. The scheme is still in its early days but continues to make steady and satisfactory progress.

Mr. McKelvey: Is the Minister aware that I support the scheme? Does he not share my concern that in Ayrshire recently there were a couple of diversions involving cases of husbands of battered wives. Does the Minister agree that cases of serious assault are not proper to be used in a diversion scheme?

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Clearly, we want to expand the diversion scheme. I believe that the hon. Gentleman supports what is being done. Obviously there are also cases where it is not appropriate to take advantage of that alternative to prosecution. I do not know of the particular cases to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. If he feels that there have been cases of serious assault, I shall be grateful if he will let me know. It is certainly not intended that the diversion scheme should be used to deal with serious assaults, which should very much more properly come before the ordinary courts.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of questions. My point of order relates to the rights of hon. Members and to the confidentiality of the document referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) in his supplementary to question No. 8. I have a copy of a document entitled "NCB Accounts—a Mine of Misinformation". The document is available in two forms. One is marked "Confidential" in red. The other is not marked at all. The document marked "Confidential" in red was given to me by a member of the Select Committee on Energy. Discretion as to whether that document is designated as a confidential document is in the hands of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy. It is within his discretion. In the event of his attaching the designation "Confidential", it means that the document becomes privileged. If the document is privileged, it is subject to the rules as set out in "Erskine May" on pages 153 and 154 where it says that until a Committee has reported to the House it is a breach of privilege for disclosure to be made of anything that took place during the Committee's private meetings, or for any of its papers to be made public.

My point of order is in two parts. Has the Chairman of the Committee abused his position by seeking to designate a document as confidential when it has already been made available to Members of this House and has already been made the subject of a BBC "Newsnight" programme in the middle of last week? This document has already been made public. Could it possibly be said that in designating the document as confidential the Chairman was intending to shackle the members of that Committee and prevent them from commenting publicly upon the contents of the document? Furthermore, in order to finalise my point of order, was my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) placed inadvertently in contempt of this House? Was the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone), who rose today to refer specifically to that document and who is a member of that Select Committee, inadvertently or deliberately placed in contempt of this House?

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) did not give me notice that he intended to raise this matter. However, I have to inform the House that, as far as I am aware, no member of my Committee has with my knowledge made this document available. When it was received by the Committee it was marked "Confidential". The Committee was requested to treat it as such. As far as I am aware, we are under an obligation so to do.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a heavy day and I can dispose of the matter simply, because the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) kindly gave me notice that he was going to raise the matter and I have had an opportunity to look into it. I have made inquiries about the document and I am satisfied that it may be referred to. Indeed, it has been referred to in the House before by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 29 November. An hon. Member must not refer to unreported evidence of a Select Committee, but if a paper has already been circulated to other persons before the Committe sends for it, clearly reference can be made to it in th House or anywhere else.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Further to tha point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am very concerned abou the position. I had hold of that document as a Member o the House last Thursday and I used it on three occasion at public meetings over the weekend. I came to the Hous on Monday evening to open correspondence from th Clerk to the Select Committee and in it was a copy of th document that I had used on public platforms marke "Confidential". It was I who handed it to my hon. Frien the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

I have written to you today, Mr. Speaker to ask whethe my actions over the past six days have indeed been contempt of the House and I look forward to receivin your reply.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already referred in kindly fashion to the hon. Member for Bolsover. I do no think that any point of order can arise.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me dispose of the point o order. I do not think that the hon. Member for Rothe Valley (Mr. Barron) has done anything wrong. I have nothing further to add to what I have already said to the hon. Member for Workington. As I understand it from the Chairman of the Select Committee, and as the House heard, when he received the document it was marked "Confidential".

Mr. Skinner: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you, Mr. Speaker, will look seriously into what my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) had to say, and taking into account the admission of my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), it is important that you understand that for many years the Coal Board has been twisting the accounts when it presented reports——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not on a point of order. He is abusing his point of order to make a political point which is not a matter for me.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, during the Second Reading of the Local Government Bill, I was fortunate enough to catch your eye at 25 seconds to 10 o'clock. I intended to point out to the House how the Bill would deny millions of citizens the democratic right of electing their local representatives. I have no doubt but that the House would have welcomed that after listening to 30 minutes of boring diatribe from the Minister. However, at 15 seconds to 10 o'clock the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household moved that the Question be put, and, rightly, you put the Question. I rushed to the House this morning to read my 20-second speech and I found that it was not in *Hansard*. Can you put this right, please?

Mr. Speaker: *Hansard* heard it, I am sure.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not take a further point of order from the hon. Member for Bolsover.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that I asked a supplementary question to question No. 8. May I apologise to you and to the Leader of the House for misleading the House. The right hon. Gentleman replied to three questions on the mining dispute yesterday, and, unfortunately, I had read only two of them.

Mr. Skinner: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take the point of order if it is entirely different and legitimate, but in fairness to his colleagues in the House, the hon. Gentleman should not take up time with spurious points of order on a day when we have a heavy programme before us.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of the difficulties that hon. Members experience in relation to nationalised industries and documents of this kind is that we are allowed to ask questions only of a general nature. We are not allowed to ask questions about the day-to-day administration of any nationalised industry. That has been laid down. In your capacity as Speaker, you will know that there is a severe limit upon the areas about which we can ask questions.

Because of that I raise this legitimate point of order. Lots of information has been given to the Coal Board upon which Ministers have commented at the Dispatch Box, throughout the dispute and before. An important Select Committee was given figures by the Coal Board that have been proved to be false. They were also given to the House. If we are to be allowed only to raise matters of a general nature in relation to the National Coal Board as a nationalised industry and not about the day-to-day administrative figures we should have more reliable evidence.

It is pretty clear from the confidential document that the Chairman of the Select Committee has that, if we are not careful—this is what I ask you to rule upon—we shall be given Coal Board accounts in a twisted form delivered by people from the NCB who are bent and the House will be misinformed. We want to make sure that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman was not here during Scottish questions.

Mr. Skinner: I was.

Mr. Speaker: Then the hon. Gentleman was not listening. This matter was extensively discussed during Scottish questions and it was suggested that there were two views on the report.

European Council (Dublin)

3.42 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the results of the European Council held in Dublin on 3-4 December. I was accompanied at this meeting by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The conclusions of the Council have been placed in the Library of the House.

The Council covered four main subjects. First, we examined the economic situation in the Community on which the Commission had submitted a detailed report. In particular, we discussed the creation of more jobs by opening up the internal Community market for all goods, services and professions; by defining European standards for products; and by improving the Community's performance in advanced industrial technology. This has to be achieved in the context of—

"moderation in the evolution of real wages"

and

"a pause in the growth of current public expenditure and a decline for several years in its share of gross domestic product".

The Council agreed to set up a review of manpower policy with the aim of directing training to sectors where labour will be needed, of encouraging job mobility and of fostering enterprise, especially among young people.

Secondly, the European Council reached agreement on the Community's position in the enlargement negotiations with Spain and Portugal. Two major issues had been outstanding — wine and fisheries. Both were satisfactorily settled. Unfortunately, Greece reserved her position on enlargement, linking it with a bid for more money for Mediterranean programmes. However, the enlargement negotiations will now go ahead on the outstanding issues and, we hope, be brought to an early conclusion, with a view to accession on 1 January 1986. The outcome will have to be referred back to the Council of Ministers, especially in view of the position adopted by Greece.

Thirdly, we gave particular attention to further measures to relieve famine in African countries, particularly in Ethiopia. We agreed that the Community and its member states should provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain in 1985. This is a really major effort which the United Kingdom strongly supports. We appealed to other donor countries to match this effort.

Fourthly, we had a preliminary exchange on reports from two groups established after the Fontainebleau meeting. These groups are dealing with Community institutions and with practical measures such as easier movement of goods and frontier formalities. The final reports will be substantively discussed at the European Council in the first half of next year.

The European Council also urged the Environment Ministers to reach agreement at their meeting tomorrow on guidelines for the reduction of lead in petrol—a British initiative within the Community — and on vehicle emissions.

Within the context of political co-operation, the Council endorsed the principles for dealing with terrorism and the abuse of diplomatic immunity, which were adopted in September and are now being put into practice.

[The Prime Minister]

We discussed East-West relations, stressing the importance of reaching satisfactory arms control agreements, and the middle east. In the discussion on central America we reaffirmed our support for the Contadora process.

Finally, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted the text on bydgetary discipline, including the strict financial guideline for agricultural expenditure. It is the result of considerable efforts over a period of years by Britain to ensure the better control of Community expenditure and a better balance in the Community budget.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): The most welcome news that comes out of the Dublin summit is the agreement to release 1·2 million tonnes of grain for Ethiopia and other African countries in the coming year. Will the Prime Minister give us an undertaking that, as the grain surplus of the Common Market continues to increase, she will prevail upon the other Heads of Government to increase that allocation as the opportunity arises.

Unfortunately, other consequences of the Dublin summit are much less satisfactory than the decisions on famine relief. First, the Prime Minsiter has failed to get the discipline over the Common Market budget that she promised. When reporting to the House after the last summit in June, the right hon. Lady said:

"we should like the principles to be embodied formally and legally in the budgetary procedure, but it must be done in such a way as to guarantee them." — [*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1001.]

Will she now confirm that the document on budgetary discipline approved by the Dublin summit has no legal status, that it will operate on the basis of majority voting with no British veto, and that it falls lamentably short even of the objectives which the right hon. Lady set herself and promised us back in June?

Secondly, the Prime Minister may talk in her statement of the strict financial guidelines for agricultural expenditure, but is it not a fact that the 1985 Common Market draft budget, which will provide the basis for our 1986 arrangements, provides for a further and significant increase in the proportion of the budget going to agriculture and provides also for cuts in science, technology, investment in research and expenditure on transport and energy? Did the Prime Minister challenge that budget, because it will mean heavy disadvantages for Britain? In the light of that, is the right hon. Lady now prepared to reconsider her rash commitment six months ago to increase British VAT own resource payments to the Common Market by 40 per cent. in the coming year?

Tomorrow, the House debates the Chancellor's autumn statement, which provides for reduced expenditure on housing, education and other vital provisions such as regional aid and training. Against the background of financial stringency at home, how can the Prime Minister possibly justify the increased largesse to the Common Market to which she again committed herself in Dublin?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments about Ethiopia. The Community has pledged itself to provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain between now and the next harvest. All of that grain is not for Ethiopia — other places in Africa also need a considerable amount. It is thought that overall 2 million tonnes are needed of which the Community says it will provide 1·2 million tonnes. The Community is saying to other donors, "Will you please at least match that?" There is a considerable number of other donors who, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, are being very generous.

Considerable amounts of grain are due to land in Ethiopia, with 112,000 tonnes of wheat due to arrive in Ethiopian ports in December and another 94,000 tonnes in January, so that the distribution is kept up. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the distribution is going well. It is vital that we have both flow and distribution. I do not think that we can commit ourselves at the moment to increased amounts. The total amount of cereal allocation in the budget is about 1·1 million tonnes. Not all of it goes to emergency aid; some of it is committed elsewhere. It is a combined effort between the Community and its member states. The right hon. Member will be aware that member states have been very active on their own behalf in helping Ethiopia, as well as within the Community. The text on financial budgetary discipline is binding on the Council itself, but it is not being embodied into a treaty or technically — legally — into the budgetary process. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because one simply cannot get agreement from all 10 countries. All of them have, however, agreed that the Council, which is the deciding unit in the whole Community, shall be bound by the clause on financial budgetary discipline. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the autumn statement and public expenditure, he will have noted that I quoted from one of the documents submitted by the Commission to the Council in the discussion on employment, urging a reduction in public expenditure as a proportion of GDP.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, while the aid that we are, quite rightly, sending to Ethiopia is reaching the Ethiopian army and much of the civil population under Government control, the larger part of the country is not under Government control, and that none of the aid that we are sending is reaching the areas under the control of the National Liberation Fronts of Eritrea and Tigre? As a result, there is a tremendous influx of refugees—nearly 1 million — into the Sudan, and it is becoming an intolerable burden on the Sudan.

Will my right hon. Friend give serious consideration to sending aid through the Sudan to the areas controlled by the National Liberation Fronts of Eritrea and Tigre? There is some justification for doing so, in that those two organisations have offered a truce to the Ethiopian Government and the Ethiopian Government have not responded to it.

The Prime Minister: I am aware that not every area in Ethiopia has managed to get food, but the distribution is very much better than it was. My right hon. Friend is the first to be aware of the difficulties of getting supplies of food and water to the areas concerned. We are very much aware that Sudan is another area in need of help, and I shall take up what my right hon. Friend said about it.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): How far are the new budgetary arrangements, as they affect Britain, capable of being overturned or deferred by action on the part of the European Assembly?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that those new arrangements can be overturned by the Assembly. The

Assembly has to act within the treaty. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the treaty refers to 1 per cent. VAT, and his question is pertinent to some of the things being considered at the moment. The Assembly cannot go beyond 1 per cent. VAT. It has certain margins within that provision but cannot go above it.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): What case is there for any increase whatever in EC agricultural expenditure?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend may take that view, and some of us may go quite a long way towards meeting him on it, but it is not a view taken by everyone.

My right hon. Friend will also be aware that when we took the first steps to limit the guarantees on certain agricultural produce, it caused problems in Britain. We have to be aware that whatever is done is done gradually.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): What is the Government's view on the fact that the majority of Community countries wish to have an intergovernmental conference now on the treaties? In the light of the Greek attitude and the impending enlargement of the Community, are there not advantages for Britain in streamlining the Commission from 17 to 12, in safeguarding budgetary disciplines, and in ensuring that, provided we retain the safeguard of the Luxembourg compromise, there is more majority voting?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, those matters are being discussed in the Dooge committee.

With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's point about reducing the number of Commissioners from 17 to 12, even at Fontainebleau I said that we were prepared to accept that. We think that it is absurd to have 17 Commissioners. There is not the work for 17 Commissioners to do. I must tell the right hon. Gentleman that I was not necessarily followed in my conclusions by other countries which have two Commissioners. I hope that ultimately they will see the wisdom of what I said.

With regard to majority voting, I have no wish to extend it beyond what is at present provided for in the treaty. Majority voting can operate in many areas, but we must stick to the Luxembourg compromise. From what the hon. Gentleman has said, I understand that he agrees.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): What about the fishing aspects of the Dublin summit? In particular, can my right hon. Friend assure our fishermen that the negotiating position agreed there will not be to the detriment of our fishermen, particularly in the south-west of England where Spain clearly hopes to gain increased fishing rights?

The Prime Minister: The Community adopted an agreed negotiating position on fishing. For obvious reasons, that has not been published, but I do not think that my hon. Friend would be unduly concerned about its provisions. I am sure he would feel that they reasonably protected Britain's interests.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Prime Minister has said that the Council has bound itself in respect of budgetary discipline. If that were to be so, would not that need financial regulations? Has not the Council reached conclusions only?

The Prime Minister: No, the conclusions bind the Council, but the hon. Gentleman is right in that this matter has not been transferred into regulations. Other members of the Community did not think that that was necessary. We would have preferred it, but the conclusions are now binding on the Council.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): Will my right hon. Friend give more details about the satisfactory settlement on wine? Am I right in thinking that this settlement requires a much greater distillation of wine, and what effect will that have on the production and use of industrial alcohol in this country?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will be aware that when wine production exceeds a certain amount—and it is triggered by three different criteria—the wine then goes for distillation into alcohol at a very much lower price. That is meant to be a disincentive to growing so much wine in the following year. I refer to table wine, not vintage wine. We are very much aware of the effect that this could have on industrial alcohol in this country. It is therefore important that the triggers are effective to reduce the amount of wine grown in successive years. That will thereby reduce the amounts that go to distillation because the price of that wine would be so low as to make it not worth producing.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Was there any discussion on the easier movement of professions in the internal Community market? Did the Prime Minister take the opportunity to raise the Football League's opposition to the free movement of footballers, which could have a devastating and damaging effect on the finances and standards of English football?

The Prime Minister: No, the hon. Gentleman will be well aware that we are talking about equivalence of qualifications, which can take a long time to negotiate. It is important to complete that part of our work so that our young people are able to practise more easily in other Common Market countries.

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): What provision has the EEC made for food and medical supplies to the 3 million Afghanistan refugees in Pakistan?

The Prime Minister: That is not dealt with through the EEC. We give refugee aid to Pakistan. We have tried to be as generous as possible, because we understand and applaud the excellent provision which Pakistan has made for those refugees from Afghanistan. I shall give my hon. Friend the precise figure. It was up to £3 million, but it may now have gone over that.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): During the conversations on the middle east, did the right hon. Lady pursue the suggestion put by the Greek Prime Minister that there should be a European initiative towards a settlement in the middle east, or is she simply prepared to wait until the American President bothers to notice the problem?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the communiqué on political co-operation. The discussion on the middle east was not extensive. A new initiative could emerge only after very extensive consideration of the kind which specifically occurred at the Venice summit. The discussion was brief. Therefore, the communiqué summarises our present position and says that each of us has kept our contacts with the several parties involved in the middle east dispute. We intend to continue to keep those contacts separately and as a Community.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with the provisions made in the context of enlargement both for migrant workers and the access of British industry to Spanish markets? Does she share my unease that the Greek bargaining position that is now being taken up is a foretaste of what is yet to come regarding Mediterranean countries' pressure on northern European countries on agricultural matters?

The Prime Minister: We have a particular interest in the negotiation of industrial tariffs of the Community with Spain in the negotiations for enlargement. We are not yet satisfied with the conditions, but they are still under negotiation. We are aware of the matter both regarding the quota on cars which are imported into Spain and on the high tariff imposed on them. Therefore, we want increased quotas and reductions in tariffs to take place especially steeply during the early years.

The Greek Government are demanding considerable sums for Mediterranean programmes. The sums were of such an order that my colleagues and I did not think that we could possibly agree to them, bearing in mind that Greece already derives substantial net benefit from joining the Community, which has increased steeply during the past two years.

Mr. Roy Jenkins (Glasgow, Hillhead): Does the Prime Minister recognise that Mr. Papandreou has become her most apt pupil in unilateral intransigence? Nevertheless, does she agree that it would be singularly inappropriate for Greece, which was eager to speed its entry into the Communityto block the entry of two at least equally qualified Mediterranean countries? Does she agree that that is an example neither of Socialist internationalism — a rare commodity these days — nor of democratic responsibility?

The Prime Minister: I recognise no similarity. The right hon. Gentleman has reason to know that the United Kingdom is still a substantial net contributor to the Community—[*Interruption.*]

I note that the right hon. Gentleman says that that is very good. He should be the first to understand that Greece is a substantial——I am sorry——a substantial taker-out from the Community and wants substantially to increase the sum which it takes out. There is, therefore, absolutely no parallel between the two cases. However, I agree that it would be disgraceful if Greece were to use that particular demand to block the entry of both Spain and Portugal. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for expressing that sentiment in the House.

Mr. Francis Maude (Warwickshire, North): My right hon. Friend announced the intention to proceed to the free exchange of services within the Community. Will she say when we may expect a genuine Common Market to replace the protection that exists at present?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right in saying that the article of the treaty on the completion of the Common Market for internal services has been pursued least, although in order of priority it comes above that for agriculture. It is a matter to which the Dooge committee is giving special attention. We have a special interest in it. The committee will report in March, when we shall consider how to take forward its proposals, and we shall have a substantive discussion on it by June 1985. The sooner we get a complete internal market in services the better.

Mr. Ernie Roberts (Hackney North and Stoke Newington): At the meeting did the Prime Minister raise the urgent and serious problem of massive unemployment in Europe? What cures and solutions did she suggest at the meeting?

The Prime Minister: As I said in my statement this was the first part of our discussions and the first matter to which we addressed our attention. I pointed out that there was a substantial report from the Commission — the annual economic report — which was geared especially to

"the dominant problem of unemployment."

It set out four particular groupings and 16 guidelines on matters to be followed. There is a full copy of the report in the Library.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is to be a further statement of great importance, an application under Standing Order No. 10 and an important debate lies ahead of us. I shall take two more questions from each side.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I am glad to hear of the initiatives taken to try to solve the problem of unemployment in the EEC. Is my hon. Friend aware of the success of the United States in its work fare schemes in place of welfare? Will she institute a serious inquiry to see whether their methods can be useful in solving our unemployment problems?

The Prime Minister: We did not discuss those schemes in detail at this meeting, but they were discussed in detail at the London economic summit, at which many European Community countries were present, when President Reagan described them. Some of my hon. Friends in the Department of Employment have been studying those schemes.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): When the Council considered the provision of grain and food aid to Ethiopia and to other countries, did it take into account the role of the United Nations and its various agencies? If so, what conclusions were reached?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we took into account the role both of other countries and, as many of our colleagues pointed out, of the extremely generous gifts from individual citizens and groups in other countries. We took the measure of what we could do both as a Community and as individual countries, and decided that we could provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain, out of a required amount of, we calculated, 2 million tonnes. That is not only for Ethiopia. There are other countries in need in Africa. Many of us also contribute to the world food programme which has been active in securing greater supplies of food to Ethiopia.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): Considering the attitude of Greece, is it expected that enlargement will cause particular difficulties, and when may we hear the outcome? Is it generally accepted that Greece has an absolute veto in all circumstances about enlargement?

The Prime Minister: Negotiations will go ahead on the remaining matters, which were wine, fish and industrial tariffs, for Spain and Portugal. We hope they will be completed by March so that the March Council can consider them. I think that it is technically true that Greece or any member state would have a veto on enlargement

because if one insists on having a Luxembourg compromise on the veto, that inevitably follows. I hope that we shall be able to point out, as right hon. and hon. Gentlemen have, that it would be completely unjust if Greece, which is doing extremely well from its membership of the Community and is a democracy which has known non-democratic days, blocked the entry of other newly established democracies into the Community, when a purpose of their entry is to help and strengthen their democracy.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is the Prime Minister suggesting that Greece is getting enough from the Community already? If so, does she still believe that economic convergence is a central objective of the EC? If the sums that Greece is receiving are sufficient, what hope can there be for a poor country such as Portugal? How and when does she expect the standard of living and economic opportunity of the poorer countries to be significantly improved?

The Prime Minister: In 1982, Greece's net receipts were £404 million, and in 1983 they amounted to £555 million. That represented the sharpest rise in any member state's net receipts, and made Greece the second largest net recipient of European Community funds after Italy. Greece has also benefited from certain special measures such as postponement of the introduction of VAT, which means a benefit of some £140 million. On top of those benefits, other sums were offered to Greece in pursuance of the agreement that we had, that such funds should be provided for integrated Mediterranean programmes as a consequence of enlargement. Therefore, extra on top of that has been offered to Greece. Greece said that it thought that that was not enough, but we said that it was all that the Community could afford for the time being. The hon. Gentleman mentioned convergent economic policies, but the Community is not meant to be a mechanical redistributive mechanism.

Student Awards

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

On 12 November I announced changes to the student awards system involving the abolition of the minimum award, increased contributions from parents in the middle and upper reaches of the income scale and the extension of contributions, for those most able to pay, up to the maximum of the designated tuition fee of £520 a year. The resources released by these measures were intended in part to meet increases in the already substantial bill for student awards—about £700 million in 1984-85—and in part to provide additional money for science.

Our system of student support—amongst the most generous in the world—has long been based on the sharing of responsibility by the Government, the student's family and where appropriate the student himself. When resources are limited, it is, I believe, right for those parents who can afford to do so to carry a larger share of the costs of their children's higher education, in order to release money for urgent needs elsewhere, particularly at the moment for science.

I recognise the concern expressed in the House and elsewhere that the increase in parental contribution that was proposed was too sharp and the notice given too short to enable parents to make such a substantial adjustment in their financial affairs. I believe also that parents will want to know where they stand in relation to the next academic year.

I should therefore tell the House that it remains the Government's intention, subject to the decision of Parliament, to abolish the minimum award and to increase the level of parental contributions to maintenance for those in the middle and upper reaches of the income scale. I have, however, decided to withdraw the proposal that parents should make a contribution to tuition fees. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has decided similarly. The cost of this concession in England and Wales in 1985-86 is £21 million. In order to find this extra sum, I have been through my recently announced expenditure programme again and I have been able to find £11 million savings towards it.

I have three savings to announce. First, there will be a reduction of £6 million in the addition to the equipment grant for universities in 1985-86. This means that universities will get £4 million for this purpose in that year instead of the £10 million that I announced earlier. I intend, however, that the selective scheme, with the agreement of the University Grants Committee, should now be extended to cover the three years to 1987-88: £7 million a year will be available in each of the two later years.

Secondly, there will be a reduction of £3 million—from £14 million to £11 million—in the amount which I had told the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils was a planned addition for science in 1985-86.

Thirdly, there will be a number of smaller economies amounting to £2 million. This will mean among other examples a smaller increase than already announced for

[Sir Keith Joseph]

the PICKUP programme; and less for educational research, adult education and the microelectronics programme.

The remaining £10 million needed in 1985-86 will, exceptionally, be found by an addition of that amount to the public expenditure planning total.

The Government propose to consider—and consult widely about—whether a radical change in the student support system, which might include loans, should be made so as better to meet the needs of students and their families whilst safeguarding the interests of the taxpayer.

I believe that these proposals meet the two main concerns of the House: first, that the increase in parental contribution was too sharp and too sudden; and, secondly, that the system of student support in the longer term should be reviewed.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take points of order afterwards.

Mr. Wilson: It is very important——

Mr. Speaker: Order. All points of order are very important.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: No; I said that I would take the hon. Gentleman's point of order afterwards.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have told the hon. Gentleman that I will take his point of order afterwards, and I will.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will take it afterwards. I will not take it now!

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear me. I will take the point of order afterwards. I will not take it now.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that by withdrawing the proposal to charge for tuition fees he has been forced into a humiliating climb-down? Is he further aware that since the Government came to power they have reduced the real value of student grants by 14 per cent.? The right hon. Gentleman still proposes to abolish the minimum grant and is still not prepared to set up a wide-ranging and independent — I stress "independent"—review of financial support for all those in higher and further education.

Is it not also the case that the right hon. Gentleman is now cutting over £9 million from the increase in the science budget, which he told the world was so important that parents and students must pay for it? Terrified by their own Back Benchers, the Government have climbed down. How can the House have confidence in a Secretary of State who has displayed such incompetence and insensitivity? How can the Secretary of State have any confidence in himself?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we would feel more respect for Conservative Back Benchers if they also used their muscle on issues affecting far greater numbers? Where is the Tory rebellion on the reduction in the pensioners' heating allowance? Where is the Tory rebellion on the cuts in regional aid? Where is the Tory rebellion on unemployment? We will take the Tory Back Benchers seriously when they force the Government to climb down on those other issues of fundamental importance to many millions throughout the country.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government's purpose of strengthening the science budget — though admittedly less than we would have liked—is still being achieved.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): While obviously regretting the need for any increase in the parental contribution, I nevertheless say to my right hon. Friend that I and many of my hon. Friends will be glad that he has thought again about the question of tuition fees. We welcome the change and thank my right hon. Friend for what he has done in that regard, thereby preserving the principle of free higher education in this country.

Sir Keith Joseph: I very much respect the desire of my right hon. and learned Friend to find the best answer to the problem of student support, and I am grateful for what he has said.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): It will not be lost on the House that a rebellion by Tory Back Benchers has for the first time been half successful when it involves the interests of their better-off constituents.

The right hon. Gentleman misunderstands the position if he thinks that the public outcry is about the suddenness of the announcement. The outcry has arisen because the announcement comes on top of a steady erosion of the value of the student grant during the right hon. Gentleman's period of office. That is why it is unacceptable. Why is the right hon. Gentleman messing around trying to find £11 million by damaging cuts in other areas of education when the Chancellor of the Exchequer has told us that he is keeping £1,500 million in reserve for tax cuts in the spring? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us about the effects of the cuts on the Scottish budget, about which he said nothing in his statements?

Finally, why should there not be a review before any changes are made rather than after the right hon. Gentleman has aready made some damaging decisions?

Sir Keith Joseph: All the better-off will still pay more in parental contributions, despite today's announcement. The question of arriving at the optimum balance between students and families on the one hand and taxpayers on the other will be at the heart of the review that has been announced. The cuts of £11 million are reductions in increases and leave substantial increases for the science budget.

Sir William van Straubenzee (Wokingham) *rose*——

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already told the hon. Gentleman that I will take his point of order afterwards, and I will do so.

Mr. Steel *rose*——

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose*——

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am very surprised that the leader of the Liberal party and other should rise on points of order in the middle of a very important statement which the House wishes to hear. I am here to protect the interests of the whole House.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) does not resume his seat, I shall have to ask him to leave.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would be reluctant to have to ask the hon. Gentleman to leave. I ask the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat. I call Sir William van Straubenzee.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I can almost anticipate the point of order that the hon. Member for Dundee, East wishes to make, although there is so much noise that the situation is very difficult for me. I believe that he wishes to say that we have had Scottish questions this afternoon, that there was a question on this point, and that the Secretary of State did not answer it as the Secretary of State for Education and Science has done.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I may be able to call him.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Does my right hon. Friend recall that I ventured yesterday afternoon to identify —and the point seemed to have approval—the inclusion of fees in the parental contribution arrangements as the issue of principle that was bothering so many hon. Members on these Benches? I said that that principle potentially affected not just the better-off but students from far less well-off homes than is normally supposed. What my right hon. Friend has now done, therefore, has gone a long way towards setting at rest the anxiety of Conservative Back Benchers.

Will my right hon. Friend venture to suggest to his Cabinet colleagues that the other lesson of principle is that Conservative Back Benchers who are anxious to support the Government must, in difficult matters such as this, be brought into consultation at a reasonably early stage?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am glad to pay tribute to the effectiveness of my hon. Friend's insight. The review and the following consultation will give an opportunity for the thorough canvassing of the options.

I gather that a question was asked by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), which I did not hear. I cannot answer for Scotland myself, but I am told that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has yet to announce the allocations to programmes within the Scottish block. The effect of this change will be covered when he makes that announcement, which I understand he hopes to do shortly.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Has not the Secretary of State been kicked into grasshopping from one penny-pinching point to another? He has no answer to the accusation that, while giving public funds to the assisted places scheme and cutting down on education left, right and centre, he has now been brought to book, and, in order to please his own Back Benchers is having to make a concession that is not really a concession. He is stealing funds from other areas when he could take money from the rich to ensure that working people have a proper education.

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that, as is often the case, that is inaccurate. On an exceptional basis, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has helped to achieve a situation which allows an increase in the science research budget.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said about fees and future inquiries into student support, but can he confirm that, as the student population is rising, the extra £15 million for awards in 1985-86 is safeguarded?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Wilson: As the Secretary of State for Scotland put off the leader of the Liberal party earlier this afternoon in Scottish Question Time with a promise that a statement would be made on this matter setting out the Scottish implications, will the Secretary of State tell us — we demand it — what the effect will be on the Scottish education budget?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, Sir. I have told the House that my right hon. Friend hopes to make a statement shortly.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have already gone over this matter.

Mr. Douglas: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have received notification that the Opposition Front Bench wishes to raise a point of order at the end of the statement. I intend to take points of order then.

Mr. Douglas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already said that I shall take the point of order later. I call Sir William Clark.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already said that I shall take the point of order after the statement.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware——

Mr. Douglas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who is a very experienced parliamentarian, is not trying to challenge what I have said. I have already said that I shall take the point of order at the end of the statement. That is exactly what I intend to do. I call Sir William Clark.

Sir William Clark *rose*——

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles) *rose*——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that this is intolerable.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is intolerable that Privy Councillors——

Mr. Donald Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is intolerable that Privy Councillors and experienced Members should seek to challenge a decision that I have already stated. As I have already told the House, I intend to take the point of order at the end of the statement. I have an obligation to the whole House, not just to Scotland.

Mr. Donald Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Sir William Clark.

Sir William Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be widely welcomed here and throughout the country? Is he further aware that, rather than this being a humiliating defeat for him, we admire him for agreeing and admitting that his first assessment on student awards needed amendment? He showed political honesty and courage. In his long-term consideration of student awards, will he look into the extension of the business loan guarantee scheme for students?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. We can ensure that his suggestion is taken into account in the review.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): As someone who is not renowned for causing any trouble in the House, may I tell the right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "No—ask him."]—may I let him know that Opposition Members are not averse to any Government taking notice of what Back Benchers think? It would be a good thing if all Governments did that.

Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that many of us are deeply anxious about the suggestion of loans to students, as such a proposal would result in ordinary working-class youngsters who have previously been given the opportunity to go to university not getting those opportunities because their families are unable to meet the cost? Is he aware that student grants are tremendously important to ordinary working people as they have given thousands of youngsters from working-class families the opportunity to go to university? Is he further aware that if the Government continue with the proposal of student loans they will meet the greatest resistance from both sides of the House—I hope?

Sir Keith Joseph: The idea of partial or total loans in replacement of grants is one that should surely be considered during the review. The experience of our neighbours in north-western Europe shows that a suitably drawn partial or total loan scheme does not discourage access to higher education in any way.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we are pleased that the voices of his colleagues and those who have spoken through them have been heard by the Government? Will all options be considered in the review, including the possibility of our not being committed to further increases in parental contributions?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I assure him that the review will aim to consider all the options before consultation.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister in their respective statements talked about the Community's advance in high technologies. Precisely how many alpha research projects, many of which are already being refused, will now be refused when they would otherwise have been successful? What number of peer-group diagnosed alpha research projects will be refused as a result of taking money away from the science budget?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman has evidently not absorbed the fact that the Government are proposing an increase in the science budget, although it is slightly reduced as compared with what we proposed at first. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question cannot be given by any Minister from this Dispatch Box, because the decision is for individual research councils. I can give him a general reply that the number of approved and funded alpha grants will be substantially greater because of even the reduced increase which is now proposed.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall that some 70,000 students were taken out of contributions by themselves and their parents under the package that he announced first? Will he assure the House that they will be safeguarded, as was first announced? Will he bear it in mind that adult education has suffered severe cuts already and should be subjected to no more? Will he remind the Opposition and everyone else of the importance of maintaining the access of able people to university, wherever they come from, as they will create the wealth which will pay for the welfare programmes that we all want? That is the only way in which that will be achieved.

Sir Keith Joseph: Those at the lower end of the income spectrum who would have benefited from the Government's first proposals will still benefit exactly as was originally proposed. I should not like the House to get the wrong impression about the diminution of the money that might have to be made in the allocation to the adult education programme. As far as we can tell, it will be about £100,000 a year.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) is absolutely right, that a loan scheme for students would undoubtedly disadvantage many working-class families and, although today's climb-down by the Cabinet shows that he has been listening to Back Benchers, the substitute proposals that he has put forward will be no less damaging to education than the earlier proposals and should provoke the same protests from his own side?

Sir Keith Joseph: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The effect of a loan scheme, whether partial or total, depends on the detail of its construction. As for the

hon. Gentleman's comments about the implications for education, even after the adjustment, we are proposing an improvement in the education and science budget.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that on this very healthy day for parliamentary democracy his proposals on tuition fees will be broadly welcomed by Conservatives and by the country as a whole? Nevertheless, will he explain in more detail his proposals for grants in the middle-income groups so as to allay our fears that some families in that group may suffer unduly?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am not quite sure what my hon. Friend has in mind. We are removing the danger or the probability of any individual with just one child in higher education having to pay more than £205 per year, except in very unusual circumstances. What we do afterwards will depend on the review, which will take all the options into account, and on the consultations that follow the review.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his climbdown will be totally unacceptable to students and parents in Scotland? He has said that the Secretary of State for Scotland will be making an announcement on a future occasion. Why is that announcement not being made today, after the right hon. Gentleman's own statement? May Scottish Members have a guarantee that any such announcement will be made on the Floor of the House so that we can ask questions on it and not through a private notice question or a press notice issued from Edinburgh?

Sir Keith Joseph: I cannot really answer that beyond saying, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, "Yes."

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that his statement today will be widely welcomed in Scotland as a recognition of the unfairness of the parental contribution system? In carrying out the review, will he bear in mind that partial loans for students will be welcomed by students and parents across the political spectrum in Scotland as a fairer system whereby working class families will not have to subsidise others?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I suspect that many hon. Members agree that the interests of taxpayers who do not have children in higher education and who may themselves have relatively low incomes must also be taken into account.

I should correct an error that I inadvertently made in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay). It is possible that some parents may have to pay as much as £270 per year more.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Is not the Secretary of State simply playing ducks and drakes with his own budget and merely offering a continuation of the thin gruel of education cuts and turning the clock back to before the Education Act 1944? Will he guarantee that more funds will be made available for education and that the 20,000 places in higher education that have been lost in the past five years will be restored? Does he agree that it is immoral to give away £1·5 billion in tax cuts when this money is being denied to higher education?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman has got it entirely wrong. The number of students in higher education is nearly 60,000 per year higher than it was in 1979.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that many students are receiving grants in excess of the amount on which many pensioners have to live? Will he confirm that, in view of the need to restrict public expenditure, it is only fair and just that all sections of the community should pay their share, including those earning between £20,000 and £30,000 per year?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes. We must also bear in mind the contribution of those on low incomes to the total tuition fees from which students in this country benefit, which vary from £3,000 to £8,000 per year.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that, however humiliating this partial climbdown has been for him, it is an even greater humiliation for Conservative Back Benchers who have shown no spine or guts and have accepted a statement which, if anything, will damage the future of education even more than the original proposals?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman is being unduly churlish. The result of today's announcement is to secure a substantial — a significant — increase in the money available for basic science research, which I should have thought would have been of interest to Members on both sides. It is also a recognition by my right Friend the Chancellor of a quite exceptional case so that he has been able to contribute to that result.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the most welcome part of his statement is that serious consideration will be given to the whole system of financing students in higher education and that there will be full consultation on this? Does he agree that the review is long overdue and that it must take particular account of those students whose parents cannot or will not pay for them?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, but I should not like any hon. Member to ride away with the thought that the reduction in savings accepted by the Government today can be free. We have had to make reductions in other forms of public expenditure.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that it is not unknown for students with extremely rich parents to live on chip butties because their parents will not accept responsibility for the parental contribution? In carrying out his review, will he bear it in mind that the only egalitarian way to finance education expenditure is through taxation and that that is the way in which the matter should be tackled?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is an approach that the Labour Government felt unable to adopt. There is a limit to what can be asked of the taxpayer.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Most of us recognise that it takes great courage for a Minister to change course as my right hon. Friend has done today, and he should be given credit for that. Nevertheless, will he take a longer, harder look than he seems prepared to do? Does he agree that investment in minds is the finest investment that we can make for the future but that many

[Sir Bernard Braine]

of us are dubious about some forms of research expenditure? Will he take a close look at some of the unethical research taking place in accordance with guidelines laid down by the Medical Research Council?

Sir Keith Joseph: A large number of people will agree strongly with my hon. Friend, but the Government, like many previous Governments, have given the research councils autonomy to make their own decisions on such matters.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The Secretary of State has said that there will have to be other cuts to pay for this. How are those cuts likely to affect organisations such as the Workers Educational Association, which helps those who have not had the privilege of a university education? Has he considered cutting the present £30 million subsidy from taxpayers to the public schools?

Sir Keith Joseph: The reply to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is none; there will be no effect on the WEA. In answer to the second part, the Government reviewed all the possible sources of savings, including that one.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be a warm welcome on the Conservative Benches and in the country for the commitment to study in the review the part that a loans scheme might play in student finance? Does he agree that the availability of loans in conjunction with grants could do much to widen opportunity and responsibility in higher education, as well as help to meet the Government's financial commitment within the bounds of what can reasonably be afforded?

Sir Keith Joseph: I welcome my hon. Friend's comment, but I should not like the House to imagine that a part-loan scheme, which I have long favoured, can be introduced without complications and costly options. It will need a great deal of thought before deciding whether the Government would be wise to adopt any option that would involve extra costs.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Does the Minister feel that by saying over the weekend that it would be impossible to cut a further penny from the scientific budget but coming three days later to the House with cuts amounting to £11 million he will have enhanced his status in the scientific community?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman is right. I did not, as I should have done, interlard every statement that I made on televison with the phrase "Parliament permitting" or "With the approval of the House". I was talking about the provisional allocations. I accept the hon. Gentleman's comment.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his original proposals seemed to some of us wholly right in principle, although perhaps somewhat wrong in execution? Is he also aware that millions of people who voted Conservative, including a large number in my constituency, have incomes that are nothing like £19,000 a year? If we are a national party, is it not our duty to look after all classes, not just the middle band? Furthermore, if we are to control Government spending, should we back down just because we receive a few letters from our constituents?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree very much with the first part of what my hon. Friend says. How much the taxpayer should contribute to the expensive education costs of students is an important question to decide. Although students will almost certainly in most cases benefit the public, they will also—and good luck to them—benefit themselves.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Surely the Secretary of State is aware that the cuts that he has announced this afternoon are even more reprehensible than the parental payment towards fees? Does this not demonstrate that the Conservative Government attach more importance to the disposable income of their highly paid supporters than to science, which is crucial to our future? As the Secretary of State has made such a public capitulation on this issue, will he resign?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government's purpose is being achieved. There is some redeployment towards scientific research, which will receive an increase even after the reduction from that increase this afternoon, and we shall embark on a review to sort out part of this complex matter, which arouses strong feelings on both sides of the House.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening and acting. However, I am somewhat disappointed that it has not been possible to find the extra £11 million, in view of the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has told us that he is likely to have £1,500 million to spare. Bearing in mind that people are adults at the age of 18, will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reaffirm the pledge that he and his predecessor gave to the Select Committee, that it remains the policy of the Government to phase out parental contributions?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I cannot give a pledge such as that. We have long recognised that it would be desirable to treat an adult as an adult in terms of the costs of higher education, but we do not judge it practicable in the present and foreseeable circumstances to be able to do as my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Does the Secretary of State agree that he has broken his word to the University Grants Committee and to the research councils? Does he not understand that this statement, far from allaying criticism, will be viewed with anger and contempt by the universities, by people interested in research and particularly by parents and students? Does he realise that he no longer enjoys the confidence of the House in his handling of education, and should he not resign?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman is totally wrong. The vice-chancellors of many universities objected to the scale and the short notice of the proposal that I originally announced. I have had many letters from them urging some reduction in the proposed increase. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will find support for what he is saying among universities or among the science community.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, instead of cuts in one sector, there will be cuts in almost every sector of the education budget, and that in postponing the erosion of student grants in the short term he is proposing the elimination of student grants in the long term? Will he

come clean and say that it is to make possible tax cuts at Easter that he is prepared to cut science, training, adult education and research in universities' budgets?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The result of this afternoon's decision is that the science budget receives more, although slightly less than was originally announced.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the fact that he has correctly identified one of the outstanding points of principle that concerns Conservative Members shows that he has displayed high personal courage, which can only increase the esteem in which Conservative Members regard him? In the deliberations that will follow, will my right hon. Friend be able to persuade my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to find the remaining £11 million that has made this change possible?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful, but it is a dangerous illusion into which we fall when we talk of the Government, or even my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, finding money. It is all the taxpayers' money.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us who have been highly critical of him will welcome his decision to maintain the status quo in tuition fees, which shows good sense? However, will he go further and say that, as the grants that many students obtain from local authorities are tax free, any contributions that parents make should be allowable against their tax?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is really a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Secretary of State accept that the way in which he has dealt with this problem in securing the interest of articulate organisations and the middle-class lobby may in future mean that, instead of taking them on, he will turn his attention to the more deprived elements of our society and their education needs? Will he give an assurance that he will not do that?

Sir Keith Joseph: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can be aware that in 1979 the Labour Government left a minimum award that was highly regressive in its affects, and that has only been removed by the decision, which has been confirmed today, to abolish the minimum award.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Bearing in mind that the Representation of the People Act 1969 set the legal age of adulthood at 18, is it not incongruous that young people are even more reliant on their parents at a time when they are judged to be legally adult? When my right hon. Friend has his inquiry, will he examine closely the estimate that 46 per cent. of students do not receive the full parental contribution, which is a matter of concern? It is of great sadness to his colleagues that he will have to look round for the odd million here and there when it is so easy to find hundreds of millions of pounds, as we did last week, to throw at the National Coal Board.

Sir Keith Joseph: My hon. Friend has inadvertently misled himself. I think that he was intending to speak of the 46 per cent. of students who receive contributions. The House must recognise that any Government face a dilemma in balancing the adult status of the student child with the sheer budgetary burden of removing the parental contribution.

Mr. Wallace: You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that during Scottish Question Time the Secretary of State for Scotland said that the Secretary of State for Education and Science would reply to a question put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), the leader of the Liberal party. I repeat the question in the hope that the Secretary of State will answer it. I do not think that it depends on the work allocation that is always being referred to. What will be the savings in the Scottish Office budget as a result of the cuts which have been announced, and how many Scottish students will this affect?

Sir Keith Joseph: I still cannot reply to that question. That is a matter for my right hon. Friend.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, although there will be some who will say that he has not gone far enough, the majority will acknowledge the importance of having a fundamental review, which all Governments over the past 10 years have been asked to carry out? The concession on fees which he has announced will have the single most important effect of reducing the burden on parents who are contributing to the maintenance of their children in university or other higher education. Will he ensure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer does something in the Budget to offset what has been done to science, the pickup scheme and micro-electronics to help modernise industry? He has only to see what is happening in Japan to recognise the importance of that.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government have provided extra money for all these schemes. I hope that the erosion of their finance will be marginal compared with the increases with which they have already been provided.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there is some relief and gratitude that, after much hard pounding, some common sense at least has been brought back to student grants? Does he think that it is worth the agony and the anguish to the great body of the middle class that for £11 million so much ill will has been caused? This time last week some of us stayed in the Chamber at a late hour because £800 million was to be put through on the nod on behalf of the greatest pressure group of all, which is formed by those who insist on going on strike in an industry which continually loses money. Does he agree that if we can get our priorities right those who contribute most, who are members of the middle class, will not be hit as hard as they have over this stupid matter?

Sir Keith Joseph: Under the constraint of various burdens on public expenditure, I can understand my hon. Friend's complaint. I hope that he and the House will recognise that it is a national interest to safeguard the quality of our scientific research base. It seems imperative to the Government to take urgent action to preserve it.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will bring great relief to many parents, especially those of younger children who are not yet at university, who were worried that, once established, the principle of tuition fees could soar to an

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

impossible level? Will he make it abundantly clear that the figure which has been arrived at is unlikely to re-emerge in any review?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I cannot give my hon. Friend a guarantee that this or that possibility will not arise in the review. The review will give us the opportunity to consider all the options and then we shall consult upon them.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that a recent NEDO report described British micro-electronics and information technology as being in serious crisis? Is he aware also that the gap between our main competitors in Japan, the United States, France and Germany and ourselves is widening? Does he realise that his proposal to introduce a cut in the micro-electronics programme will accentuate the gap, which must be bad for all modern or new industries in Britain?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman has entirely wrong the scale of what might be involved. The erosion in the micro-electronics programme — the programme has been growing — might be £250,000 to £500,000 a year. That is dwarfed by what the micro-electronics programme is achieving.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend accept the thanks of the many parents who save conscientiously towards meeting the cost of the education of their children, who would have been unable to bear the additional burdens that it was proposed to place upon them? Will he accept also my thanks for the offer of a review, which will be greeted with great pleasure? People like to feel that they have influence in anything as important as the matters that will be examined during the review.

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Radice: Is the Secretary of State aware that many of us are dissatisfied with his answers, especially on the science budget? I return to the review of student support. Given the mess which he made of his original proposals and the controversy which surrounds the issue of loans, will he guarantee that his review will be independent?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government have not yet decided the form that the review will take. I cannot give any such commitment.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Carscadden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to consider the damaging and rather disgraceful situation that has arisen this afternoon. After the statement of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, we know nothing about the thoughts, actions or reasons of the Secretary of State for Scotland on student grants. All that we have is a statement from the Department of Education and Science that the Secretary of State for Scotland has decided similarly. That is added as an afterthought almost insultingly, at the fag end of the Secretary of State's statement.

I ask you for some protection, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we know what is happening in the Scottish Office. We know the total figure that is involved for England and Wales and we know where the education cuts will fall, but when it comes to Scotland we are left in a black hole of uncertainty. We are left with the unfortunate impression that, whether the Secretary of State for Scotland has decided or not, he does not really know what has been decided in his name.

Is it not intolerable that, on a day that has included Scottish Question Time, we should be left with less information than the rest of the United Kingdom about a key decision of interest to universities, students and the people of Scotland generally? Will you consider, Mr. Speaker, whether it was not most unfortunate that when a precise and specific question appeared on the Order Paper — it was Question No. 4 from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) — we were told that it could not be answered because there would be a statement from the Department of Education and Science? Any reasonable person would have deduced from that that the Minister making the statement would be in a position to deal with the Scottish figures and answer specific questions on Scotland. The Secretary of State for Education and Science was not in a position to do so. I presume that we were misled unintentionally during Scottish Question Time.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Scotland will not try to shirk his responsibilities. He is responsible for these matters in Scotland. He is quick enough to claim the credit if there are differences of approach in Scotland and England, but when the going becomes rough he must come to the House and not shelter behind another Minister. The right hon. Gentleman is in his place and the Leader of the House is in his. Can we now have, through you, Mr. Speaker, an assurance that there will be an immediate statement that will give us the details for Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I am not in a position to give immediate guarantees that statements will be made. That is not a matter for me.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I realise that there is great concern and anxiety in the House about the Scottish dimension of this afternoon's business and a wish that it should be made available to the House. I shall not comment on the remarks of the hon. member for Glasgow, Carscadden (Mr. Dewar) save to say that I think that they are rather contentious. At least that is how they are heard by English ears. I assure the House that an oral statement will be made as soon as possible, the modalities of which can be determined through the usual channels.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House will fully understand my position. The House has heard what the Leader of the House has had to say. I am not certain that I shall be able to answer any points of order, but I will do my best.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker, as the Member who asked question No. 4 on the Order Paper? It will be within your recollection that the Secretary of State for Scotland specifically asked us to wait until the statement was made this afternoon. Rather foolishly, perhaps, we agreed to that request. In retrospect, perhaps we should not have agreed to it. Indeed, in retrospect there is no earthly reason why we should have agreed to it. The Secretary of State for Scotland is not a subsidiary Minister. He is

entitled to give us the information. My specific point of order is to ask why we should have a separate statement taking up the time of the House. Could we not direct the Secretary of State for Scotland to answer question No. 4?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot do that.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Mr. Speaker, you will recollect that during Scottish Question Time this afternoon you called Opposition Members in consecutive order on more than one occasions. In one instance, four of them were called before anybody was called on the Government side of the House. I am not making any criticism, because I was called. I ask you, however, Mr. Speaker, to reflect that you were rewarded by the behaviour of Labour Members, even those on the Opposition Front Bench who attempted to disrupt the proceedings.

Mr. Wilson: Could I raise a point of order that includes three separate aspects? First, I raised a point of order during the statement because it became clear, from the answer that was given, that the Secretary of State for Education and Science had no intention of replying—or, indeed, may not have had information to enable him to reply — to the question about the Scottish education budget. I did not wish unnecessarily to interrupt the statement because I know of your preference for dealing with points of order at a later stage, but for Scottish Members a point of order was essential at that time. Without any knowledge of whether there would be a separate statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland, we could not know whether it was appropriate for us to direct our questions to the English Minister for Education and Science.

The second part of the point of order that I wish to bring to your attention is that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has control over the Scottish universities but, by reason of an anomaly, does not have control over the grant or budget of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The particular aspect to which I wish to draw your attention and to ask you to consider raising with the Procedure Committee, is that if Scottish Members of Parliament—it has happened frequently in the past—cannot expect to receive statements from the Secretaries of State for Scotland on policy matters affecting Scotland when equivalent statements are made by their colleagues, they are effectively treated as second-class Members of this House. Immediately after the Treaty of Union I believe that one of your predecessors wrote in terms of the orders of this House that it was the English House of Commons which was to continue. If the Procedure Committee and you, Mr. Speaker, do not direct your minds to the rights of Scottish Members of this House, that is exactly what it may be.

The third aspect of the point of order that I wish to bring to your attention, following upon the point of order raised by the leader of the Liberal party concerning question No. 4, is that we were misled. We look upon you to defend our rights as Members of this House when promises are made by Cabinet Ministers. We now know how the statement on grants will impact upon the education system in England and Wales. It will do so in a manner that must cause us concern over the equivalent budget for Scotland.

Either the Secretary of State for Scotland—who has acceded to the decision announced today in the House by his colleague — is aware of how he will fund it, in which case he is cowardly in not facing hon. Members, or, if he does not know, he is incompetent. It may be that he is both, but in either event a serious point of principle is involved. As Scottish Members we should be entitled to answers from our own Ministers. Otherwise, our attendance at this House is a waste of time.

Mr. Douglas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Rather reluctantly may I ask you to reconsider some of the remarks you have made. During the exchanges that took place this afternoon you said, if I understood you correctly, that you represented the interests of all Members of the House, not just Scottish Members. On this occasion I ask you to consider what has happened. Scottish Members have been treated not as equals but as inferior to other hon. Members. You will be well aware that in Scotland we have a separate and distinct education system. It is not sufficient to have the Secretary of State for Education and Science answer for English universities and polytechnics when in Scotland the colleges of education, central institutions and student grant system form a separate and distinct system of education.

I am asking you, Mr. Speaker, whether you are aware of that and whether it is within your power and province to ensure that the Secretary of State for Scotland simultaneously, so far as is possible, comes to the House and answers on a co-equal basis for Scotland when the Secretary of State for Education and Science answers in this House for matters within his province. When is the Secretary of State for Scotland going to come to the House today to make such a statement?

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have the responsibility to protect the reputation both of this House and of every single Member in it. The reputation of this House will today have been severely damaged in Scotland by the action of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who has refused to make a statement on the matter. The Secretary of State has an opportunity to do so now. If he is saying that he does not know what is happening in the universities he should not be in the job. The fact is that, already, during the last three weeks, we have had two examples of Ministers coming to the House late in the day, as a result of pressure from the House. The Secretary of State is in a position to do that today. He does not have to leave it until another occasion. It is right that the Secretary of State, who is present and who is in a position to answer questions, should answer questions now from Scottish Members and not make a statement later.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Younger) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: The Secretary of State is rising to his feet. It might solve the matter if he were allowed to speak.

Mr. Younger: I may be able to help the House. The House may not be fully aware of how the Scottish public expenditure system works. It works in this way. There is a block of Scottish expendiiture within which the Secretary of State has discretion to make dispositions according to his priorities. None of the decisions on any parts of the expenditure within the Scottish block have yet been finalised. Therefore, this is merely one other part of the series of decisions that are being taken by my hon. Friends and myself within the Scottish block.

May I confirm what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said? I shall be making a statement to the

[Mr. Younger]

House when the full implications of the whole Scottish block — *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the House would be good enough to hear me out. It is an important point. When all the decisions are taken about all aspects of the Scottish block, which is imminent, and when all the decisions are clarified, I shall be making a statement upon which hon. Members from Scotland or anywhere else will be able to cross-question me. At this moment, quite irrespective of any changes that are taking place today as a result of my right hon. Friend's statement, there is no way in which I am in a position to give any of the figures for any of the expenditure within the Scottish block. I should be grateful if the matter could be dealt with in the normal way.

Mr. Dewar: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear, through you, what the Secretary of State is saying. When the Leader of the House rose to say that there would be a statement, the timing of which would be agreed through the usual channels, I understood that that would be a statement about student grants in Scotland. The Secretary of State now seems to be saying something rather different. He seems to be saying that at some future date, probably some way ahead, there will be a general statement about the overall public expenditure system in Scotland, including education, social work, housing and everything else. Somewhere subsumed in that will be the information about student grants parallel to that which has been given by the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

That is not satisfactory. We want a separate statement, parallelling the English one, giving us the information and the figure equivalent to the £21 million in England. Presumably that is known now and we do not want to wait until some future date.

Secondly, to save a further intervention, it would be helpful to the House and to the dignity of his office, if the Secretary of State for Scotland were to say that, with hindsight at least, he regrets the way that question No. 4 was dealt with. He gave a clear impression that the details requested would be supplied during the course of this afternoon's statement. That, as the Secretary of State for Education and Science made clear, was not the case. It is unfortunate that that impression was given and I hope that the Secretary of State for Scotland will join me in regretting that.

Mr. Younger: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Of course I am sorry if any misleading impression was given by me or anyone else. I did not imagine that the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) would be expecting anything in detail until the Scottish public expenditure was settled. *[Interruption.]* The reason for that is perfectly simple. Whatever changes have to be made could affect many different parts of the Scottish block. Therefore, by the time I am able to make a statement about this precise aspect, all the other aspects must be decided too. They have nearly been decided and I do not expect a statement to be long delayed. But when I make a statement, of whatever sort, it will have to cover all aspects of the Scottish block because they are all interdependent.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House has heard the Secretary of State. We have an important debate before us——

Mr. Eadie: I am demanding my right to put a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have an important debate before us. Other hon. Members have their rights as well. If the hon. Gentleman persists in raising points of order all afternoon, I cannot stop him. Nevertheless, that is unfair to his colleagues. I shall take his point of order.

Mr. Eadie: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have never unfairly exercised my rights in this Parliament and I demand to put a point of order in relation to this issue.

We are well aware of how this matter arose. To some extent, hon. Members have rights and are entitled to respect the Chair of this honourable House. I want to put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that occasions can arise when it may be convenient for you to say that you will take points of order afterwards, but there are circumstances when it is right, and in accordance with the good workings of the House, that hon. Members who rise to their feet to make a point of order should be given the right to do so at that time.

I submit today that if that right had been given to hon. Members, the incompetence that the Government have shown today would perhaps not have been as bad as it has been. There may have been some reflections by the Government when hon. Members put the points of order on the Scottish aspect of the cut in student grants and fees.

Therefore, I say in all sincerity that this issue is occupying the minds of my constituents in Midlothian in relation to the whole aspect of university education, and, indeed, all education. We want the Secretary of State to come to the Dispatch Box today to tell us what is happening to student fees and grants. I submit that we have the right to put that point of order to you.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with one point of order at a time. It is not a new doctrine that I do not take points of order in the middle of questions. It is long established and my predecessors, as far as I know, have always adopted that practice. It is right and fair to the House.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept fully the statement that you made earlier today that it is your duty to protect the rights of all hon. Members, from whatever part of the country they come. I also accept your remarks made slightly later that there is a responsibility on the House and on you to take account of important business that faces the House.

It will be within your recollection that yesterday there was a series of questions to the Secretary of State for Education and Science and during those exchanges the right hon. Gentleman sought, or attempted, to make it clear that he was not shifting his ground in any way. Therefore, if there is any encroachment on the important business of the day, it is precisely because the Secretary of State sought to return within 24 hours to try to change that position.

It is time that the whole subject of statements made by Ministers was re-examined. There was no earthly reason whatever why the right hon. Gentleman had to come to the House today and make the announcement that he did. It

would have been a courtesy to the House, to the Secretary of State for Scotland and to every hon. Member if there had been a period of calm and silence. That would have allowed consultation to take place so that the right hon. Gentleman did not place the Secretary of State for Scotland in the invidious and embarrassing position in which he has been placed today.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for Education and Science has put you in an extremely embarrassing position. He has also put me in an embarrassing position. I am not one of those who constantly harps on about the specific and special rights of Scottish Members. But I feel strongly that, given the sequence of events — the Secretary of State for Education and Science answering questions yesterday, refusing to make an announcement, followed, 24 hours later, by questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland when a specific question dealt with the issue on which the Secretary of State for Education and Science was to make his statement—it beggars belief that we should not have had proper answers from the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Nothing that the Secretary of State for Scotland says about the difficulties that he is facing in announcing his programme can make up for the fact that, if he had said earlier, during Scottish questions, that he would be making a statement after the Secretary of State for Education and Science—even if he had said then what he said later about the need to examine the budget—that might have been acceptable. But the contempt that the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Scotland have for the House must be ended. You, Mr. Speaker, must look seriously at the issue of statements being made. Although "Erskine May" says that a Minister does not require either your permission or that of the House, that needs to be looked at so that we can judge whether our rights are being eroded in an insidious way.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are not matters for me. If the hon. Gentleman feels that the system is wrong, he has a right, even an obligation, to take the matter to the Procedure Committee. That is where such matters are looked at. The House decides. I am elected by the House to keep the rules as they are. That is all that I can do.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to seek your guidance. Earlier this afternoon the Secretary of State for Scotland said that no decision had been made about any part of the block grant allocation for Scotland. However, the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that the Secretary of State for Scotland had decided similarly on the question of student awards. That implies that a decision has been made. How can I find out which Secretary of State is misleading the House?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot advise on tactics.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Like my hon. Friends, I have no desire to be disrespectful to you, Mr. Speaker. I know that you will understand that. However, you will recall that hon. Members have an interest in this serious subject. My own interest was shown when you called me to ask a supplementary question to the question tabled by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel). In common with the right hon. Gentleman and others, I failed to get information that is essential for the whole House.

Two important matters emerged. First, after a number of points of order, the Secretary of State for Scotland conceded that he had taken a decision on principle without considering the implications. That is of the utmost importance and deserves debate.

Secondly, you, Mr. Speaker, are right to say that you have a responsibility to the whole House. Equally, the House has a responsibility to you. The Government Front Bench has neglected that responsibility by presenting such a shambles to the House. We owe it to you to offer the apology to which you are entitled.

Mr. Ewing: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was involved in question No. 4 tabled by the leader of the Liberal party. I asked the Secretary of State why he did not intend to make a statement similar to that which was to be made by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The record will show tomorrow that the Secretary of State said that I had read far too many whodunnit magazines and that, on this issue, he never made any separate statements. He said that when his right hon. Friend spoke about education he spoke for all education Ministers. The record will show that.

The Secretary of State for Scotland put the Secretary of State for Education and Science in an embarrassing position. The right hon. Gentleman had enough difficulties today without the Secretary of State for Scotland causing him more. The Secretary of State for Education and Science was in no position to fulfil the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

When the Secretary of State for Scotland said that the Secretary of State for Education and Science would speak on behalf of the Scottish Office he knew that to be untrue. We are told that we misunderstood, but the Secretary of State for Scotland knew that what he said was untrue. I have a respect for him, but he has a duty to his office and to the House to withdraw the answer to the question so that when the record is produced it will be correct.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I can see several hon. Members who are anxious to take part in the next debate, but that will be made difficult if we persist with points of order. I cannot take the matter further this afternoon. The sensible course would be for the matter to be discussed through the usual channels. No doubt an arrangement will be made for a statement to be made to the House by the Secretary of State for Scotland. We shall then see what he has to say. I cannot take the matter further.

Mr. Dewar: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept that this is a matter for the usual channels. However, I should like to say publicly that it is important for the effectiveness of the Scottish dimension within the United Kingdom parliamentary system for the statement, when it comes, not to be an overall wrap-up of public expenditure in Scotland in which the debate about student grants will be lost. We must have an opportunity soon to discuss the specific issue on the Floor of the House. If we receive a sympathetic response, I shall be happy to leave the matter there.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall hear the shadow Leader of the House.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry, but it seems that two completely separate issues are involved. The first is the issue of a statement on student grants in Scotland which, as has been said, can be dealt with through the usual channels. The second is that a Minister has misled the House. When that happens is it not normal for the Minister to come to the House to make a personal statement? In addition to the statement about student grants in Scotland we must consider good behaviour in the House of Commons. That means that tomorrow at the start of business the Secretary of State for Scotland should come here and make a personal statement based on what the official record shows.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, we cannot take the matter further this afternoon.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order is about points of order. I agree that the House should consider your position. You were put in an intolerable position by the Government's inept handling of the issue. During exchanges you rightly said that Mr. Speaker can exercise discretion about when to take points of order. That is in accordance with precedent and with "Erskine May", which also says clearly that if an hon. Member has a point of order it is his duty to raise it immediately, if necessary interrupting a right hon. or hon. Member. More thought should be given to the position when contentious statements touching on principles are involved.

You suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the Procedure Committee might be appropriate, but will you consider the conflicting difficulties in which you are placed? The usual channels will try to assist, particularly to ensure that hon. Members have adequate notice of which statements are to be made so that they can assess their possible effect on other Departments.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You made reference earlier—the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) also raised the point—to the practice that has developed of points of order being postponed until later. Is it not the case that this was an innovation of Speaker Thomas and yet a further illustration of his many failures of judgment? May I ask you, Sir, to take this matter back very seriously and consider whether the traditional practice of accepting a point of order when it is put and allowing it should be resumed for the good health and conduct of the business of the House?

Mr. Speaker: I think that it is a wise practice to take points of order at the end of questions. If the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) and the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) thought this matter through, they would find that we would get through fewer questions if points of order were raised in the middle of questions. The hon. Member for Warley, East will know, because he has done this himself, that most points of order arise because the hon. Member did not receive the answer he expected.

Parliamentary Questions

5.41 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a different point of order Mr. Speaker. As you know, one of your awesome tasks is to oversee questions that are tabled by hon. Members. Sometimes we are in difficulty about the aspects on which we can table questions. The subject of taxation causes difficulty, because hon. Members can ask questions only about general taxation matters and not about individual aspects. I seek your guidance on the important principle that is at stake.

In recent days there has been much discussion about giving aid to Ethiopia. As a result, a group of young people got together and made an important record. That record is selling by the thousands and is making a tremendous amount of money to go towards aid for Ethiopia. I should like to table a question to ascertain the precise amount of value added tax that will accrue from the sale of that record and go into the Government's coffers. Many of us believe that the money the Government are taking from that charitable action should to to Ethiopia, instead of to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I wish to ask a question not about general VAT but about the precise amount of money that the Government are receiving through VAT from the sale of the record so that I can demand that the Government send to the Ethiopians pound for pound the money they have received. I want to find out about the money that those young people have made from producing a record, some of which goes to the Chancellor.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member tables that question, I shall look into it. Perhaps he will send me the record.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At any point during the past hour or so, has it crossed your mind that there is great merit in the argument for establishing a Scottish assembly?

Mr. Speaker: That frequently crosses my mind.

Teachers (Pay)

5.42 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the strike today of Scottish teachers over the failure of the Secretary of State for Scotland to grant an independent pay review."

This matter is urgent because this is a major national strike involving more than 30,000 teachers — 80 per cent. of the members of the Educational Institute of Scotland. The matter is specific because that strike is disrupting the education of many thousands of pupils throughout Scotland. That is a regrettable development. The matter is also specific because the Government could do something about the problem by granting teachers an independent pay review.

This matter is urgent because the lack of independent pay review is leading to the disruption of the programme to develop standard grade examinations in Scotland. It is likely that the whole system could collapse in the next year or two and that students will be unable to take those examinations in 1986. The matter is urgent also because, already, many dedicated teachers are leaving, or contemplating leaving, the profession, specifically science and maths teachers who are in most need. They are leaving because they can receive better pay in other sectors.

I therefore urge you, Mr. Speaker, to give me leave to move the Adjournment of the House so that this matter can be debated and we can impress upon the Government the need to take positive action to grant an independent pay review and allow Scottish teachers to get on with the job they want to do—that of teaching our children.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the strike today of Scottish teachers over the failure of the Secretary of State for Scotland to grant an independent pay review."

I have listened carefully to the hon. Member, but I regret to say that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

BILLS PRESENTED

Intoxicating Substances (Supply)

Mr. Neville Trotter, supported by Mr. Alex Carlile, Sir Geoffrey Finsberg, Mr. Marcus Fox, Mr. Roy Galley, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Michael Hirst, Mr. Ron Lewis, Mr. Christopher Murphy, Mr. Reg Prentice, and Mr. Tom Torney, presented a Bill to prohibit the supply to persons under the age of eighteen substances which may cause intoxication if inhaled: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 19.]

Sexual Offences

Miss Janet Fookes, supported by Mr. Charles Irving, Mr. Tom Cox, Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark, Mr. Robert Parry, Mr. Christopher Chope, Mr. Tony Lloyd, and Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman, presented a Bill to make, as respects England and Wales, provision for penalising in certain circumstances the soliciting of women for sexual purposes by men, and to increase the penalties under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 for certain offences against women: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 20.]

Local Government (Access to Information)

Mr. Robin Squire, supported by Mr. W. Benyon, Mr. Marcus Fox, Sir Bernard Braine, Mr. Jonathan Aitken, Mr. Charles Irving, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. Allan Roberts, Mr. Alf Dubs, Mr. Clive Soley, Mr. Simon Hughes, and Mr. Michael Hancock, presented a Bill to provide for greater public access to local authority meetings, reports and documents subject to specified confidentiality provisions; to give local authorities duties to publish certain information; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 21.]

Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment)

Dr. David Clark, supported by Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Jim Callaghan, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. John Cartwright, Mr. Sydney Chapman, Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. Peter Hardy, Mr. Mark Hughes, Mr. Stephen Ross, and Mr. Chris Smith, presented a Bill to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 22.]

Unborn Children (Protection)

Mr. J. Enoch Powell, supported by Sir Bernard Braine, Mr. Donald Stewart, Mr. A. J. Beith, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark, Mr Ian Campbell, Sir Gerard Vaughan, Mr. James White, and Mrs. Ann Winterton, presented a Bill to make provision relating to human embryos produced by in vitro fertilisation, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 23.]

COPYRIGHT (COMPUTER SOFTWARE) AMENDMENT

Mr. William Powell, supported by Mr. Nicholas Lyell, Mr. Nicholas Baker, Mr. Bryan Gould, Mr. David Madel, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Nigel Forman, and Mr. Patrick Nicholls, presented a Bill to amend the Copyright Act 1956 so as to provide new penalties for offences relating to infringing copies of computer programmes; to provide for the issue and execution of search warrants in relation to such offences; and to confirm that copyright subsists in computer programmes: And the same was read the First time; and orderd to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 24.]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Michael Grylls, supported by Mr. David Howell, Mr. William Cash, Mr. Michael Fallon, Mr. Richard Wainwright, Mr. Spencer Batiste, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. John Browne, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, and Sir Philip Goodhart, presented a Bill to make further provision for, and to amend the law relating to, small businesses: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 25.]

SPORTS FIELDS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. John Carlisle, supported by Mr. Nicholas Soames, Mr. Colin Moynihan, Mr. Richard Ryder, Mr. Robert Atkins, Mr. Martin Brandon-Bravo, Mr. Tim Brinton, Mr. Jim Lester, Mr. David Ashby, Mr. Jim Spicer, Mr. Matthew Parris, and Mr. Nicholas Winterton, presented a Bill to enable the Government to direct public bodies and other owners of recreational facilities to inform them of any proposed sale or change of use of sports fields or facilities, to monitor annually the loss of playing fields and facilities, and to encourage local authorities and others to offer the use of their sports facilities to voluntary sports bodies and community groups: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 26.]

WATER AUTHORITIES (MEETINGS)

Mr. Gerald Bermingham, supported by Mr. Marcus Fox, Mr. Derek Fatchett, Mr. Clement Freud, Mr. Michael Knowles, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Matthew Parris, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. John Ryman, Mr. Allan Rogers, Mr. Robert Rhodes James, and Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark, presented a Bill to apply the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, relating to the admission of the press and other members of the public, to meetings of water authorities, and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 27.]

EDUCATION (SCHOOL BUDGETS)

Mr. David Madel, supported by Mr. Gerald Bowden, Mr. David Knox, Mr. Michael Stern, Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. John Carlisle, Mr. Robert Hicks, Mr. Peter Bruinvels, Mr. Graham Bright, and Mr. Hugh Dykes, presented a Bill to require local education authorities to publish annually certain financial information relating to maintained, aided and special agreement schools; to require the governing bodies of aided or special agreement schools to publish accounts of income and expenditure; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 28.]

CHARTER TRUSTEES

Mr. Charles Morrison, supported by Mr. Douglas Hogg, Mr. Robert Key, Mr. Richard Alexander, Mr. Michael Howard, and Mr. Jonathan Aitken, presented a Bill to provide for the continuation of the charter trustees of any city or town and for the preservation of their powers and of the privileges and rights of the inhabitants of their area upon that area becoming comprised in a borough: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 29.]

HOSPITAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson, supported by Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson, Mr. Steve Norris, and Mrs. Renée Short, presented a Bill to oblige Regional Health Authorities to establish a complaints procedure for hospital patients and to draw such a procedure to the attention of patients: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 30.]

CONTROLLED DRUGS (PENALTIES)

Mr. Keith Raffan, supported by Mr. Mark Carlisle, Sir Edward Gardner, Mr. Teddy Taylor, Mr. John Wheeler, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. David Alton, Mr. Harold McCusker, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mr. John Cartwright, Mr. Roland Boyes, and Mr. Ron Davies, presented a Bill to increase the penalties for certain offences relating to controlled drugs within the meaning of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 February and to be printed. [Bill 31.]

NORTHERN IRELAND (TERMINATION OF JURISDICTION)

Mr. Ernie Roberts, supported by Mr. Tony Benn, Miss Joan Maynard, Mr. Bob Clay, Mr. Derek Fatchett, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Ms. Clare Short, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and Mr. Robert Parry, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the termination of Her Majesty's jursidiction in Northern Ireland; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 15 February and to be printed. [Bill 32.]

MOTOR-CYCLE CRASH HELMETS (RESTRICTION OF LIABILITY)

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook, presented a Bill to exempt persons other than the actual offender from criminal liability in

resepct of the offences of driving or riding on a motor-cycle in contravention of regulations requiring the wearing of crash helmets: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 33.]

Fabric Origin Marking

Mr. Geoff Lawler, supported by Mr. Gary Waller, Mr. Richard Wainwright, Mr. Tom Torney, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. James Lamond, Mr. Cyril Smith, Mr. Barry Sheerman, Mr. Peter Thurnham, Mr. Ken Hargreaves, and Mr. Alastair Burt, presented a Bill to require the indication of country of origin for woven fabrics in outer wear textile products: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 34.]

Minimum Wages Etc.

Mr. Dave Nellist, supported by Mr. Terry Fields, Mr. Eddie Loyden, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. David Winnick, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Brian Sedgemore, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Roland Boyes and Mr. Robert Litherland, presented a Bill to provide for the setting and enforcement of statutory minimums below which wages and allowances shall not fall with respect to different classes of employees and trainees; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 35.]

Companies (Political Donations)

Mr. Derek Fatchett, supported by Mr. Ian Mikardo, Ms. Jo Richardson, Mr. John Maxton, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. William O'Brien, Mr. Robert N. Wareing, and Mr. Chris Smith, presented a Bill to require ballots of shareholders of companies incorporated under the Companies Act 1948 in respect of proposed donations for political purposes; to define political purposes under this Act; to require political funds to be established for the payment of such donations; to specify the qualfications for receipt of such donations; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 36.]

Gaming (Bingo)

Mr. Peter Fry, supported by Mr. Fergus Montgomery, Mr. Bernard Conlan, Mr. John Forrester, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Mr. Barry Porter, Mr. Eldon Griffiths, Mr. Sydney Bidwell, and Mr. Michael Morris, presented a Bill to amend the Gaming Act 1968 in respect of games which are played on bingo club premises and in which the players may be on different bingo club premises: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 February and to be printed. [Bill 37.]

Road Traffic (Production of Documents)

Mr. Tim Smith, supported by Mr. Geoff Lawler, Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk, Mr. Andrew MacKay, Mr. Mark Fisher, Mr. Tim Brinton, Mr. David Alton, Mr. Tony Blair, Mr. Tony Favell, and Mr. Gerald Bermingham, presented a Bill to amend certain provisions relating to the production of documents under the Road Traffic Act 1972 and the Transport Act 1982: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 38.]

Hong Kong

Mr. Speaker: This important debate on the Hong Kong agreement has had a rather late start, for reasons that the House well knows. I must announce to the House that I propose to operate the 10 minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 8.50 pm. I hope that all hon. Members will bear that limitation in mind when making their speeches, because, as I said, this debate has had a late start and there is great pressure from hon. Members to participate.

5.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I beg to move:

That this House, having considered the views of the people of Hong Kong as set out in the reports of the Assessment Office and the Independent Monitoring Team published in White Paper, Cmnd. 9407, approves Her Majesty's Government's intention to sign the agreement on the future of Hong Kong negotiated with the Chinese Government, which was published in White Paper, Cmnd. 9352.

The draft agreement which the motion commends for the approval of the House is a document of historic importance. It has a significance that goes well beyond Hong Kong itself. But it is with the unique and thriving community of Hong Kong that the House is rightly concerned today.

Hong Kong owes its success to the spirit of free enterprise and resourcefulness that has for generations been displayed by the people of Hong Kong of all races. It is that spirit that has created Hong Kong's unique way of life, and it is the preservation of that way of life, its rights and freedoms, and the prosperity and stability on which it has been built, that has been our firm objective. We have sought that thoughout all the work that has produced the agreement that is the subject of today's debate. In that work, I have been most grateful to the official Opposition and to hon. Members in all parts of the House for the understanding and support which they have given me in a task which I have been able to feel I have been undertaking on behalf of the whole House.

The agreement that has resulted must, of course, be judged against the background of the historical realities that created the problem with which we are concerned today.

In May 1898, the second convention of Peking was signed, in Peking, by the British Minister resident there, Sir Claud MacDonald. I cannot believe that at the time when he signed that document he had any idea of the complexity of the problems that he would be bequeathing to the present generation.

Under that convention, the area which later became known as the New Territories of Hong Kong was leased to Britain for a period of 99 years. Those territories were added to the relatively small areas of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island, which had been ceded to Britain during the previous half-century. That 1898 lease covers 92 per cent. of the land territory of Hong Kong as it is today. It expires, of course, on 30 June 1997. On that date, the New Territories will revert to China.

The ceded territories, the other 8 per cent., have, over the past 87 years, become completely integrated with the leased territories. On their own, they would not be viable. It is those circumstances that compel the need for a specific agreement at this time.

Yet the need for accommodation with China is not new to Hong Kong. Throughout most of its existence, Hong Kong has been dependent on co-operation with its giant neighbour. In recent years that has developed into a strong and complex relationship.

That is the background to the long—and at times very difficult—negotiations that have been taking place over the past two years. They have had to be conducted in confidence. I know that the need for confidentiality has been frustrating—for Parliament and, of course, much more so for the people of Hong Kong. Both have shown great understanding, and both, I hope, will take some comfort from my judgment that confidentiality was absolutely essential to the success of the negotiations.

I should like to give warm thanks to the members of the Hong Kong Executive Council, who played a vital part in advising the Government, through the Governor, throughout the negotiations. I give thanks too to the members of the Legislative Council. The confidentiality of the negotiations posed particular problems for them.

The Governor of Hong Kong has borne the dual burden of continuing responsibility for the government of Hong Kong and of continuous involvement in the negotiations. If I may be allowed to say so, he has borne that heavy burden with great distinction.

Our Ambassadors at Peking, successively Sir Percy Cradock and Sir Richard Evans, have led the negotiating team with great skill. They and all the officials involved, from the Hong Kong Government as well as from our own diplomatic service, well deserve the tribute paid to them by the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, which spoke of the "sheer professionalism" of the British team. I have no doubt that the whole House will wish to join me in thanking and congratulating them all.

Throughout all our work, we have aimed, of course, to reach agreement on arrangements which would be acceptable to the people of Hong Kong; arrangements that would enable them, and the international community, to have confidence in the future of the territory.

From the outset it was clear that such arrangements would also need to be acceptable to the Chinese Government. That is just another reflection of the fact that Hong Kong could never have become the place that it is today without establishing a practical relationship with the People's Republic of China.

In the early part of the negotiations we looked for ways which might allow a British Administration to continue in Hong Kong after 1997—on the basis that Britain would recognise China's sovereignty over the whole of Hong Kong. That course would have meant the minimum of change. The people of Hong Kong certainly expected that we would, as a first step, see if that was possible. So we tried, over 12 months of negotiation. But it became quite clear that a solution along those lines would not be acceptable to the Chinese Government, and that if we had persisted in seeking it, the talks would have broken down. That would not have altered the fact that 92 per cent. of the territory would revert to China, under the lease, in 1997. But in that way it would have done so without any agreement on its future.

We concluded that a breakdown in negotiations, with all the uncertainties that that would have created, could not in the long view offer satisfactory prospects for the people of Hong Kong, and for is future stability and prosperity.

We therefore decided, with the agreement of the Governor and of the Executive Council of Hong Kong, to

seek to negotiate arrangements under which British administration in Hong Kong would cease after 1997 and Hong Kong, though becoming a part of China, would retain her distinctive way of life as a special administrative region of China.

The draft agreement before the House today is the result of the negotiations which were brought to a conclusion on that basis. If the motion on the Order Paper is carried, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will travel to Peking later this month to sign the agreement—and we shall, of course, be going as well to Hong Kong. This will be my third visit to Peking in nine months. It will provide an opportunity to renew the close working relationship that we have established with our Chinese colleagues. It must be said that this agreement would not have been possible without the vision and realism which has characterised the approach of the Government of the People's Republic of China to these negotiations. I should like to express my personal appreciation of the part played by my opposite number, Mr. Wu Xueqian, in bringing our negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Following signature, we shall bring forward legislation early next year to provide for termination of sovereignty in 1997, and to provide powers to make other changes to the law, including the nationality law, which will be necessary in connection with the agreement and termination of sovereignty.

The agreement is both comprehensive and detailed. Since it was published on 26 September, hon. Members will have had more than two months to study it. I described its main provisions in my statement of 25 October. Today I want only to stress a few of its significant features.

First, the joint declaration and its annexes constitute a legally binding international agreement. As the Chinese Foreign Minister recently told the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in Peking, the joint declaration is a form of international treaty; it has the same force in international law and is legally binding.

Second, the policies set out in the agreement will, under the terms of the agreement, be stipulated in a basic law which will be passed by the National People's Congress of China and which will establish the special constitutional status of the Hong Kong special administrative region. The agreement provides that these policies will remain unchanged for 50 years.

The content of the basic law, and the arrangements for its drafting, are rightly of great interest to the people of Hong Kong. They are of crucial importance.

The law will be passed by the Chinese National People's Congress under the powers conferred on it by articles 31 and 62 of the Chinese constitution. Those articles provide the basis for special administrative regions with systems different from those in other parts of China.

It is, of course, the Chinese who must undertake the drafting of the basic law. But the joint declaration states that the basic policies for Hong Kong set out in the joint declaration itself, and elaborated in annex 1, will be stipulated in the basic law. The agreement thus provides clear guidelines for the drafting of that law.

I know that the Chinese leaders understand the great importance of this. I am confident, too, that they will have noted the hope, which has been widely expressed in recent weeks, that the people of Hong Kong will be fully consulted about the drafting of the law.

The Chinese Government have indicated that the people of Hong Kong will be consulted, though the exact form of that consultation has yet to be made clear. I welcome that indication. In that and in other respects, we stand ready to extend to the Chinese our fullest co-operation.

The third point I want to stress about the agreement is that it provides sufficient detail, in the many areas it covers, to give confidence, both internationally as well as in Hong Kong itself, that the future is a secure one. It provides a high level of autonomy for Hong Kong, as a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China. It provides a firm guarantee that Socialist policies pursued on the mainland will not be practised in Hong Kong. It provides for the administration of Hong Kong to be in local hands, and for the Executive to be accountable to an elected legislature. It provides for judicial power to be exercised independently and for a public service in which appointment and promotion will depend on qualifications, experience and ability.

The preservation of the legal system and courts to which Hong Kong is accustomed is fundamental to the continuation of Hong Kong's way of life. The agreement provides for this. Appeals to the Privy Council will cease. Instead there will be a Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong.

The English language will continue to have equal validity with Chinese in the courts. The work of translating the laws of Hong Kong into Chinese is now going ahead.

The agreement provides for Hong Kong to continue as a world commercial, financial and communications centre. It will be responsible for conducting its own external trade, have its own freely convertible currency, and enjoy free flow of capital without exchange control.

Although the Central People's Government in China will be responsible for its external relations, Hong Kong will have considerable autonomy in conducting relations with other countries in many important areas. There are arrangements permitting Hong Kong to continue its participation in the GATT and other international trade agreements, and to participate in relevant international organisations. There are provisions for Hong Kong to continue to be an important centre for shipping and civil aviation.

There are full and explicit provisions for the preservation of human rights and freedoms, including those specified in the international covenants on civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights.

Finally, secure arrangements have been made both for the recognition of existing land leases after 1997, and for the extension of leases expiring before 1997, and for the granting of new leases for terms of up to 50 years beyond 1997. Those are only the broad outline. There is much more detail in the agreement.

So far, I have dealt with the future after 1997, but the next 12 years are also crucial for Hong Kong.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): Whose task will it be to secure international recognition of this agreement and its terms in the period after 1997? Is it for China or for Britain, or will it be a combination of both? If it is both, has an adequate machinery been set up for that purpose?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There are various aspects of that question. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the need to secure continued recognition of Hong Kong's place in the GATT and other international arrangements, that is something on which both countries will co-operate. That is specifically provided for as one of the objectives of the joint liaison group, to which I shall refer in a moment.

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

The next 12 years are also crucial for Hong Kong. In order to ensure the success of this enterprise, and to make sure that the provisions of the agreement are put into practice—such as the one that I have just mentioned—there will be a need for close co-operation between Britain and China in the period between now and 1997, especially in the later years. The joint liaison group which is provided for by the agreement is the best means of achieving this and of avoiding abrupt changes in 1997 which might disturb the continuity of life at that time.

The joint liaison group will be charged with the tasks of consulting on the implementation of the joint declaration and of discussing matters relating to the smooth transfer of government in 1997, as well as exchanging information. It will continue in being until the year 2000.

It is our firm intention that the group should carry out its functions so as to build confidence between the British and Chinese Governments on all matters relating to the agreement, as well as building confidence among the people of Hong Kong. We shall give the group our full co-operation to that end, because I regard its work as of the highest importance.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that some people in Hong Kong are concerned that they could become stateless persons. Can he say anything on that important matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That could arise in certain cases. It will be dealt with so as to ensure that statelessness does not happen. This matter will be included in the provisions of the Bill that we shall be introducing in the new year. I am glad to have had the opportunity of dealing with that point.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): If the joint liaison group is to play a leading part in underpinning the international status of the special administrative region after 1997, will people from Hong Kong be among its members?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I was about to come to that point. I appreciate my right hon. Friend's concern, but perhaps he will allow me to deal with it at the appropriate point in my speech.

We took pains to ensure that there could be no possible ambiguity about what the group's functions will be. In no sense will it be a shadow Government. The agreement makes it plain that, in Chinese phraseology, the group shall be an organ of liaison, not an organ of power, and that it shall take no part in the administration of Hong Kong. The agreement also states explicitly that Britain will remain fully responsible for the administration of Hong Kong until 1997. I assure the House of the Government's wholehearted commitment to the full exercise of their responsibilities throughout that period.

Of course, the interests of Hong Kong will need to be properly represented on the joint liaison group. The exact composition of the group has yet to be determined, but I should like to make it clear that the British delegation will include officials from the Hong Kong Government. There will continue to be the fullest consultation with the Executive Council and with other representatives of the people of Hong Kong. It is important that the group should be able to enjoy the kind of confidence that is essential if it is to carry out its work properly.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman saying that while officials of the Hong Kong Government will serve on the British side of the joint liaison group, there will be no unofficial representatives?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Annex II to the joint declaration on page 25 of the White Paper makes it clear that the joint liaison group shall enjoy diplomatic privileges. It is a diplomatic group. There is provision for the appointment of representatives of that kind to the group. However, as the group carries out its work — no doubt working through a variety of methods as time goes by — it is important that there is full representation of the viewpoint of the Hong Kong people. This point has been raised with me in a number of places. It is important that it takes sufficient account of the view of the Hong Kong people, as I hope we have been able to do during our negotiations thus far. As the group's work intensifies, that will be important.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) Is my right hon. and learned Friend saying that the joint liaison group will remain throughout the period of 12 years, that in no way will it evolve and that it will remain a purely diplomatic body?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The agreement provides that the joint liaison group may, by agreement between the two sides, decide to set up specialist sub-groups to deal with particular subjects requiring expert assistance. Members of the joint liaison group and sub-groups can be attended by experts other than members of the joint liaison group. There is provision for a steady development of the working of the group in a practical fashion. The group will remain a body of which officials from either side will be members. That is part of the nature of the group, and those officials will include those from the Hong Kong Government. These matters are precisely set out in the agreement.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Regarding representation on the liaison group, the Foreign Secretary will be aware that people from Hong Kong should sit on it. Is that the position?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have made it clear that officials of the Hong Kong Government will be members of the group. Beyond that there will be provision for input from the people of Hong Kong. It is plainly important that that should be so.

I have a long speech to make to introduce the matter. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be able to answer these questions in more detail when he replies. However, the point raised by hon. Members relates to a point that I wish to underline.

Our aim throughout the negotiations has been to secure an agreement that would be acceptable to the people of Hong Kong. The Government have known from the start that the House would certainly wish to be satisfied on that point. That is why we decided that an assessment office should be set up in Hong Kong to collate and analyse the views of the people of Hong Kong on the draft agreement. Their report, together with the report of the two monitors whom I appointed to observe their work, was published as

a White Paper on 29 November. That White Paper is the second document that is before the House today, alongside the draft agreement itself.

The period of assessment in Hong Kong ended on 15 November. It was a considerable achievement that a clear and comprehensive assessment report, as well as the report of the monitoring team, should have been compiled, forwarded and published within two weeks so that it was available to hon. Members within a fortnight at the completion of the process. I should like to thank the head of the assessment office, Mr. Iain MacPherson, the two monitors, Sir Patrick Nairne and Mr. Justice Li, and everyone else concerned for completing their work in time for the House to receive their reports in that way.

I am glad to draw the House's attention to the conclusion of the assessment office, endorsed by the monitors, that

"most of the people in Hong Kong find the draft agreement acceptable".

That is an authoritative, and most important, conclusion. It is based on careful analysis of the whole range of submissions and statements received. All the principal representative bodies in Hong Kong, along with the overwhelming majority of organisations and groups and most of the individuals expressing a view, accepted the draft agreement.

The overall picture from reports by and through the media was found to be one of general acceptance. The same view emerged from various independent opinion surveys. The independent monitors, who watched the work of the assessment office at every stage, confirmed that the office had performed its functions properly and impartially.

By any standards there has been a very vigorous and public debate on the draft agreement since it was published in Hong Kong. Over 3·5 million copies of the agreement were distributed in Hong Kong. The fact that more than 1 million of them were distributed by the New China news agency says something about the relationship within which the assessment was conducted. The assessment office received nearly 2,500 direct submissions, many from organisations representing a huge membership. That compares very favourably with previous exercises of consultation in Hong Kong.

The assessment office took into account 273 reports of discussions, debates, seminars, public speeches and interviews, and the results of 23 opinion surveys of various kinds. By any standards, it was a most thorough exercise in information and consultation.

One point on which a number of people commented in the course of this process was the fact that the draft agreement could not in any case be amended. I want to deal directly with this.

The normal practice in negotiating international agreements is that, once they have been initialled, they are not open to amendment. There is good reason for that. It is that in such cases any attempt to change the draft agreement would risk disturbing the whole delicate balance that had been established. So it was in the present case. That is why we took such trouble to consult the Executive Council at every turn during the negotiations, and that is why I made statements on my two visits to Hong Kong in April and July. In that way, we offered the people of Hong Kong opportunities to comment on the likely shape of the emerging agreement. Characteristically and rightly, they took advantage of those opportunities.

Subsequently, the assessment exercise has enabled people in Hong Kong to express their anxieties about the completed draft agreement. The report gives a clear account of them. That will be of enormous value to us during the process of implementing the agreement in the years ahead and during the discussions we shall have in the future with the Chinese Government through the joint liaison group. That has been an added advantage of the whole exercise.

I shall now deal with one or two other matters which have attracted attention. The first is nationality. It was one of the most difficult subjects in the negotiations. Because it is also a matter which affects people in their personal lives, it gives rise to very strong emotions. It was not easy to reconcile the conflicting interests involved.

Nevertheless, I believe that what has been achieved is a reasonable answer to the problems. The Chinese Government were not prepared to agree that anyone born in Hong Kong after 1997 should acquire British nationality by virtue of their connection with Hong Kong.

What we have achieved is agreement with the Chinese Government on measures which will mean that those who are British dependent territories citizens before 1 July 1997 can retain during their lifetime an appropriate status, which by definition will be a form of British nationality. As with their present status, that will not entitle them to settle in the United Kingdom. But it will enable them to use a British passport and so to avail themselves, except in Hong Kong and China, of British consular protection.

Those arrangements have been set out in a draft exchange of memoranda which, although they are not part of the agreement itself, were agreed between the two sides and published alongside the agreement.

We were not able to provide that those persons who had been British dependent territories citizens before 1997 should transmit that status to their children for one generation thereafter. Obviously, I recognise that that has been a disappointment to many people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Since that matter is not part of the agreement but is in an annex, would it be open to reconsideration in legislation, which must follow, about British nationality?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I should not like to give the hon. Gentleman the impression that that could be open to consideration. I know from observations that he and other hon. Members have made in the past that the matter has been regarded, understandably, as being of importance. During negotiations transmissibility was unattainable. The compromise which was arrived at was the best that could be achieved. I have no doubt about that.

The second issue that I want to mention is the stationing of Chinese forces in Hong Kong after 1997. Under the agreement, defence is a matter for the Central People's Government. However, the agreement clearly provides that the special administrative region government will have full responsibility for the maintenance of public order and that forces sent by China for the purpose of defence shall not interfere in its internal affairs. I am confident that the Chinese Government are aware of the sensitivities in Hong Kong on this matter, and that they will act prudently.

I have one final point about the agreement. Some have asked whether there can be any guarantee that the Chinese Government will keep the agreement. There is no such thing as absolute certainty in relations between sovereign

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

states. But I believe that we can all have confidence that the agreement will be observed. I say that for the following reasons.

The best guarantee of a country's performance is its own self-interest. The House will need no reminding of the United Kingdom's strong interest in adhering to this agreement and making sure that it works. China has a matching interest. First, China has and is likely to continue to have strong economic reasons for wishing to see Hong Kong remain stable and prosperous. Secondly, and perhaps even more important, the whole course of Chinese reunification, which has always been a central policy of the Chinese Government, is likely to be connected to the success of the agreement.

Both countries have given their commitment to the agreement. Both countries will wish to maintain their reputation by upholding the agreement in the spirit in which it was made.

It would be too much to expect that this document, which has emerged from extremely complex and sometimes difficult negotiations, could provide the whole answer to every problem. In some areas it will be necessary to elaborate the general principles set out in the agreement. One such area is the constitutional arrangements and government structure of the future Hong Kong special administrative region.

In that connection I welcome the White Paper on constitutional development which has just been published by the Hong Kong Government. It provides for substantial development towards representative institutions in the 1985 elections, and for the prospect of further development in this direction following a further review in 1987, which will consider also the question of direct elections. At the same time it rightly avoids sudden and dramatic changes, which could unsettle the very stability that all our efforts are designed to secure.

I have already told the House that we regard the next 12 years as crucial. We shall need to achieve progress in constitutional development. At the same time, we shall need to keep constantly in mind the unique circumstances of Hong Kong, and its future position as a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): There is one important matter to which my right hon. and learned Friend has not referred, and which is referred to only briefly in the White Paper, and that is the position of the British expatriate staff in the public service of Hong Kong. Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that in the past, whenever a colony has achieved its independence, there has been a public officers' agreement, under which provision has been made for their future career prospects and pensions, and for compensation for loss of office arising out of constitutional changes? Will he give an undertaking that similar arrangements will be made for members of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, about which he has already asked several questions. As has been pointed out, the draft agreement in annex I, part IV provides satisfactorily for continuity of service by serving officers in the public service of Hong Kong on terms and conditions, including pay and pensions, that are no less favourable than before 1 July 1997. Those provisions apply to members of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service serving in Hong Kong as well as to other civil servants.

The resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong by the People's Republic of China raises similar issues in respect of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service as independence did for other dependent territories. However, it is not possible to define now, 12½ years in advance of constitutional change, all the arrangements that will apply to members of Her Majesty's overseas Civil Service serving in Hong Kong and to payments of their pensions by the Hong Kong special administrative region after 1 July 1997. Thus, at this stage, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the contents of the agreement, which he has seen. I understand his concern and I hope that I have shown our appreciation of it.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): There is one other peripheral but important matter that I should like my right hon. and learned Friend to comment on, and that is the long-term fate of the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. He will be aware of the difficulties that the Hong Kong Administration face in trying to place those refugees throughout the world, and of the Government's reluctance —having already done a great deal—to take any more refugees now. I should be grateful if my right hon. and learned Friend would confer with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department to ensure that we take some refugees, and that we make every effort to encourage other countries to do so.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. Of course, it goes a little outside the debate that I am now concerned with, in commending the agreement to the House. But in so far as it is within the scope of today's debate, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will have something to say about it at the end of the debate. However, that point takes us on to rather different territory.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): I think that my right hon. and learned Friend has set at rest the worry about the role of the People's Liberation Army within the region, as it will not be involved in internal security. But there is another worry, and that is that conscription might be applied. That worry should be set at rest as soon as possible. Might it not be a good idea to establish some internal security force for the policing of the frontier with the rest of China, so that young people in Hong Kong can serve in that body and not be in any way subjected to the possibility of conscription to the PLA?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is obviously important that the arrangements that are to be in place after 1997, whereby public order is the responsibility of the government of the special administrative region, should be considered and developed so far as necessary. Conscription is not mentioned in the agreement. The Chinese Government have not suggested that there will be conscription, and there is no reason to assume that there will be such a thing. I cannot say more than that at this stage.

Mr. Faulds: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way on that point?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall not give way. I must try to draw my remarks to a close, as I want other hon. Members to have a chance of taking part in the debate. I

have said as much as I can now about the balance of factors that we have to take into account on constitutional development.

I believe that what has emerged from these negotiations is a bold and imaginative plan for the future of Hong Kong. The concept of maintaining two separate political, economic and social systems within one country is a far-sighted one, which is closely associated with Chairman Dengxiao Ping himself. As a means of reconciling the apparently irreconcilable, it could have important implications for problems in other parts of the world.

I am greatly encouraged by the favourable reception given to this draft agreement internationally—and not least by the major industrialised nations that can play such an important part in Hong Kong's future prosperity. Indeed, 1997 will not just mark the end of an era in Hong Kong but more important than that, it will mark the beginning of a new era.

The success of this agreement will depend not only on China and the United Kingdom but to a very large extent on the people of Hong Kong and on their willingness to make it work. As the House well knows, they are resourceful and resilient people. I believe that there is every chance that in the 21st century Hong Kong will continue to be the striking financial, economic and social success that it is today.

We shall certainly continue fully, responsibly and effectively to discharge our obligation for the administration of Hong Kong until 1997. Thereafter we shall follow the fortunes of the Hong Kong special administrative region with the utmost attention and interest.

This is a debate about the future of Hong Kong and about the draft agreement before the House today. I close by saying that it is an honourable agreement. It is good for Britain and good for China. But far more important than either of those things it is good for the people of Hong Kong.

On behalf of the Government, I warmly and strongly commend the agreement to the House.

6.27 pm

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I thank the Foreign Secretary for that thorough and detailed presentation of the agreement. However, I regret the fact that the Government did not accept the Opposition's suggestion that we should have two days for this important debate. At the time we were grateful for the extension of the debate by two hours but, of course, we have already lost more than that owing to not unfamiliar incidents in the House after Question Time. Accordingly, I shall try to keep my remarks short, as many hon. Members wish to speak. It will be relatively easy for me to do so, because the House gave careful consideration to the background to the negotiations as long ago as May, and I think it fair to say that at that time there was a broad consensus.

In September, the Government published the draft agreement and I believe that it was clear then that there had been a combination of political realism and diplomatic skill in both the People's Republic of China and Britain that we all admired, and which I hope may be applied in some other areas on which the issue of sovereignty is of central importance.

When we discussed the agreement briefly in the House on 25 October the House was broadly agreed that the agreement as Lord Butler said, was "the best we have", and certainly better than might have been expected a few years ago. At that time, the House was disposed to accept it as such, subject only to the views of the people of Hong Kong, as assessed by the office set up for that purpose. Now we have the report of assessment office and of the independent monitoring team. I propose to confine my remarks largely to the findings in those reports and to some of the important issues that emerged with new clarity from them.

The report of the assessment office suggests that the people of Hong Kong have taken much the same view of the agreement as has the House of Commons. The report is decently honest about the problem of judging opinion in a territory that has never possessed representative government as we know it here. The assessment office was clearly disappointed by the relatively tiny response to its inquiries. Only one individual out of every 3,000 in the territory put in a written submission, and I suspect that Sir Patrick Nairne and Mr. Justice Li were right to say that that was partly because the office took a long time to assure the people that any opinion that they might submit individually would remain confidential and inaccessible to outsiders for ever.

It is somewhat disturbing that out of the 1,000 people who expressed a view on the acceptability of the agreement, as many as one in three opposed it. Nevertheless it is difficult to dispute the conclusion in the report that, given the fact that nearly all the people of Hong Kong acknowledge the inevitability of China having sovereignty in 1997 and the impossibility of changing an agreement made by two Governments outside Hong Kong, the agreement must be accepted.

I was somewhat surprised, however, by the Foreign Secretary's suggestion that it was not possible to change any international agreement that has been initialled. I had formed the impression that that is not the view of Her Majesty's Government in the case of the draft treaty on the law of the sea. Perhaps, when he replies, the Minister will comment on that.

We would all agree that the important thing is to ensure that the agreement is carried out as the basis for the continued prosperity and well-being of the people of Hong Kong. I suspect that the general view of the people of Hong Kong was summed up by one person quoted in the report by the assessment office, who said that the draft agreement is a post-dated cheque and that the result can only be known when it is proved.

Perhaps the most interesting summary of the situation is contained in paragraphs 23 and 24 of the report of the independent monitoring team. I hope that I may be allowed to read it—as they say in the United States—into the record:

> "Nobody in Hong Kong can escape the uncertainties of the future: those who have, or can acquire, a 'right of abode' elsewhere will take personal precautions in the short term while hoping for the best in Hong Kong in the long term. The minority who reject the draft agreement do so either because they can never accept reunification with Communist China or because they are bitter about the consequences for themselves as British dependent Territories citizens. The majority who accept it do so chiefly because they regard reunification as inevitable and are relieved that the terms of the draft agreement are as good as they are.
>
> But the verdict of acceptance implies neither positive enthusiasm nor passive acquiescence. The response to the Assessment Office has demonstrated the realism of the people of Hong Kong. They know that their future now lies in their own hands."

[Mr. Denis Healey]

Some of the implications of that judgment on the findings of the assessment office are relevant to us in Britain. The House and the Government must take account of the clear misgivings that remain in Hong Kong. Both as a matter of honour and, I suggest, as a matter of British interest, we must accept our responsibility to do what we can to ensure that the agreement is successful, particularly in the 12 years before the resumption of sovereignty by the People's Republic of China.

There is a strong case for meeting the views of the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council, at least so far as saying that the Government should publish an annual report that Parliament could debate. A firm commitment to debate every report would be perhaps unnecessary or even unwise, but the Government should make an annual report on developments in the territory and it should be open to the House, if it wishes, to debate it.

I hope that when we consider the legislation next year we shall be able to debate many of the issues that arise and to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred. However, some issues require special attention. There are the problems of the expatriate civil servants and of the Vietnamese refugees, which have already been referred to. I hope that the Government will take those problems seriously and will be able to allay some of the concern felt on those issues on both sides of the House.

A matter of even greater moral importance for Britain is that a substantial number of the people of Hong Kong served the British colonial Government in fields that could render them liable to victimisation in the future. I hope that the Government can give us an absolute assurance that those people will be guaranteed their future and their personal security.

There is also the problem of the British dependent territory citizens in Hong Kong. As the years pass, there is a case for giving somewhat fuller assurances on nationality and travel for those 2 million British dependent territory citizens. I gather from what the Foreign Secretary has said that, although this is not necessarily possible, it is not necessarily excluded. Not many of us would believe that it would be possible for any British Government to offer them all an automatic right of residence here. However, many of those people have skills and energies that could contribute greatly to Britain's economy and social progress. Having spent some weeks on holiday in California in August, I was immensely impressed by the contribution made by recent immigrants from Hong Kong, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea and Japan to the stupendous growth of a state that is the size of Britain and has twice our annual national product. We should not be indifferent to the contribution that Chinese people from Hong Kong can make, although we cannot issue any blank cheque to accept as many of them as might wish to come here at any one time.

Mr. Parry: Does not my right hon. Friend accept the suggestion that, together with Commonwealth, NATO and the European Community, the Government might take the initiative to provide a haven for those who might wish to leave?

Mr. Healey: I was just about to refer to that proposal. I am glad that my hon. Friend is keen on it because I think that the suggestion is a very good one. The idea is that the Government should consider launching an international effort, drawing largely on members of the European Community, the Commonwealth countries and NATO, to assist in the resettlement of those who may wish to be resettled. I believe that the idea has been referred to as "operation Haven". I hope that the Government will consider that suggestion. The Minister of State may wish to say something about it when he replies.

There has been a dramatic change of opinion in Hong Kong about the joint liaison group since the idea was first mooted. Many people in Hong Kong originally saw the joint liaison group as an underhand mechanism by which Peking could get premature control over the territory. Those fears have been completely dispersed, and the joint liaison group is now seen in Hong Kong as a valuable instrument in ensuring the future development of the territory in line with the agreement. I take it that the Government also regard it in that light. It would be useful if some means could be found of associating the people of Hong Kong in the liaison group's work. We know from the draft agreement that the group will include officials of the Hong Kong Government and that there is some scope for evolution at a later stage, at least in the case of the working groups. I hope that Government officials in Hong Kong and the British Government will watch the possibility of development in that direction because there is no doubt that it would be greatly welcomed by the people of Hong Kong.

It is not unnatural that the people of Hong Kong would also like representation on the Chinese body that will draw up the basic law, but that must now be a problem for them to discuss with the Chinese Government. It is not essentially a problem that the British Government should discuss, once the agreement comes into force. Representation by Hong Kong on the joint liaison group or on any Chinese body that drafts the basic law raises what is still the most difficult issue concerning Hong Kong's future—whether its institutions can be given the power to reflect more accurately the views of the people of Hong Kong in the years before the change takes place. In other words, can Hong Kong move towards more representative government? That will not be easy in a territory in which there has been hardly any significant constitutional change for the past 100 years. Suddenly rushing the thing in 12 years is obviously open to real dangers.

We must test each step in the process before moving to the next to ensure that nothing that is done disturbs the political stability on which the economic prosperity of Hong Kong must depend. Through this agreement, the Government have a direct responsibility to the Government of Peking to deal with that problem in this way—I put it no higher than that. However, if any more representative system is to last, it is important that it should be in place well before the transfer of sovereignty. I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that I am fully aware of the problems that that raises and will be tolerant of any difficulties that the Government might encounter.

If the House accepts this agreement—I strongly hope that it will—and the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister sign it and it is passed into law in Peking and London next year, we shall be opening a new chapter in the life of some of the most vigorous, skilful and ingenious people who have ever been subjects of the British Crown. We are opening the new chapter under far better auspices than anyone would have believed possible only a few years

ago. No other territory in the world is guaranteed 62 years of capitalist free enterprise by treaty. Some of us might regard that as a somewhat mixed blessing but it is not completely without precedent for a Socialist community to coexist with a capitalist one. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends from north of the border will feel that that has been the problem of Scotland for many years. Although we hope to assimilate the rest of the United Kingdom with the Scottish model as the years pass it cannot come a day too soon.

As I have said, when we read the news that we get from Hong Kong and talk to travellers to Hong Kong and our colleagues who have visited the territory in the past six months, we find that everyone is impressed by the tremendous opportunities for external capital and enterprise in these new circumstances. They have been impressed by the fact that Japanese and American businesses are already gearing themselves up to take full advantage of competition with British businesses on what they regard as likely to be more equal terms than in the past. I hope that the Government will take every opportunity to press British businesses to be equally alert. Some of the princely hongs have shown far from the right spirit in their approach to the opportunities that now face them. I hope that their place will be taken by other British businesses with more energy and vision.

6.45 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I commend most warmly the manner in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and those colleagues who have worked with him have conducted the negotiations. I should like to offer my full congratulations on the result that he has achieved. In my view he has been most successful.

This is a realistic agreement. It recognises the facts of the situation. I have always believed that the people of Hong Kong have recognised those facts. My plea to my right hon. and learned Friend is that he should continue with his present attitude and not allow himself to be diverted in any way from it. The temptations will be quite considerable — some of them have already been expressed today.

On 1 July 1997 we relinquish sovereignty over the island and the lease over the rest of Hong Kong. We shall then have neither sovereignty nor power and I beg my right hon. and learned Friend not by any sentence or phrase to give indications that will cause troubles for his successors when that time comes. That is fundamental in every respect. It is already being said that we must ensure that the agreement works, but it will not be in our power to see that it works. What lies in our power is to ensure that we carry out our side of the agreement. The rest will be in the power of Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China. I hope that that will always be at the forefront of my right hon. and learned Friend's mind and in the minds of his colleagues in the Foreign Office and the Government as a whole. To do otherwise would be unfair to the people of Hong Kong as we should be misleading them, and they would not then be able to make their own fair and responsible judgments about how to organise their future.

My right hon. and learned Friend rightly emphasised that Britain is responsible until the date of the handover. That alone puts great responsibilities on us. In the wealth of admiration which my right hon. and learned Friend and others expressed today, we should be foolish if we failed to acknowledge that Hong Kong has its problems, and great internal problems. I hope that we shall concentrate, for the remaining years of our responsibility, on helping Hong Kong to solve those problems. I do not need to go into them in detail as we all know what they are. Moreover, it is right to emphasise that Hong Kong now faces considerable competition from the rest of the Pacific. That has nothing to do with 1997 but derives from the fact that Singapore has emerged as an extraordinarily successful entity and is now linked up with Tokyo and Chicago, which Hong Kong is not. That is one of the elementary facts of financial life at the moment. If Hong Kong suffers from that it is not our fault, Peking's fault or the fault of the Foreign Secretary and the negotiators, but something that Hong Kong, with the aid of the British Government until 1997, has to resolve for itself.

I hope that we shall continue to do everything possible to help Hong Kong solve its problems and recognise that after 1 July 1997 we shall have neither sovereignty nor power. That affects nationality, which itself is complicated enough. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) mentioned two groups whom we should look after and said that we might organise a European or world arrangement to accommodate those who wish to leave Hong Kong. I believe that that is impractical. I do not for a moment doubt the skill and drive of the people of Hong Kong—that is why I have confidence in their future. If we want to use some of that skill and drive, it is open to us to allow them to come to Britain without their having British or any other dependent form of British nationality. The question therefore does not arise. We should learn from the experience of the years in which we moved our colonies to independence but loaded ourselves with all manner of undertakings which we could not carry out afterwards and which became a source of grave embarassment to this country.

Mr. Healey: I think that the right hon. Gentleman has misunderstood my comments in two ways. The first group to which I referred were those whose work for the British colonial regime may render them liable to victimisation as time goes on. I hope that he will accept that we have a direct responsibility to give people who have served, for example in the police, the opportunity to come here before 1997, whatever their nationality status.

On the second point, I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I am not suggesting that we should give British dependent territory citizens a statutory right to live here. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I am saying that we should recognise that many of them could make a great contribution to our country by coming here and that we should be prepared to accept them, on a case by case basis, as the Americans have accepted hundreds of thousands of Asians from other western Pacific countries since the war.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that explanation. His point about victimisation implies that the autonomous Hong Kong China Government will victimise people in Hong Kong. I am not for one moment prepared to accept that before the transfer of power in 1997 and it will not help the working of the agreement if we suggest that it will happen.

I have dealt with the Government of the People's Republic in private business in the City and I have always found them meticulous in carrying out agreements made

[Mr. Heath]

since the revolution. International treaties and arrangements made since the revolution have also been meticulously observed. That should give us confidence that the same will be true of the agreement now before us, which I hope that the House will reaffirm today.

On the development of representative government within Hong Kong, I agree with the right hon. Member for Leeds, East that we must do our utmost to achieve proper, working representative government there by the time the handover takes place, but I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman's comments about not rushing things. With only 12 years to develop representative government, the question of rushing or not rushing does not arise. What I believe will do more harm than anything is the suggestion, as the tone of the White Paper implies, that we are doing this rather grudgingly. Post-colonial history shows that we have always suffered when we have seemed to be dragging out feet. There is always the argument that it would be so much better if these people let us go on ruling them because we do it so much better than they ever could, but not all of us share that view and the impression that we are only grudgingly making changes will be highly damaging to Hong Kong. My experience in talking to young Hong Kong Chinese is that they are anxious to assume those responsibilities, but that response to the assessment was low because they did not trust the present system to enable them to express their views safely and clearly.

Mr. Adley: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. Does he agree with me that there is likely to be more resistance to the change that he proposes from the Hong Kong Government than from the People's Republic of China?

Mr. Heath: Of course I do. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will have seen the mass of advice from people in appointed positions who naturally enjoy their positions and will urge him to continue them rather than spreading responsibility too hastily. Far greater than any danger of haste is the danger of not having fully representative working government with experience by the time the handover takes place.

There is constant discussion about the stability of the People's Republic and of the administration in Peking, but no Conservative Member can deny that the direction of their agricultural policy in the past five years and now their industrial policy has been most satisfying. Of course there are aspects of the Chinese regime of which some people do not approve. That happens all over the world. Nevertheless, the direction adopted by the Chinese in agricultural and industrial affairs is certainly one that we can encourage and approve. The Chinese declaration about industrial policy could almost have been made in this House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, with occasional deletion of the word "Socialist" which had clearly been inserted to keep the ranks in order. It was a policy of enterprise, incentives and greater productivity, stressing that management must manage and that there should be good relations between unions and management and no interference from the Government. It says everything that my right hon. and learned Friend has been saying in various ministerial capacities for the past five years.

There is one way in which we can help, given our good relations with the People's Republic and the part that we are playing in its affairs. My right hon. and learned Friend's achievements as Foreign Secretary fully justify the decision of the Government over which I presided and of which he was a member to enter into full relations with Peking in 1972. One of the purposes was to ensure the best possible answer for Hong Kong when the time came.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East said that we must acknowledge the interest being shown by the Americans and the Japanese in capital in Hong Kong. In fact, 50 per cent. of the capital in Hong Kong is already American, 35 per cent. is Japanese and only 5 per cent. is British. That is the situation now and there is nothing new or experimental about it. Moreover, nearly 50 per cent. of trade with Hong Kong is American, more than 35 per cent. is Japanese and only 7 per cent. is British. Clearly, therefore, the American and Japanese economic interest is far greater than our own in both investment and trade.

The area in which we can be helpful is in joint ventures with the People's Republic, by far the greater part of which currently go to Japan, with a small amount going to the United States and a very small amount to Europe, of which we get only a proportion. This goes beyond the sphere of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. It means that the Treasury as well as the Foreign Office and, indeed, the Government as a whole must take a much broader attitude to investment in such joint ventures than it now does. If Dengxiao Ping asks why he should get his joint ventures from us at 11 per cent. or 12 per cent. when he can get them from Tokyo at 4·5 per cent., I cannot give an answer. No one here can answer that, but an answer must be found if we are to have joint ventures with the People's Republic and thus extend our influence, help the People's Republic to stabilise and thus help the people of Hong Kong.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary all the very hard work that he and his team have done, some of which I have seen at first hand, and I thank him for it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches operates from 7 pm. I appeal for the co-operation of right hon. and hon. Members.

6.58 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I do not think that it would be possible to query the wisdom of relinquishing our sovereignty over Hong Kong under the terms of an agreement such as that now before us. Whatever may be the future of that agreement—we cannot look 60 years into our own future, let alone that of China — the agreement is a remarkable achievement, which many would not previously have expected the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues to achieve.

I wish to refer to just one element which, I believe, is technically not part of the actual agreement. The Foreign Secretary said that the last four paragraphs were not part of the agreement. That section is entitled "Associated Exchange of Memoranda". As I understand it, this means that, having been notified of our intentions as set out in those paragraphs, the People's Republic of China raises no

objection to them. The fulfilment of what is set out in those paragraphs is not, from its point of view, a condition to its acceptance of the rest of the agreement. From that it follows that this, and perhaps this alone of all that is set out in the White Paper is a matter which the House—and the country—is free to debate and decide for itself, since it concerns us materially, in the course of the legislation that will be laid before us.

In those paragraphs, the Government say that they

"will seek parliamentary approval for legislation"

to give

"a new status, with an appropriate title,"

to those who are now British Dependent Territories citizens by reason of their connection with Hong Kong, and those who will become such in the next 12 or 13 years.

It is true that the Government say that that status

"will not give them the right of abode"

in the United Kingdom. It does not. That is one of the absurdities and anomalies of a status which many of us thought should never have been created in the British Nationality Act 1981 and which has already had to be modified in the case of two of the territories to which it applied. But it is one thing for the Government to say that the new status will not give these people the right of abode in the United Kingdom. It is another to ignore the increasing pressure that will be brought to bear on the United Kingdom if we confer the kind of status adumbrated in this document, to admit its holders liberally and freely to the United Kingdom from Hong Kong in coming years, both before and after 1997. We would be foolish to underestimate the anxieties that exist or the pressures that may be deliberately engineered to that end in years to come. One can see the growth of such pressures already.

In September, *The Times* was writing:

"the British government should at least compensate for them"—

that is, the terms of the memorandum—

"by giving as broad a definition as possible to those B.D.T. passport holders eligible to settle in Britain under the discretionary terms of the 1981 Nationality Act."

After a few weeks that had become:

"Even though Britain is in no position to open its doors to such numbers we will have to be prepared to treat such an emergency, if it happens, with particular humanity and urgency."

And today, in the same newspaper, we are told:

"The present generation will probably be granted British overseas citizenship, which does not give the right of abode in this country but implies an ultimate moral obligation on Britain if things go badly wrong."

By what is proposed here we are incurring a virtually unlimited, though unacknowledged, liability to cede to pressure, a liability which could be of great consequence for our own future.

The Government have courted that result by the manner in which they have represented the new status. They have represented it as a continuation of the present British dependent territory status. In no circumstances could any status of the people of Hong Kong after 1997 be properly regarded as a continuance of their present status as inhabitants of a British dependent territory.

In the draft the Government have repeatedly referred to the travel documents that would be issued as "British passports". Now, we in the House may understand that a British passport issued to a British dependent territory citizen is not what the rest of the world would take it to be; but the rest of the world, and a great many of the people who will read this document, will think that a British passport means the same as a French passport—in other words, a passport the possession of which is equated with citizenship and with the rights of citizenship. It is a profound mistake on the part of the Government to use a concept and vocabulary that is bound to strengthen the internal and international pressures and to weaken the legal protections that we have against entry into this country where that has not been specifically decided in specific cases by the authorities of the United Kingdom.

I hope therefore that this proposal will be rethought, and will be rethought if not before, at any rate during, the course of the legislation that is to come before the House next year. The notion that the United Kingdom can confer a status that will outlast 1997 is itself the assertion of a falsehood. It represents the inadmissible division between citizenship and status on the one hand and sovereignty and power on the other. Where there is no sovereignty or power, there cannot be citizenship or status in any natural sense of the words. In this I concur entirely with what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said. We are in danger of adopting formulae at this stage which will be interpreted in the future in a way that will be a rod for our own backs, and will not be to the advantage either of those who might eventually be covered by it.

We have made such mistakes before. I see that in the document there is a reference to

"passports issued by the United Kingdom."

We have been through all that painfully in past years, when we found that the act of issuing passports by an authority responsible to the United Kingdom Government was interpreted as conferring all the rights naturally inherent in citizenship itself. As a result, we were held internationally as well as internally to be bound by the fact of the United Kingdom having issued passports to individuals, even though the citizenship possessed by those individuals was one that by our law did not carry the right of entry and abode to this country.

We have no need to make that mistake again. We are deceiving others and ourselves if we lay this foundation for a repetition of that mistake. I hope that reconsideration, in the context of the future legislation, will enable us to avoid it.

7.7 pm

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): This is the best possible deal that we could get. It owes a lot to the realism of the people of Hong Kong, and the way in which they have accepted it, and the assessment team has said as much. Reality is the name of the game, and we salute the Hong Kong people for it.

I intend to make a short speech within the 10 minutes that are available to me. There are several realities. Reunification is unavoidable, and that fact has to be faced by all of us. Secondly, China has accepted, and we hope will go on accepting, the two systems. It is in her interest to do so. This point is absolutely crucial. It has been emphasised by both Front Benches, and will be emphasised again in the debate this evening. The crucial nature of this is that we must, in the 12 years to come, maintain the fact that it is in China's interest to make this a success.

The opportunities are enormous. I emphasise this, as it has not yet been touched on. That area of the far east is perhaps the premier potential growth area in the world. Europe has its difficulties, and it may be said that it has

[Mr. Peter Temple-Morris]

reached a plateau of achievement, although we are hoping it will get better, while the potential of expansion in the future in that area of the east is enormous.

China will want to control Hong Kong, and that point will play a vital role in all this. To think otherwise is to delude oneself. Therefore, there are two points. First, we must preserve the value of what China takes over, and the self-interest argument comes in there. Secondly, we must create positions and institutions which are reasonably compatible with the system that is due to take over Hong Kong. Therefore, everything that we do must be directed to that end. Positions and institutions that are reasonably compatible is all that we can achieve.

The future of democracy within Hong Kong is a delicate matter and it has been approached delicately in the debate so far. There is nothing sacred about democracy. It has not always worked in parts of the world where we have wished it to work and where we have introduced it. In many instances it has declined rapidly and in many others it has died. It is important, whatever the system, to get the Hong Kong Chinese into leadership positions whatever the system that prevails in Hong Kong between now and 1997. During the next 12 years we must create something that will continue beyond 1997.

The proposals for indirect elections are just about right. Again, this is a difficult and delicate matter. We must proceed slowly in the recognition that democracy is neither a Chinese nor a Hong Kong institution. Democracy is not exactly the main attribute of Hong Kong or the reason for its success. There are great dangers in undue speed. Those who advocate speed, such as the radicals, pressure groups and Hong Kong observers, perhaps strike some of us as being rather too western-oriented for comfort, and perhaps not the ideal people to advocate a lasting system beyond 1997. I am not deriding democracy. I am merely observing that it is necessary to be practical. *[Interruption.]* I notice that one or two great democrats have responded to my remarks. Perhaps they are amused by what I am saying, but there is a certain seriousness behind my remarks.

We must not divide a consensus community. Hong Kong is not and has never been an independent state. It has operated by consensus and we must not exacerbate the differences which might appear between the Nationalists and the Communists by pressing on too quickly towards a system which is based on direct elections. That is why indirect elections will be going quite far enough for the moment. There are Communists within Hong Kong and they have a close relationship with the mainland. They would not win in any direct elections and we should not cause them to feel that they should not compete. If we did, they would opt for abstention and perhaps eventually influence those who take over to dismantle the system that we have tried so laboriously to build up.

It is all-important that the United Kingdom continues its interest and support over the next 12 years. It is pleasing that so many hon. Members are present in the Chamber to demonstrate their interest in Hong Kong, and this interest must continue. Indeed, it must be seen to continue. It is only then that China will take sufficient interest in the Hong Kong Chinese. It is imperative that we give them an increasing role if the framework is to last and continue beyond 1997.

It is vital also to maintain confidence. If we fail to do so, the consequences and results will be dire. We all know that various individuals are, understandably, going to various boltholes. When they have the nationality that will result from those boltholes, they may return to Hong Kong. There is a vital middle ground of talent within Hong Kong that is responsible primarily for the continuation of its success. That talent will leave if we get things wrong. This terrible danger was apparent in Shanghai back in the 1940s and it has been apparent in other parts of the world.

If things start to go wrong, they rapidly become worse. That leads to corruption, "take while you can," and the entire edifice collapses. That is why confidence is so vital. It is necessary to maintain Hong Kong's freedom of operation bearing in mind the opposition and competition which it faces. If exchange controls were to be introduced, for example, in addition to other measures, confidence would be lost and the Hong Kong experiment would diminish to such an extent that it would be the end of the agreement which we have all worked so hard to achieve and which we want to make a success.

In maintaining confidence, there is no greater challenge than the liaison group. The issue has been raised with my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and his answers were rather blurred, although he pointed out the presence of the Hong Kong Government on that group. Within the agreement there is a facility for continuation to the extent that we can involve the Hong Kong Chinese, at least for the moment on the sub-committees. The liaison group will have a vital role in the next 12 years. Its contribution and its access to the basic law will be all important. It is the duty and role of the House—I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will be dealing with this in more detail than my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary did—to ensure that we have the active and vital participation of the Hong Kong Chinese on the group rather than a load of Hong Kong Government luminaries.

7.17 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) about the need to maintain the confidence of the people of Hong Kong. I hope that this debate will not be the last occasion on which we have a major examination of the affairs of the colony. I hope also that we shall have regular reports from time to time that will enable us to show the people of Hong Kong that we are continuing to maintain our interest in what will remain for the next 12 or 13 years a British colony.

I shall address myself to two problems. One problem is that of democracy and the other is the international recognition of the agreement. We have had the Hong Kong Government's White Paper and there have been comments already on how far and how fast we shall go by 1997. I join those, including the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who feel that by 1997 there should be in place in the colony a system of fully representative government. I believe that that will be in the best interests of the people of Hong Kong. I invite hon. Members to envisage a situation in which there is virtually no progress towards democracy in Hong Kong over the next 12 years. We shall then be handing over one authoritarian system of government to another. It will be much easier in those circumstances for the incoming Government and governor, if they wish, to make fundamental alterations irrespective of whether they are in accordance with the terms of the agreement. Their task in

doing whatever they may wish after 1997 will be made immeasurably easier and smoother by the absence of representative institutions and government in Hong Kong which can represent fully to them the interests of the Hong Kong people. We need to have more representative government—that is, a majority of elected members of LEGCO and EXCO—but I do not presume to enter into the many arguments and discussions on the exact formula of the elections. That should be the guiding principle.

In paragraph 33 of the White Paper there is set out the issue of the powers, if any, that should devolve to the new Hong Kong Administration, the more representative Government. There is little point in making the Government more representative unless they have some powers with which to control the destiny of the Hong Kong people in the period up to 1997. The issue is uncertain and vague as it appears in the documents before us. I hope that we shall maintain the pressure on the British Government and the Hong Kong Government to make haste slowly during the next 12 years. That should be our theme and I hope that that will help the Hong Kong people to realise that we have their best interests at heart.

I turn briefly to the issue which has concerned me from the time that I visited Hong Kong earlier this year with a number of other hon. Members. We did so at the invitation of the Hong Kong Government. That issue is the international acceptability of certain of the provisions of the agreement. I refer in particular to the period after 1997. The agreement says that all should be well and that Hong Kong will be able to maintain its participation in GATT and its special status as a member of the multifibre arrangement. Both of those international institutions are vital for the future economic prosperity of Hong Kong.

If Hong Kong were unable to maintain its position within those two international institutions, its economic future would become very uncertain. That is recognised in the White Paper which is before us for provisional approval today and for approval by Britain and China next year in the form of legislation. The agreement is good, so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It may mislead people in Britain, China and Hong Kong about the need to take urgent measures to ensure that the special economic status of Hong Kong is recognised by other countries.

I invite the House to consider the economic climate in the world over the next 12 years. We have seen during the past 10 years, during which there has been the multifibre arrangement and other economic arrangements to benefit poorer countries, including Hong Kong, a climate of growing protectionism. I resist that climate and I intend to go on resisting it. Nevertheless, the mood of the House is that we need to protect ourselves much more. That mood is also evident in the United States and in other industrial countries. Therefore the international economic climate will not be very favourable towards concluding an international economic agreement for the continuation of Hong Kong's special status in GATT and the MFA.

The Foreign Secretary made great play—I do not blame him—of the fact that there has been international recognition of the value of this agreement. However, all countries in the world recognise and applaud the agreement because it does not cost them anything to do so. Many countries are anti-colonialist. If the agreement ends colonialism, all well and good. Most countries are conscious of the value of friendship with the People's Republic of China, if only for economic reasons, because potentially in the 21st century China will be one of the largest markets in the world. Therefore, they do not want to lose any brownie points over the next 12 years.

The point we are asking them to accept is that this is not only an agreement between Britain and China over the future of Hong Kong. We are asking the community of nations in GATT and the MFA to accept that Hong Kong's special status should continue. It will require them to continue to make sacrifices, in the sense that we accept the obligations of the MFA.

Hong Kong also enjoys certain privileges under GATT as a dependent territory. In those circumstances, it is incumbent upon all of us in this House, and upon the British Government, together with the People's Republic of China, to map out a strategic campaign to ensure that at the appropriate time there is full international recognition and an agreement on these two issues well before 1997. That will be extremely difficult. At least two countries—the United States and France—will be very difficult to convince that the special status of Hong Kong under the MFA and GATT should continue after 1997.

During the last year there has been a row between Hong Kong and the United States over the rules of origin for certain goods and garments. That is a sign of the times. I believe that there will be forces in the United States—I use the United States as an illustration of a country where this issue has arisen during the last year—which will want to ensure that by 1997 the special economic status of Hong Kong should cease, because then it would revert to being part of mainland China for the purposes of the MFA. Unless China's quotas under these arrangements are increased, the net result will be to reduce the pressure on rich countries to take goods from countries such as Hong Kong, China and many other developing countries.

Under the MFA, I believe that there will be strong opposition from France and perhaps from other members of the European Community. I single out France because when the Foreign Secretary raises this issue at the Council of Ministers he will be told that this is an excellent agreement, that most of the members of the EEC welcome it and that they also welcome the fact that Hong Kong is to continue to enjoy a special economic status. However, when our Foreign Secretary, as I hope he will, tries to obtain a concrete agreement in the EEC recognising the special status of Hong Kong in MFA and GATT, I suspect that the French will say that 1997 is a very long way away, that circumstances may change, that there will be several different MFAs leading up to that point, that they cannot consider the matter properly and justifiably at this stage and that we should put off the negotiations until much nearer the time. However, when we get much nearer the time—1995, 1996, and 1997—I have no doubt that the French, and perhaps others, will drive a very hard bargain if we are to fulfil the commitment which is contained not merely in this agreement but in statements made by the Foreign Secretary in Hong Kong, Peking and in this House about the special economic status and international provisions for the economic future of Hong Kong.

I hope that the Foreign Secretary will take these points on board. I am extremely worried about the international economic status of Hong Kong. Everything depends upon that after 1997. The best we can do in this House is to ensure that we negotiate successfully on their behalf.

7.26 pm

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) is quite right to stress the importance of obtaining acceptance of this agreement by the international organisations and by other countries which are concerned with economic and financial matters. I shall return later to that subject. I believe that the most important aspect of this excellent agreement is the evident acceptance by China of the basic principle that Hong Kong will be run after 1997 by the people of Hong Kong. Given the enormous difference between the two ways of life on the mainland of China and in Hong Kong, any attempt by China to run Hong Kong would lead to great difficulty.

Given that the acceptance by China of the principle of Hong Kong being run by its own people is absolutely sincere, I am optimistic about the success of the agreement. This is what the "one country, two systems" slogan means. From it flows most of the other important aspects of the agreement. China has accepted a self-denying ordinance. This shows that China understands that if it were to intervene in the day-to-day affairs of Hong Kong after 1997 it would risk the collapse of a structure which brings benefits not only to the people of Hong Kong but to the people of China. From the acceptance of that principle flow the other consequences in the agreement: a separate system of law and courts, private property, a separate currency, the fact that China will not take taxes from Hong Kong, and the separate membership of Hong Kong in GATT, IMF and the other organisations to which the hon. Member referred. There is also the remarkable list of 16 freedoms which will be enjoyed by the people of Hong Kong. They are set out on page 22 of the agreement. The agreement is a great credit to all those who have been involved in the negotiations.

I wish to say a word about the role played by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. It is clear that in the summer of this year, when the negotiations were at a rather difficult stage, the personal intervention of my right hon. and learned Friend when he visited Peking was responsible for unlocking the door. I want also to pay tribute to his officials. They have made a wonderful job of the negotiations. I want also to pay tribute to the governor and to the members of UMELCO who have clearly advised the Government extremely well.

My right hon. and learned Friend was right to pay tribute to the Chinese Government as well because China has recognised its own interest. I say that as a compliment. It is not always that Governments recognise their real interests. It is very much in the interests of China that the agreement should work and it is very much in its interest that it has been made in such an excellent way.

But there are still some concerns. First, will the agreement last? We may ask what will be the system in the United Kingdom in 20 years' time. I do not know. I hope that it will be a country in which I will be happy for my children to live, but I cannot guarantee it. We cannot guarantee what Hong Kong will be like in 20 years' time, but we should have confidence in the agreement.

There are many reasons for that confidence. China has a good record in observing treaties which it has signed. It has even observed what it describes as unequal treaties which are responsible for the creation of Hong Kong. The whole thrust of China's economic development is encouraging because it is becoming more compatible with the system in Hong Kong. There are the special economic zones and we have now heard about the first peasant millionaire in China, which is encouraging. In addition, the great publicity which the Government of China have given to their first peasant millionaire is encouraging. That tendency is now spreading to the cities.

I cannot say that that trend is irreversible, but it is much more likely that the tendency towards liberalisation will continue rather than be reversed. I think that it is likely to be successful.

The Prime Minister, Dengxiao Ping, said that China proposes to remain open to the world. If that is its policy, there is only one place through which it can successfully be open to the world and that is Hong Kong.

Then there is the proposal that Hong Kong will have a separate status in all the international organisations to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It would be an outrage if our allies and friends—the French and the Americans —were to obstruct the proposal. It is an intolerable thought that they may do so. It may occur, but if it does I am sure that China, the United Kingdom and many of our friends will ensure that the proposals in the agreement are put into effect.

Then there is the important Taiwan factor and the example that Hong Kong will give for the proposed reunification of the mainland and Taiwan.

There are several matters about which concern has been expressed by the UMELCO delegation. One is the question of possible statelessness for some Hong Kong residents. I hope that when my hon. Friend replies he will say something more in addition to what was said by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary about that matter. The possibility of statelessness for some Hong Kong people is a matter of great concern.

An annual report to Parliament has been proposed. That was referred to by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). That is a good idea and I hope that when my hon. Friend replies he will say that the Government propose to accept that.

There are two concerns which are much broader than those that I have just mentioned. They are the drafting of the basic law and the joint liaison group. China will understand the importance of closely associating the people of Hong Kong with the drafting of the basic law. I say that because of what I said at the beginning of my speech. China has understood that the prosperity of Hong Kong, which is so much in China's interests, depends on maintaining confidence among the people of Hong Kong. If the people of Hong Kong feel that they are excluded from the drafting of the basic law and that their views are not being taken account of, confidence will suffer. I am sure that the Chinese Government understand that as well as we do.

A similar factor applies to the joint liaison group. I note that there will be Hong Kong civil servants in the group, but I hope that it will be possible, at least over time, for unofficial people from Hong Kong also to be part of the group. That would be in the interests of not only the Hong Kong people but Britain and China. I see little conflict of interest between those groups in this situation. It is in all our interests that Hong Kong should be stable and prosperous in the future, and that is the greatest ground for encouragement.

7.34 pm

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): It is one of the bad things about the new 10-minute rule that it is difficult to intervene. I have been a great believer in giving way, but I give notice that on this occasion I shall not give way. That is bad because the fact that we give way in this Chamber is supposed to make us different from and better than continental systems where people make set speeches.

I reiterate the welcome that I gave to the agreement when it was announced by the Foreign Secretary and repeat my congratulations to him and my admiration of the remarkable approach made by the Chinese under Chairman Dengxiao Ping.

We are left with three basic questions. First, can Britain do anything about making the agreement stick in the spirit as well as the words? That has already been rehearsed quite a bit. Secondly, what should we do in the next 13 years about the internal administration while we still remain responsible? Thirdly, where does our responsibility stop to those Chinese now resident in Hong Kong, many of whom went there to escape the People's Republic of China and who fear reabsorption into it?

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said that we could basically do nothing to make the agreement stick. That is pretty important. As somebody said to me when I was in Hong Kong in October, the music is good but the song must be well sung. In other words, it is the implementation and practice that are important. I am sure that something can be done. One of the myths about sovereignty is that the decision-making process can be influenced only by a great power. One of the good things that the Government have achieved is to develop a close relationship with the People's Republic of China which gives them an opportunity to exert influence as things develop.

Britain has a special responsibility. We are not decolonising. It is not quite right to use that expression. Every time we have decolonised we have allowed people to decide for themselves what would happen and what form of Government there would be. That has not been done and we all know why. The Government have shown sensitivity, but in the years to come there will need to be a commitment to follow up matters. Various people have mentioned the idea of regular reviews. That was mentioned in the press at the weekend by Miss Lydia Dunn of the Legislative Council. It was also mentioned today by the right hon. Member for Leeds East. It is a good idea. But it is not enough to proceed on the basis that if the House wishes we shall have a debate on the annual report. The Government should commit themselves to a debate at least once a year to examine some sort of annual progress report so that we can monitor what is going on and so that we have the opportunity in the House to reassert the fact that we still have responsibility.

I am still not clear, despite the exchange with the Foreign Secretary, whether non-official people will be allowed on the joint liaison group. I gather they will not. I gather that they may be brought in for sub-committees. It may be that that is impossible, but the route through the sub-committees must be fully utilised.

The drawing up of the basic law has been mentioned by many people and undoubtedly it will be done on behalf of the Hong Kong people by the Chinese. The Foreign Secretary said that the Hong Kong people have been offered consultation. They deserve participation, which is different from consultation. That is a view that could well be conveyed to the People's Republic of China. After all, we have paid tribute to the People's Republic of China for going along with an agreement of remarkable flexibility. It is right to stress that that will be for the benefit of the People's Republic as well as Hong Kong. It may open the door to a resolution of the problem of Taiwan and certainly it has economic significance.

As everyone has said, it will be a bold person who claims that the economic modes and modules in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong or the United Kingdom will be recognisable 50 years from now. It is a matter of trust.

What should we do about democratic institutions in the next 13 years? How fast do we move and what do we do? The agreement states:

> "The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will be composed of local inhabitants. The chief executive will be appointed by the Central People's Government on the basis of the results of elections or consultations to be held locally."

There is no guarantee of elections. I expect that the People's Republic will accept the structure that it inherits.

I agree that we must make haste in the next 10 years, but it must be done with care because everything depends upon Hong Kong's economic success, as the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) has said. That does not depend only upon how ingenious and effective people are in Hong Kong. It depends upon the world economic situation. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, Hong Kong's exports are heavily concentrated in certain places and its economic position is fragile.

The question of nationality arouses strong passions. The Foreign Secretary said that "statelessness would not happen." I should like to be assured that that applies to the Portuguese, the Indians, the Parsees and other minority groups. I hope that they will have documentation to give them statehood.

What about the Vietnamese? The Foreign Secretary said that their problems were not the point of the debate, but they live there. I visited Hong Kong with the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) in October. The flow of Vietnamese refugees continues. This year, 1,535 have arrived in 63 boats. They are allowed in and are not turned away. By the end of this year about 12,500 Vietnamese refugees will be living in Hong Kong. They keep coming and we do nothing about it. The Minister should comment on that. They cannot be left in camps for ever.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East mentioned the sensitive areas — the police and those involved in security. We remember the riots in 1967. The people involved in security and the Communists are still there. Old grudges might be settled. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said that there would be no victimisation. That is a trusting view for a man who claims to be a practical chap.

I shall not dwell on the question of the expatriates, but they are worried about the future of their pensions and their security.

What about the main body of people — the 2·5 million who are British dependent territory certificate holders? It is not practical to say that we shall let them all in. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell)

[Mr. Russell Johnston]

would not allow that. Yet consider what Hong Kong has done. After the second world war 600,000 people lived there. After the 1949 uprising there was a tremendous influx followed by a steady flow and 2·5 million people were absorbed in an area of 393 sq miles, much of which is hill or island. My constituency comprises 4,900 sq miles. The United Kingdom does not lack space, but it lacks a tolerance to absorb other people. That is a fact that we have to face. I am not especially proud of it, but I recognise it.

The Government must concentrate on ensuring that people do not receive passports which are in any way devalued and that such passports give them access and entry——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman must bring his speech to a close.

Mr. Johnston: I shall take one minute.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must not take one minute. We are under orders and his 10 minutes are up.

Mr. Johnston: Then I commend the agreement, and I am sorry that I could not say more about it.

7.45 pm

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): Many of us have already found opportunities to congratulate the Foreign Secretary, the Governor and the negotiators of the draft agreement. I do so again. I now want to congratulate the people of Hong Kong and their representatives—the members of the Executive and Legislative Councils. One has only to read the agreement and the long "Elaboration of basic policies" that goes with it to realise that the Chinese negotiators were much influenced by the UMELCO paper published when we last debated the subject in May, and, I have no doubt, by the UMELCO delegation to Peking.

The Chinese have been just as keen as we to gauge Hong Kong opinion. In the last two years scores of prominent Hong Kong citizens have been asked to go to Peking, many of them to meet Deng himself. Hence an agreement that has surprised us by the degree of its detailed understanding of the financial and social set-up in Hong Kong has emerged.

In our last debate, several right hon. and hon. Members went out of their way to argue that as UMELCO is not an elected body like the House of Commons it could not represent the Hong Kong people. I ask the doubters to read the assessment office report which summarises the debate in the Legislative Council. The views expressed in that debate are completely in tune with reports from hundreds of individuals and organisations reporting to the assessment office. Originally I had doubts about the creation of the assessment office. In the event, I and many others were wrong.

The Hong Kong Government are to be congratulated on the thoroughness with which they sought public opinion. they circulated 2½ million copies of the draft agreement in two languages within a few days. They undertook the massive job of collecting and collating all the evidence. No such operation has ever been attempted in any other country.

The report is a valuable document. The range and number of contributors gives it credibility. Written evidence came from about 1,800 individuals. That may not seem many, but people do not often hurry to put pen to paper unless they have something to grumble about.

I was most impressed by the reaction of the network of 679 organisations and groups from all levels of society which permeates Hong Kong and covers every sector of the community. Because of that range of interest, in effect the report goes through the draft agreement with a fine tooth-comb. It provides the one and only systematic record of Hong Kong opinion at this critical point in the territory's history. It will be read by foreign Governments and, in particular, by serious long-term investors. It will certainly be read by the Chinese and referred to by the joint liaison group.

In the debate in May we looked forward to today's debate as the time to discuss whether the draft agreement had the approval of the people of Hong Kong. That question has now been settled by the overwhelming message of acceptance accompanied by, of course, a list of reservations, qualifications and questions which must be clarified or resolved in the years ahead. Let nothing I say tonight be taken to under-rate the seriousness of the problems yet to be solved.

I can find no better interpretation of the Hong Kong verdict than the last words of the report of the monitors, Mr. Justice Simon Li Fook Sean and Sir Patrick Nairn to whom we should be very grateful. They said:

"The majority who accept the agreement do so chiefly because they regard reunification as inevitable and are relieved that the terms of the draft agreement are as good as they are. But the verdict of acceptance implies neither positive enthusiasm nor passive acquiescence. The response to the assessment office has demonstrated the realism of the people of Hong Kong. They know that their future now lies in their own hands; and the widespread concern to be involved in the drafting of the basic law is a timely and important token of their wish to stand increasingly on their own political feet."

That interpretation leaves us with much to do during the next 12 years. More and more people are turning to the prospect of the basic law which they expect not only to reflect the draft agreement but to solve outstanding problems. There is an increasing call that Hong Kong people should not only be consulted but participate in the drafting of the basic law. Members of UMELCO have advocated a

"basic law advisory and monitoring committee".

I doubt whether the Chinese will concede any such formal arrangement, but the way in which the draft agreement has so accurately reflected Hong Kong views gives me hope that the Chinese will take the trouble to ensure that the basic law does the same. The Chinese must know that they will need practical help from the British and the people of Hong Kong in drafting the law — something in which they have no experience.

What time must I finish, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker At 7.56 pm.

Sir Paul Bryan: In the UMELCO paper with which hon. Members have just been issued—the paper is in the House of Commons Library — fears about the implementation of the agreement and the policies of future Chinese leaders come high on the list. Those fears were well answered by Miss Lydia Dunn in the Legislative Council debate, when she gave six reasons why she believed that the terms of the agreement would be faithfully implemented. Judgment on that front made by leading citizens in Hong Kong seems to be more convincing than anything we can say in this Chamber.

Earlier this afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science undertook to reconsider his plans for a reduction in student grants. I warn him that, if his recommended economies include a reduction in overseas student grants, that would be politically disastrous in Hong Kong. The present scheme, financed in part by the Hong Kong Government, is going well, and any tampering with it would be regarded as a sure sign of declining British interest in the territory.

In our long and unique colonial history, we have never experienced a transfer of sovereignty compared with this one. With our other colonies, we have usually found virtue in handing over the reins of power at reasonable speed, leaving unsolved problems for the incoming Government to face. Often, those Governments faced a pseudo-Westminster system of government unsuited to their circumstances.

This time we have 12 long years. The responsibility is all the heavier on British shoulders. In the words of the UMELCO statement,

"Given that Hong Kong will be a special administrative region within China after 1997, with an elected legislature enjoying a high degree of autonomy, it is essential that a Government structure consisting largely of local people is in place and in proper working order well before 1997."

I stress that last sentence. That does not necessarily mean direct elections or any other preconceived system which happens to have worked in some other part of the world. We must develop a system that is tailormade to bring stability and prosperity to Hong Kong in its new and particular circumstances. With that objective firmly in our sights, I believe that the White Paper on the future development of representative government in Hong Kong is about right. I agree with this step-by-step approach. The steps should be quick and not too long. All the time we must ask ourselves, "Is the developing system attracting new talent and new leadership into government?"

7.55 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The hon. Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) spoke with great knowledge of Hong Kong, and hon. Members listened to him with respect. A few weeks ago, I visited Hong Kong and China. It was interesting to compare the reactions in the two places. In Hong Kong there was a welcome for the agreement but some reservations about the future. The agreement was enthusiastically acclaimed in China. There is no doubt about the fundamental importance that China attaches to this agreement, because to the Chinese the agreement is a recognition of the geographical, legal and emotive issues. They are completely committed to it. Although most Hong Kong people accept the agreement, it is essential for us to recognise frankly the different reactions of Hong Kong and China.

The reasons for some disquiet in Hong Kong—I put it no higher than that—have been expressed clearly since the initialling. Naturally, the Hong Kong people feel deeply about this matter because their way of life and community are involved. No one else is involved. I am glad that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has given assurances that the people of Hong Kong may participate in the drafting of basic law and will be adequately represented on the joint liaison group. There is some anxiety about possible restrictions on individual rights and freedom and about passports for British dependent territory citizens. I hope that those anxieties will be considered carefully.

It is only fair, and certainly important, to recognise China's point of view and its problems. A capitalist Hong Kong within the territory of China could place great strains on the whole of Chinese society. We should appreciate China's difficulties. The fears of some Hong Kong people may be unfounded, because there are many good and varied reasons for believing that the Chinese are acting in good faith and will scrupulously carry out the agreement. The Chinese habitually keep their word, and they have an excellent record for keeping international agreements. The Chinese had no need to sign this agreement, and, if they wanted, they could long ago have taken Hong Kong. We must recognise that fact.

The Chinese recognise Hong Kong's unique value, and they have been reasonable during the negotiations. They value their standing in the world as men of their word. The Chinese are great realists. As realists, they have Taiwan clearly in mind. Obviously, an acceptable and accepted settlement in Hong Kong could pave the way to a settlement on Taiwan with great political and economic implications for China. By proving the fears of the Hong Kong people to be groundless, the Chinese can maintain the special value of Hong Kong. A large part of the success of Hong Kong has been built on confidence, and if that confidence is seriously damaged, the unique value of Hong Kong will be damaged. By sustaining that confidence, China can preserve and enhance the value of Hong Kong. I believe that China will do precisely that.

The Foreign Secretary and the Governor of Hong Kong deserve great credit for the success of the negotiations. I have no doubt that they benefited from the wise and valuable counsels of Sir Percy Cradock, and I am very glad that the Foreign Secretary referred to him. But the brilliantly imaginative stroke was not British; it was Chinese. I pay tribute to Chairman Dengxiao Ping, for his startling concept of "one nation, two systems". That provided the breakthrough. Making a success of that concept will provide the great challenge for the future.

In meeting that challenge, the Hong Kong Government have a vital role to play in preparing for 1997. Clearly, the most important aspect will be to involve the people of Hong Kong in decisions affecting them and their children. The Hong Kong Government have operated a different form of government from our own, but their record is a splendid one. The Hong Kong Government have enjoyed outstanding administrators such as Sir Jack Cater and many others who have made a notable — indeed, a historic — contribution to Hong Kong. They have done that under a type of colonial Government that we no longer accept in Britain. Incredibly, it has survived in Hong Kong. But the time has now come for Hong Kong to adapt to the historic changes that are soon to take place in Hong Kong.

I have heard it suggested that the British system of adversarial politics should be implanted in Hong Kong. That is a wholly unrealistic concept and fails to take account of the political delicacy of the situation in Hong Kong. It would be a "bull in a Hong Kong shop" approach which would be wholly inappropriate for Hong Kong. I do not believe that it would work.

We want to see progress in Hong Kong. What is now required is an imaginative approach — something as realistic and shrewd as Dengxiao Ping's "one nation, two systems" concept. I cannot pretend that I have the answer or that anyone so far has found the answer, but there must be a greater involvement of the people of Hong Kong in

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

the Government. The form of involvement should be decided not by the British Government or by the Hong Kong Government, but by the people of Hong Kong themselves.

The great challenge for the people of Hong Kong today is to produce political leaders. There has been no role for political leaders in the past in Hong Kong, but they are greatly needed now. I hope that people who believe in the future of Hong Kong will come forward. I appreciate the complexities of the situation there, but those people, who will become the political leaders of Hong Kong, can play a major role in their own destiny. Hong Kong needs to move forward to new forms of government which manage simultaneously to give continuity and to preserve posterity, and which are consistent with the new arrangement with China.

Whichever way the problems are tackled, it is of paramount importance for the British Parliament to maintain a very close interest in the affairs of Hong Kong. It will be even more important now than ever before to have more regular debates about the affairs of Hong Kong. Without that interest, Britain will be unable to fulfil its final role in Hong Kong and will be throwing away a valuable opportunity to mould the future of Hong Kong. By regular debates, Britain can remain involved in the developing process of Hong Kong after the signing of the agreement, and can play a major and significant role in the long-term future of Hong Kong.

8.5 pm

Mr. Peter Thomas (Hendon, South): I apologise, in his absence, to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary for not having heard his speech in full. I heard the end of it. I was unable to hear the whole of it because I was in a Select Committee.

From the debate so far it is clear that there will be overwhelming support in the House for the draft agreement. That is absolutely right. I join in the congratulations that have been given to my right hon. and learned Friend, to the Governor of Hong Kong, and to all the people who have been associated with the remarkable and superb draft agreement. It is unique, in that it brings together two sovereign countries with totally different approaches to economic life. They have come together in a realistic way in a historic agreement. Everyone concerned with it deserves the highest possible praise.

Few speakers in the debate so far have gone into any detail. How remarkable it is to find, in the elaboration by the Government of the People's Republic of China of its basic policies, the words:

"The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China shall enact and promulgate a basic law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China . . . in accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, stipulating that after the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region the socialist system and socialist policies shall not be practised in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and that Hong Kong's previous capitalist system and life-style shall remain unchanged for 50 years."

How remarkable it is to find phrases such as that in an official document of a Communist country. The current social and economic systems in Hong Kong will remain unchanged, and so will the life style, rights and freedoms, including those of

"the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, . . . of correspondence, of travel, of movement, of strike, . . . of choice of occupation, of academic research, of belief".

Those rights will be ensured by law in the Hong Kong special administrative region. Private property, ownership of enterprises, the legitimate right of inheritance, and foreign investment, will be protected by law. With such wonderful phrases, how could anyone not say that it is a remarkable and admirable document?

Therefore, I have no hesitation in giving my support to the agreement. I have no doubt that I shall be in very good company, in as much as all hon. Members in all parts of the House will be with me.

I listened with great interest to the speech of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). He was absolutely right when he referred to the report of the assessment office. That clearly shows that there has been general acceptance of the draft agreement in Hong Kong. All the representative bodies have endorsed it, and there is a sense of enormous relief in Hong Kong. Two years ago people were extremely concerned, but there is now a sense of real relief and a determination to make the agreement work. I have no doubt that it will be extremely successful.

I appreciate that certain misgivings remain and that people will have reservations, but these are far fewer than many people anticipated. I am sure that some of them will be dealt with in the next 12½ years.

The continuing interest of this House will be important, and I am certain that over the next 12½ years the Government of the day will realise that they have a continuing responsibility for Hong Kong, which will be of major importance up to 1997. I have no doubt that the Government of the day will, before the end of this period, continue to carry out their paramount duty.

It is also important that this House should interest itself continually in Hong Kong. An annual report to the House on Hong Kong, perhaps followed by a debate, would be one way of ensuring a continuing interest in the fortunes and progress of Hong Kong.

The agreement makes it clear that the drafting and passing of the law will be done by the People's Republic. It is important that considerable assistance should be given to the People's Republic in the drafting of this basic law. I have no doubt that certain lawyers and officials will assist, but it is equally important that the people of Hong Kong should be involved. That is of major importance.

Vast changes will take place during the next 12½ years. Something like 100 Privy Council orders apply to Hong Kong, and they will have to be incorporated into Hong Kong law. The basic law will also incorporate the agreement. Therefore, it must be well drafted, and it is important that everyone with an interest should get involved and help the Chinese.

Several hon. Members have also referred to the possibility of more democratic representation in the Hong Kong assemblies — be it the Legislative Council, the Executive Council or whatever. In the main, this relates to the Legislative Council. There is no doubt that when the chief executive takes over at the end of 1997 or before that, he will have to be supported by a more representative council.

I am inclined to support what the right hon. Member for Leeds, East said. I do not support the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). It would not be right if we tried to get the Hong Kong people to enter in a hurry into a form of democratic

representation which is similar to western democratic representation. There is no history of that type of representation in Hong Kong, which has been a colony, nor is there such a history in China. If, out of enthusiasm, we try to introduce the form of democratic politics in this country into Hong Kong, we may well cause enormous suspicions and difficulties with China.

I do not know whether there can be democratic elections without political parties, but there may be trouble if, side by side, there is a Right-wing national party and the Communist party. This matter should be left to the people of Hong Kong, who see themselves in a unique situation. They should decide the pace at which they wish to have greater representation in their legislative bodies. That is the general wish in Hong Kong. The White Paper sensibly paves the way in accordance with the traditions and situation in Hong Kong.

Above all, stability and prosperity must continue. If in the next 12½ years anything happens to upset that, the value of Hong Kong to China will be diminished. That could well result in a total change and something very different from what people hope for.

I pay tribute to the Chinese who have agreed to this draft agreement and who have worked so hard to make it sensible and realistic. The Chinese have shown that they keep agreements. I therefore have no doubt that it will be in their interests—indeed, it will be their intention—to keep this agreement absolutely to the letter of the law.

8.16 pm

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): My recollection is that this is the third or fourth debate on Hong Kong in which I have participated. In previous speeches I have been critical of the social system in Hong Kong, the lack of democracy and the repression of civil liberties in this last bastion of British imperialism.

Tonight we are debating the draft agreement on the future of the colony. Previously I have said that I have always accepted that in the last century Hong Kong was colonised under unequal treaties, and that it was inevitable that it would return to China in 1997.

The draft agreement has been broadly accepted in Hong Kong. Mrs. Elsie Elliott, an elected member of the urban council for many years, who has been in touch with the real grass roots in Hong Kong, supports the White Paper. She made that clear in an urban council debate earlier this year. It is also supported by the Heung Yee Kuk, which represents the people from the New Territories. If Mrs. Elliott is prepared to accept the draft agreement, that is good enough for me.

I welcome the decision to set up the special administrative region of Hong Kong, which will receive a high measure of autonomy. Last Monday, along with a number of other hon. Members from both sides of the House, I met a number of members of UMELCO, which has sent a delegation here to lobby hon. Members. They have raised some questions on the agreement. One is that the people of Hong Kong should not only be consulted but should actively participate on the drafting of the basic law. I agree.

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They believe as well that the Hong Kong people should also sit on the Sino-British joint liaison group. That is also right. I do not accept that only expatriates or colonialists should sit on this group. The Hong Kong people have the right to sit on this group as it will deal with their future. If such people are unable to sit on the group now, I hope that they will be able to do so in the years ahead.

I do not believe that UMELCO should try to act as spokesman for the ordinary people of Hong Kong. A number of UMELCO members are at present in the Gallery listening to this debate. In the main they are wealthy or middle-class professionals who claim to speak for the masses but speak only for themselves. I have received many letters from people in Hong Kong and I have seen many reports in the papers which make it clear that UMELCO does not represent them. It is a pity that they were not campaigning with me, my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) many years ago when we argued for democracy, basic civil rights and consultation with the people of Hong Kong. UMELCO members are visiting London at the expense of Hong Kong taxpayers. Yet people like Dr. Ding, Mrs. Elliott, Mr. Tsin Sai Nin, Mr. Andrew Tu, who represent the grass roots, must pay to come over here from their own pockets.

It is interesting that during the summer recess we saw an unprecedented number of hon. Members visiting Hong Kong. Those visits were also paid for—by Hong Kong tax payers. Over the years few hon. Members, with the exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West, have argued for democracy, tabled early-day motions, or taken part in deputations to the Foreign Office to argue for human rights and civil liberties.

I wish to raise the matter of Chinese troops being based in Hong Kong until 1997. Some UMELCO spokesmen raised the matter. It is made clear in the draft agreement that Chinese troops will be based in Hong Kong. Paragraph 42 on page 36 of the White Paper makes it clear that British troops will be withdrawn and

"that military forces sent by the Central People's Government to be stationed in the SAR for the purpose of defence will not interfere in its internal affairs."

I hope that there will not be a need for a heavy military presence in Hong Kong. Obviously, the People's Republic has the right to base its troops there, if it wishes. The young people of Hong Kong may be asked to volunteer for the forces. I was pleased when the Foreign Secretary said that during the discussions there was no talk of compulsion in bringing people into the army in Hong Kong.

On the question of citizenship, I support the suggestion that I made earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). He agrees with me about a possible haven for people who may not wish to stay in Hong Kong. A couple of academics from St. Anthony's college, Oxford, raised the matter. The United Kingdom Government should take the initiative in launching an international effort, especially among the EEC and the Commonwealth and members of the NATO alliance to bring into being an operation haven. This will provide funds for co-ordination and resettlement and quotas in a large number of participating countries, to permit those holders of British dependent territories passports in Hong Kong as well as minority nationality passports and travel documents holders in Hong Kong, to settle in those countries abroad if they so wish. I hope that the Minister will consider that point.

Will the Minister ask the Hong Kong Government between now and 1997 to make a positive attempt to improve services in Hong Kong, which affect masses of the people? I am thinking of housing. Thousands of people

[Mr. Robert Parry]

are homeless or living in boats. I hope that for housing, social security, pensions, social services, welfare and the health service, the Hong Kong Government will make a positive attempt to improve them without prodding from the British Government to do the right thing.

During our last debate I spoke about the freedom of conscience, religion and association. This is dealt with in paragraph 46, page 37 of the White Paper. I mentioned that the Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong was concerned with what may happen in the colony after 1997. In China there are many christians, Catholics and non-Catholics, bishops and priests who have been held in prison for many years. I hope that every effort will be made to guarantee that after 1997 those people will have the right to freedom of religion.

8.25 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I fully share the admiration expressed on all sides for the work of the Foreign Secretary and his team in securing the agreement. There is no doubt that in difficult circumstances he secured the best possible agreement. Nor is there any doubt that, if things go right, the prospects for the future stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and that part of the world will be bright, especially with the opening up of the giant Chinese markets for the development of trade and commerce.

I shall concentrate on the international dimension, to which the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) addressed his interesting and perceptive remarks. By that I mean four things. Hong Kong is one of the key parts of the world's financial and trading system. It is one of the wealth-creating centres of the planet. It is a source of physical wealth and a range of new ideas. It is interesting that Hong Kong inspired the Foreign Secretary in a former role to develop his idea of enterprise zones, which have been introduced in the United Kingdom and now in the United States. Fourthly, it is the home of millions of free people, businesses and of tens of thousands of families, many of whom have tasted oppression in the past and clearly remember what happened in Shanghai.

So the autonomous survival of Hong Kong, without any undermining by the Communist party, is internationally vital. There is international interest in the survival of an autonomous Hong Kong. It is not merely a matter of pride, duty and interest here and in Peking, although it is also those things.

If there is an internationally vital requirement it needs two things. First, it needs a strong, internal SAR government, as many hon. Members have rightly observed. Minds will have to be made up not only on the ideas in the latest White Paper for the Legislative Council but on the Executive Council and the governorship before 1988. A decision will have to be made about whether there is to be a gubernatorial type of government with one figure in charge in 1997 or whether it is to be a government of a different sort. It will be essential for that government to develop. While the development may take time, the decisions must be made during the next two or three years. If the Peking cadres are to be kept from infiltrating the structure of government in Hong Kong, as they will naturally do, a strong government is essential.

Secondly, international interest and commitment must be secure. Some people will tell us not to worry about that, because Japanese and American capital will pour in as it is doing already. That is true, but the money will go out as fast as it has come in the moment when it is felt that the world has lost interest in the future of Hong Kong and that the special autonomous region is sinking back into the grey mass of greater China.

So we have an important task. We must ask ourselves what we can do. A number of suggestions have been made. I shall repeat some and make some new ones.

First, I like the idea of the annual report to Parliament that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and others have mentioned. It should be a report about the work of the joint liaison group and about internal developments. Indeed, I think that we should insist on that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary should adopt that as a Government commitment and procedure.

Secondly, it must be right that there is involvement by the Hong Kong people in the joint liaison group—perhaps not immediately, but in due course. We shall need to press for that. Thirdly, the Hong Kong people must be allowed to help to draft the basic laws. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend's optimistic assessment of that possibility is right and that that will happen, as it is essential. Most importantly, Hong Kong's autonomy as a separate region, with a separate political, trading, commercial and legal system must be underpinned internationally.

That means, in particular, two things. First, it means that the assertion made by my right hon. and learned Friend very strongly that what is written and settled is an internationally legally binding agreement must be made a living and continuing reality. Secondly, it means that there must be some means of ensuring that Hong Kong SAR passports are accepted everywhere, like the passports of any other sovereign state. There are two sides to the travel documents question. One is the issuing of them and the other is getting the international community to accept them. It is vital that SAR passports should be recognised throughout the international community.

I have mentioned a few things. The point I wish to emphasise is that it is within our power to achieve them. It is not true that all the cards remain even now in Peking's hands. In this debate I have detected signs of that dismal fallacy—a fallacy of the past that has no relevance today—that where there is no sovereignty, there is no influence. Any trade, diplomatic or financial negotiator or banker will confirm that that is not so. But the perpetuation of that fallacy has caused this country great grief and harm.

I am all for realism in recognising the future position of Hong Kong as an SAR of China, but realism must not become defeatism or disinterest. I fear that that would be the possibility if some of the views expressed in the debate were taken to their logical conclusion.

I believe that the agreement is the best that could be secured. However, this is not the time for opening champagne or for celebratory self-congratulations. If that tone has crept into the debate on some occasions, I regret it. The Chinese proverb says,

"Never praise a day before evening."

There is much wisdom in that when we look ahead to the enormous tasks on which we are only just now embarking in dealing with the future stability, security and prosperity of Hong Kong.

We are at the beginning of a very long and arduous journey to ensure the survival and prosperity of what has

so far been one of the 20th century's most glittering successes and a beacon of light amidst a world of much darkness and misery. It is essential that we keep that beacon alight.

8.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): In my 10 minutes I shall not have time to make reference to the right hon. Gentleman's speech, which is the normal tradition, and nor do I intend to give way to interventions. I think that the introduction of the 10-minute rule is a nonsense, and I hope that we get rid of it.

I believe that both Governments, the British and the Chinese, and particularly their negotiating teams, deserve our warmest congratulations for having evolved an extraordinarily satisfactory agreement. And I believe that confidence—that essential component for its successful fulfilment—will be maintained by the conduct of the three parties involved in Hong Kong's future.

Concern has been expressed both here and in Hong Kong that China might not observe the agreement over the years. I strongly oppose that view—and there are very good reasons for doing so. First, historically, all Chinese Governments — whether dynastic, republican or Communist — have meticulously honoured their international agreements. Second, the process of the reunification of China will not be complete until Taiwan returns. Third, China needs to pursue the process of modernisation and will certainly not wish to damage its "open-door policy". Fourth, China needs the foreign exchange generated by Hong Kong. Finally, China may even want to learn from Hong Kong some of its dynamic commercial and trading skills.

Britain, of course, wants the agreement to work because of Britain's commercial and trading interests in Hong Kong's prosperity. But even more importantly perhaps Britain wants to tidy up the ends of empire responsibly. That she must do. What of the views of the Hong Kongers—the people most affected by the ending of the lease and the abandonment of empire? I have visited Hong Kong a number of times over the last few years, usually on the way to or from China in the company of my admirable friend, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley). On such visits, contacts in Hong Kong are normally pretty limited on the establishment round. But the purpose of my last visit in September—three days after the initialling of the agreement—was to elicit the reactions of the range of contacts which were set up at my specific request—and most of those were certainly not on the cocktail circuit.

Two reactions to the agreement were immediately clear from all those contacts. First was the "Chineseness" of the Chinese of Hong Kong—the feelings of attachment and affection for the land and the culture of their mother country, and that feeling seemed to override most of the adverse considerations. Second was the view stated time and again by all the groups I talked with, that the Chinese Government had met nearly all the points put to them at various meetings by Hong Kong representatives of a variety of interests. The agreement, they conceded, was much better than they had thought attainable.

But the real surprise of that last visit was the moderation and rationality of the reaction from those I thought would have responded otherwise. We Parliamentarians are great proponents and exporters of the Westminster model. But it does not always fit. And it often does not work. I had expected strident demands for the immediate introduction of direct elections to the legislative council. But it was not like that. Even the radical groups and the young intellectuals—a most impressive crowd of young men and women—were not arguing for direct elections now or tomorrow. They understand the unique and precarious position of Hong Kong. They want its prosperity to survive. In all the many conversations I had, most in the excellent company of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston), these supposedly radical people seemed to me to accept, indeed to stress, the responsible view of "phasing in" direct elections and seemed to accept too the need for indirect elections for some period of time, although I must say that the functional constituencies were not universally popular.

What time, of course, is the crucial question. I criticised the Green Paper on Hong Kong's future while I was there, on its time scale of change. The recent revised White Paper has already brought the start of the process three years forward from the suggested 1988, to 1985. So far so good. However, I do believe that even this position is unduly pessimistic about the ability of Hong Kong people to comprehend the democratic procedures, although education in that area is mooted, and certainly needed.

The people of the territory have never had the chance or the choice of participation. I understand the argument about the Chinese tradition of respect for authority. But Hong Kong has had compulsory education for 32 years, since 1952. And Western pressures and attitudes have certainly been at play over many decades — whether always advantageous is another matter. Perhaps Hong Kong's people have more sense and more appreciation of Hong Kong's special situation than the local Government allow for. Democracy is an infectious thing, once given rein. And historical processes always move much faster than expected. I think that a somewhat quicker pace of change to fully representative government than the White Paper allows for, will have to be met in Hong Kong.

Then there are issues that remain out of the residual responsibility of empire. I am perturbed that the rights of protection and travel under the British Dependent Territories citizenship cannot be transmitted after 1997 to the first generation of Chinese Hong Kongers. I wonder if Her Majesty's Government have tried hard enough on that. Perhaps there was strong resistance from the Chinese Government to the possibility of such rights continuing and lasting beyond the 50 years of the two systems in one country. But perhaps we did not want an inflow of immigrants.

I am particularly concerned about the non-Chinese residing in Hong Kong — children of citizens of the British Dependent Territories who will become stateless after 1997 and who may number between 6,000 and 10,000. However, I understood the Foreign Secretary to give an assurance about them. Then there are the British Dependent Territory citizens living outside Hong Kong. Their numbers are difficult to estimate but a figure of 3,000 Indians, among others, has been put forward. Do we in Britain not have a responsibility to assure the future of those last categories? Have we not a duty to them on this demise of Empire? Fortunately, we will be able to pursue those matters on later legislation on nationality. But there are two further points that I must make. If and when direct elections to the legislative council are introduced—as I

[Mr. Andrew Faulds]

think that they will be before 1997—will privilege in the sense that we in this House enjoy it, of protection from prosecution, apply to members of that body?

Consideration must be given too to the abandonment of the oath of loyalty to the Queen—much as we love that admirable lady. The view has been expressed in Hong Kong that future members of the Legislative Council might not be prepared to give such an oath.

I am sorry to have had to rattle through my speech at such a ridiculous speed. I hope that the 10-minute limit will be reconsidered. However, I shall be grateful if the hon. Gentleman will make some reference to all those points.

8.42 pm

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): I wish to treat with the subject of change raised by the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) in the context of the need to maintain the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong. Several hon. Members have spoken today of the need for a realistic approach. I trust that my own note of realism will not jar on the atmosphere of eulogy and euphoria that has largely permeated the debate so far. I have already congratulated those responsible on the achievement of the draft agreement, but we are now more concerned with its implementation.

First, there is a question of prosperity. Hong Kong must prosper if it is to continue to enjoy its present autonomy, let alone the autonomy promised by China, because a Hong Kong that is not prosperous would not merit the operation of the concept of two systems within one country. China's concern for the prosperity of Hong Kong is evident from that country's expressed worries about the budget deficits in Hong Kong and the level of welfare benefits already available, which are not paralleled on the mainland.

Hong Kong, therefore, is under an obligation to succeed. That obligation has certain positive features. There has to be a response in the development of new products and the promotion of new markets. That, coupled with the political change now set in train, will inevitably involve changes in the education system in Hong Kong which—in parenthesis—I myself think are long overdue and would have hoped to see brought forward after the 1967 riots.

Negatively, there is the pressing need for Hong Kong to be protected against the swelling tide of protectionism in the developed markets of the world. That is a matter in which Britain's role and continuing interest are most important. As a member of the EEC, we are not only an important customer but the possesser of an important voice in the international bodies which regulate trade. We must secure Hong Kong's separate and autonomous representation on those bodies. Britain must also do a great deal of detailed negotiation on behalf of Hong Kong on such matters as traffic rights for Cathay Pacific Airways until 1997.

However much some people in Hong Kong may object —and some do—to continuing British involvement, and however much others may feel let down by Britain, Britain still has a responsibility to exercise. We will continue to be responsible for defending Hong Kong's interests on the joint liaison group before the year 2000.

The second matter of importance is the stability of Hong Kong. Peking could not stand idly by and watch Hong Kong become unstable. That assumption has nothing to do with the draft agreement. It has been the case ever since 1949 that destabilisation would inevitably bring involvement. That is why the draft agreement provides for Britain to continue to administer Hong Kong until 1997, and I believe, why the British Government have declared their determination to govern until the transfer of sovereignty and administration takes place. After 1997, under the agreement, Hong Kong will still remain responsible for internal security. It is foolish to ask China whether it intends to station the PLA in Hong Kong or to introduce conscription. The Chinese are bound to say that they have every right to do so. However, there is no evidence that they wish to do so.

Hong Kong has to maintain internal security, and it will be important to maintain a strong civil service, free from political manipulation, as well as an independent judiciary. Hong Kong's commercial, financial and industrial success depends on laws that are certain and subject to independent interpretation as much as on an impartial and efficient civil service and police force.

The agreement provides for an executive to be subject to an elected legislature. The question that exercises many hon. Members is how those elections fit in with the concept of continuing British administration, the maintenance of stability and the transfer of power. On what system, furthermore, should they be based? A recent editorial in the *Ming Pao* paper made it plain that China had promised a high degree of autonomy but not necessarily a high degree of democracy. It is obviously important not to arouse any further the suspicions of Peking that were already a roused when the Green Paper was introduced before the negotiations on the draft agreement were completed. There is a danger that the Chinese may regard the White Paper as having been produced in an undue hurry. It is most important not to regard the elections as a test of China's sincerity about the agreement or to take them as an earnest of Britain's washing her hands of responsibility for Hong Kong. We must all understand that China would be bound to oppose the formation of a pro-Taiwan Right-wing political front. That could only have a destablising effect.

The White Paper was surely right to provide increased opportunities for training people in elections and leadership while allowing for consultation with China on the joint liaison group. We have to take China along with us and to settle Chinese suspicions, and the result is not likely to be an electoral system based on the Westminster model. As the UMELCO paper recognises, it is likely that a Hong Kong system will evolve and that Hong Kong leaders will emerge to stand up for Hong Kong's interests.

The aims of Britain, China and Hong Kong are the same —to work for a prosperous and stable Hong Kong. There will be increasing co-operation to that end, and not only on the joint liaison group for whose work the assessment office report has provided an initial agenda. People have derided the assessment office, but its report reflects views in Hong Kong, as the opinion poll commissioned by UMELCO has confirmed. In view of the attack made on UMELCO, I should like to pay tribute to it as its poll has been found to reflect all sectors of opinion in Hong Kong. Some tribute should be paid to the care and trouble that it has taken to elaborate it and for the excellence of its memorandum.

Chapter 4 of the report draws attention to the items that Hong Kong people want to be dealt with on the joint liaison group. Most notable among them are the drafting of the basic law and the possible conflict between the laws of Hong Kong and that basic law. That issue is still a source of much anxiety and must be resolved. They also want the joint liaison group to deal with the appointment of the chief executive and future nationality. However much some people in Hong Kong might feel aggrieved, especially the young ones who are angry that their future has been decided by Britain and China in this way, and however much older people might feel bitter about the consequences of the British Nationality Act 1981, Britain has to remain responsible until 1997. If Britain gave up that responsibility, China would assume it—a vacuum could not exist.

The success of the two systems in the 50 years after 1997 depends on the success of the 12 years remaining until that date. Of course Hong Kong people are worried about changes in China—they always have been. It has never been possible to see more than five years ahead in Hong Kong. The draft agreement merely preserves that. The task in the next 12 years is to knit Britain, China and Hong Kong together ever more closely through the joint liaison group and through practical projects of co-operation such as the nuclear power plant, the telecommunications project, the Canton motorway, the second harbour crossing and so on. Hong Kong has an important role to play in the development of China and as an example to Taiwan of two systems in one country. However, its ultimate success will depend on the confidence that its people show in their own future and the efforts that they make to secure their own prosperity and stability.

8.51 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I welcome the draft agreement in principle. It marks the beginning of the end of a long era of British colonial rule which dates back to the opium wars of the last century when Britain grabbed Hong Kong from China by an act of imperialist aggression and trickery. As far as we can gather, the draft agreement is generally welcomed by the people of Hong Kong. I say "as far as we can gather" because the method of assessment of opinions in Hong Kong is imperfect. By saying that, I am not making a personal attack on those involved in the assessment office. They had a difficult job and it was made more difficult by the fact that there is no representative government or assembly in Hong Kong. Indeed, there are no elected representatives in Hong Kong with any meaningful power and this is a point to which I shall return later.

Despite the general welcome of the agreement, some Hong Kong people have some reservations and fears. Those fears and reservations include the role of the people's liberation army, the possibility of conscription, nationality rights, passport rights, human rights and personal freedoms, freedom of religious practice, the desire to participate in the work of the joint liaison group and the desire to participate in the formulation of the basic law. There is also a general fear about undue interference by Peking. The best way in which to alleviate those fears and reservations and the best guarantee of preserving all that is worth preserving in the Hong Kong way of life is to maximise the autonomy of the people of Hong Kong. Complete independence is not an option—it never was. Sovereignty will ultimately be transferred to the People's Republic of China but even without complete independence there could be a high degree of self-determination. That would involve a high degree of internal democracy replacing the existing system of colonial patronage.

Last month, the Hong Kong Government published a White Paper to which several right hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) have referred. I do not often agree with him, but I entirely agree with what he says about the White Paper. It is too little and too late. It proposes that, next year, an elected element will be introduced to the Legislative Council. It is worth reminding the House that, despite the introduction of that elected element, not one member of the Legislative Council will be elected directly on a universal franchise. Less than 50 per cent. of the Legislative Council in 1985 will be elected by any method. The functional constituencies which are proposed are unnecessarily divisive—they might reinforce existing or potential divisions in society. Moreover, the White Paper contains no proposals for elections, direct or indirect, to the Executive Council in 1985.

I understand what right hon. and hon. Members have said about it not being desirable suddenly to introduce tomorrow or next week a mini-Westminster model of democracy in another part of the world with a different culture, a different way of life and different traditions and call it the ideal model of democracy. There must be a phasing-in programme. Some of the pressure groups that I met during my recent visit to Hong Kong made that point strongly. However, it would surely not be unreasonable to suggest the target that by, say, 1990, the entire Legislative Council should be directly elected on a universal franchise, that the Executive Council, or whatever body replaces it, should be elected indirectly from the members of the Legislative Council and that the head of that council —the governor, chief executive or whatever he is called —should also be elected from the membership of the Legislative Council. The White Paper's proposals are far too pussy-footed, and one of the reasons for the go-slow attitude is that—I was sorry to hear this view expressed in the House as many people regard it, rightly or wrongly, as the mother of democracy—some people think that democracy is not bad as long as there is not too much of it and it is possible to predict who will win the elections. Some people seem to be afraid that those who win the elections may be a bit too radical or Left-wing and that perhaps the odd nasty Socialist may get elected to the Legislative Council. If people genuinely believe in democracy through direct elections they should not be two-faced. Adopting double standards and saying that democracy is all right so long as we win is hypocrisy rather than democracy.

I would not say that the Chinese version of Socialism is perfect, but it manages to feed the billion people of China. Anyone who imagines that the naked unbridled capitalist economy of Hong Kong could be transplanted to the People's Republic of China and continue to feed all those people is living in cloud-cuckoo-land. Although the draft agreement provides that for half a century after 1997 there will be guaranteed co-existence for a capitalist system alongside the Socialist system, no realistic politician, on whatever side of the ideological divide, could expect such co-existence to continue for ever. There will have to be some kind of accommodation between the two systems.

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

The Hong Kong economy was largely built on the hard work and endeavour of its people. Unfortunately, this was sometimes accompanied by the exploitation of cheap sweated labour by multinational capital. That exploitation will not and should not survive and I hope that it disappears long before 1997. That is why, despite the provisions of the draft agreement, there will eventually have to be some accommodation between the two systems so that eventually all the people of the reunified China can live together in peace, equality and dignity, with respect for one another's human rights and a higher degree of social justice for all.

9 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I am fortunate that you, Mr. Speaker, have returned to the Chair and called me as the clock shows 9 pm when we escape the appalling penance of the 10-minute limit. You will correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Speaker, but I understand that that is the position. It is a great tribute to your judgment that you have called me at this time.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman tempts me. There is no longer a 10-minute limit on speeches, but quite a number of other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Adley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have asked my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) to give me a swift dig in the ribs when I reach nine minutes.

I hope that those who observe our affairs will not take the thinness of attendance at this debate as in any way suggesting any lack of interest in the future of Hong Kong. I believe that more of us have spent more time genuinely worrying about whether we can get this matter right than any other single issue for many years. Members in all parts of the House are deeply aware of our responsibility to try to ensure that the people of Hong Kong have the future that they want.

I shall not take up time repeating the tributes to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues are so clearly entitled. As he rightly said, we must remember the deep roots of history underlying the Hong Kong situation. We know the political reality, but the practical reality is also legion.

Only 3 per cent. of Hong Kong's fresh water supply can be obtained from the present territory of Hong Kong island, Kowloon and Stonecutters. When we talk about what the Chinese have done in the past and might do in the future, we should remember that they could at any time have turned off the water supply and taken over. The best guarantee that the people of Hong Kong have as to the likely behaviour of the Government of the People's Republic in the future is the reality of their behaviour since 1949.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) suggested that sovereignty was not the key issue. However, it always was for the Government of the People's Republic of China. It is no use our suggesting that it was not, or is not, an important issue for them. Although they could have taken over Hong Kong any time they wanted to, the negotiated return of Hong Kong to mother China is and always was the key emotive issue for them. More than two years ago, the previous Chinese ambassador said to me that until sovereignty was conceded nothing would be possible, but once sovereignty was conceded everything would be possible. As a result of that, I was perhaps slighty less surprised than some hon. Members at the progress that we have been able to make since we conceded sovereignty.

Two points require our attention. One is the pace of change. Those who hold power in Hong Kong now like it, and want to hold on to it. They have not been elected to it and have an obvious incentive to resist change. The idea of an annual debate is acceptable, but it is a peripheral issue and to suggest that it is the overriding priority emerging from the debate is indicative only of the priorities of those who have put the idea forward as though it is the most important thing in the world.

Those who have power in Hong Kong at the moment were appointed by the governor, who was appointed by Her Majesty's Government. They have always looked to London as the ultimate source of their patronage, and they want to continue to look to this place as the source of influence for Hong Kong. However, it is in Hong Kong itself that the changes must take place. Therefore, we should be encouraging change in Hong Kong: not change for change's sake but because it is vital that the people of Hong Kong should equip themselves with their own political institutions long before 1997.

I have never been a sycophantic supporter of UMELCO, so all that I have to say about it is to quote a sentence in a leading article in the *Hong Kong Standard* on 11 May which said:

> "For a self-proclaimed mirror of Hongkong opinions, Umelco seems to reflect not so much the daily concerns of the Hongkong public but the obsessions of the few."

By quoting that, I am suggesting to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Government that we must broaden our listening as we go into the next 12 years. We simply cannot allow a handful of people who are appointed by the governor to be taken as solely, or even mainly, representative of the genuine voice of Hong Kong. That is why I agree with the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) made, particularly about the young people in Hong Kong.

Most hon. Members have spoken of citizenship. We must not forget that there are between 3,000 and 4,000 people in the Indian community, many of whom held British Indian passports before India achieved its independence in 1947. The Government must pay particular attention to that group.

My second point is about Chinese intentions. I believe that the Government of the People's Republic of China intend to observe both the spirit and the letter of the agreement, but they are looking for advice and guidance on the best way to achieve this objective. They wish to encourage change, provided it is change that aids in the maintenance of stability in Hong Kong. If I were to be so presumptuous as to give the Government of the People's Republic of China some advice, it would be to involve the people of Hong Kong in the creation and development of their own institutions. A motto of "Invite, involve and entrust" would be a good way for the Chinese Government to ensure stability in Hong Kong by keeping the people content and confident in their own future. I agree with those who have said that the people of Hong Kong should be involved in the drafting of their basic laws. After all, they themselves will have to live under the laws.

One of the Government's main duties must be to encourage change and to keep an eye on those who want to stifle it. I do not share the concerns about the sincerity of the Chinese Government expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford. If he is concerned about the sincerity of the Chinese Government's intentions, then surely he will agree that the best way to keep a check on that sincerity is to ensure that the people of Hong Kong are equipped with democratically elected institutions at an early date. The development of such institutions by Hong Kong people will make it far more difficult for the Chinese Government to interfere.

Numerous concerns are expressed daily by the people of Hong Kong, but in many ways it is extraordinarily interesting that we have 12 years to iron out the outstanding problems. One could only wish for the same thing for industrial disputes. The timing between events being discussed and action being taken causes trouble, and the shorter the time, the more the trouble. These 12 years are precious years and they are more than enough time to deal in detail and at reasonable length with the many problems that understandably concern the people of Hong Kong.

It is interesting that the agreement has been objected to by only two groups. One group is the Taiwan regime and the other is the Government of the Soviet Union. That speaks for itself. There is nothing that the Taiwan regime fears more than the ability of the Government of the People's Republic peacefully and quietly to conclude an agreement with Her Majesty's Government which is acceptable to the people of Hong Kong, which is implemented without too many problems and which shows the Taiwan people, especially the young, that the scare stories which are constantly being spread by Taiwan and its agents in Hong Kong about the intentions of the Government of the People's Republic are unjustified. I am more than happy to commend the agreement to the House.

The best guarantee for the future would be a broadly based and legitimately enfranchised representative body. I hope that the Government will listen not only to those who are appointed by the British Government but to a far broader base of people in Hong Kong. I wish the millions of citizens of Hong Kong the very best for the future. We shall be keeping more than an eye on them because we are responsible for their welfare for at least 12 years. The question is not whether the House will monitor what is going on. The Chinese do not want to take over Hong Kong and they do not want the British to relinquish control before 1997. We shall indeed be keeping a close eye on things, and we wish Hong Kong well.

9.12 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) made a crucial point when he referred to the views of the Chinese towards the Soviet Union and on the likely attitude of the Soviet Union towards the agreement. The debate has been interesting and realistic. It has reflected the views of the House as expressed in the various debates that took place during the negotiations. It was accepted that the agreement would be immensely difficult and complicated and I would be churlish — I do not intend to be so — not to acknowledge that the agreement was hard fought and entailed close examination of the small print. In common with all those who have contributed to the debate, I welcome the agreement. However, no one should be complacent while we study these matters over the next few months and on into the coming years.

I agree with those who have suggested that we shall be hearing about these matters for a long time to come. The leader in yesterday's edition of *The Times* made an important point, although I did not agree with the leader entirely. It offered the opinion that

> "Both the full Commons and its Select Committee on Foreign Affairs must meanwhile keep closely in touch with the colony's fears and aspirations and the Government should be generous in allocating parliamentary time."

That is important, but equally important is the reference to "fears and aspirations". I happen to believe that the greater of the two is aspirations. The agreement offers a great deal of hope to the people of Hong Kong and to others well beyond its borders. I say that in the spirit in which comments have been made by many of my hon. Friends. We would not have devised the system of government that we have seen in Hong Kong in recent times if we had not believed in democracy, and we believe that a strong case should be made for improving democratic processes in Hong Kong. Having said that, I believe that the people of Hong Kong are beginning to indicate that they, too, take that view. I visited Hong Kong in March with my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). We were impressed by the educational system and by community involvement, as we saw it. The young people whom we saw taking part in those activities, and in industry and in the public service in Hong Kong are the very kind of people who, notwithstanding the agreement, will say that they want to have a role in shaping their society. In my view, they are absolutely right.

I believe that the agreement is important. We recognise the importance of Hong Kong in trading matters. We also recognise that importance in the context of our relationship with China and the wider world. I was interested to read among the views expressed in the consultative document an assessment of the reaction to the agreement by the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers. It is to be found on page 23:

> "The solution of the Hong Kong issue under the innovative guidance of the 'one country, two systems' concept will be conducive to maintaining the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. Moreover, the success of this 'one country, two systems' arrangement may embody a more far-reaching international significance."

I believe that to be right. I believe that the agreement, and the events which will follow, can have a very profound international significance. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton is aware, because we visited the region, China has in Shenzhen an economic shop window which suggests that it is very much in the interests of China that Hong Kong should be seen to be prosperous and successful.

In view of the international impact of the agreement, it is right that the House should consider carefully its meaning in that context and beyond. In previous debates and discussions, hon. Members, including myself, referred to the refugee problem. Today the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs repeated a view which he has twice expressed in the Chamber on the matter. He has said, broadly, that the refugee problem has nothing to do with the agreement; it ought to be left on one side and should be dealt with at another time. I happen to believe that it has everything to do with the agreement. The fact that refugees are living in those conditions and in that society

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

is an affront to everybody who is involved in the discussions. I should have liked to hear a great deal more from our friends in Hong Kong about an attempt to seek a solution to the Vietnamese refugee problem.

I should like to refer to other views which were expressed in the document dealing with the assessment. On page 41 we are told that a group of individuals has said:

"We do not care what happens to Hong Kong for our sake. However, we worry for our children".

That is an admirable expression of an opinion which people understandably hold. I am sure that all hon. Members wish those who express such a view success in the objectives that they have set. Nevertheless, I believe that even the children of those people do not want the refugee camps to be continued but an international agreement to be arrived at. Notwithstanding the views which the Foreign Secretary has expressed previously on this matter, I believe that it would help us considerably if a new British initiative were taken. I am sure that hon. Members would encourage the Foreign Secretary to take that view.

Mr. Faulds: My hon. Friend has the luxury of being able to allow interventions which those of us unfortunate enough to speak between 7 pm and 9 pm were unable to do. Does he agree that the efforts that the Hong Kong authorities have put into taking care of the refugees are extraordinarily concerned and they have done a good job but that it is totally unreasonable to expect them to bear that burden on their own? It is essential that not only should the international community accept obligations in that area but that the British Government should be far less mean-minded in future in their attack on the problem.

Mr. Clarke: Yes, I am delighted to agree with my hon. Friend. When my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and I visited one of those camps, we were full of admiration for the work being done. Nevertheless, we noted that the camp was next door to a prison which we had to go through in order to see the refugees. Excellent work is going on, but I entirely agree that the Government should apply themselves to trying to seek a permanent solution to that difficult problem.

During future debates—I have no doubt that there will be debates on the Bill which the Foreign Secretary mentioned in his opening remarks—there will be further discussions about nationality because grey areas remain. There will be discussion about land ownership, defence and, above all, human rights. As those discussions continue, the relationship that has been developed between Britain, the people of Hong Kong and the Government and people of China can be improved, good though many of us believe those relations to be.

The Foreign Secretary said that the Chinese contribution to the discussions represented vision and realism. The very fact that he said that at this difficult time in international affairs will be welcome. I take the view, which I believe is shared by many of my hon. Friends, that the agreement is well worth while. But it ought to be seen not as the end of the story but as the beginning of what could be a new era of hope for the people of Hong Kong in terms of their attitudes to social democracy and so on, and, perhaps even more importantly, to the realisation of world peace. In the negotiations that have taken place we have set an example to the rest of the world which others might be encouraged to follow.

9.22 pm

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): I am glad to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) because I found a great deal with which I could agree. May I at the outset declare my interest as a parliamentary adviser to Cable and Wireless. I do that in the particular context of Hong Kong because, as many hon. Members will know, Hong Kong's raison d'être as a financial and communications centre is a key element in the future not only of Hong Kong but of the People's Republic of China.

It was in that sense that I found myself in agreement with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) when he talked about the competition between Singapore and Hong Kong. Therefore, if the House will allow me, I want to deal a little further with the experience of Cable and Wireless in Hong Kong and in the People's Republic of China. Its experience in the past and plans for the future, and above all the commitment which it has made to that triangular relationship, is of some significance.

It is fair to remind the House that the commitment which companies such as Cable and Wireless have made in Hong Kong, which goes back many years and involves many hundreds of millions of pounds of investment, has presently assured Hong Kong its standing as the leading communications centre in the far east. When we ally to that the joint ventures which have been agreed with the People's Republic of China, the implications become of extreme importance.

A co-operative agreement has been made for a microwave link between Guandong province and Hong Kong. That opens up communications with south China and connects with the Hong Kong-Guengzhou communications system. There is a telecommunications service agreement for exploration work in the south China sea. That is done through the Huaying Nanhai joint company. If energy resources are found in that part of the world, it will have a strong effect on the industrial development of China and Hong Kong and that will be important for companies such as Cable and Wireless and BP, which is directly concerned.

The agreement for a joint venture to provide a telephone service for the Shenzhen special economic zone is indicative of the way in which a British company operating in Hong Kong can provide the infrastructure for much of the new development on which the People's Republic of China depends.

China is to be commended on the way in which a cordon sanitaire has been introduced through the economic zones to allow an integration and interface between the two systems operated by Hong Kong and the PRC using the economic zones as a buffer. It is in Britain's interests as well as Hong Kong's interests to ensure that the economic zones are a success. A number of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists are already investing in the zones, and further afield in Shanghai. That is wise.

I support what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said about investment. The British share of investment and trade in Hong Kong has declined rapidly. American and Japanese investment has increased substantially, as has that from other

European countries. Like many other hon. Members I visited Hong Kong recently. I am grateful to the Hong Kong Government for all that they did to enable us to see what was going on. However, I was depressed that already substantial numbers of Japanese and American companies are active on the ground and considering how they can establish manufacturing facilities in Hong Kong with a view to trading from Hong Kong with the People's Republic of China and moving progressively into the economic zones and hence into a wider Chinese context.

I urge British industrialists who are looking for future markets to think carefully about the opening up of China through Hong Kong. Some of us have been involved in that part of the world for 20 years. We know that it is a long haul. It took about 10 years for Cable and Wireless to conclude some of its early agreements. But agreements which the People's Republic have made since 1949 in trade and industry have been honoured. The record is good.

I urge British and Hong Kong companies to look to China for a strengthening of the link that already exists. That is in their interests. The greatest underwriting for the future lies in that investment for Hong Kong, Britain and China.

I have made those points by way of preamble. I also want to discuss some of the wider questions that have come from the agreement. However, industrial matters are of a wider significance than was perhaps appreciated until the agreement was signed. We now see the opportunities opening up. The examples that I have cited reflect far-sighted vision in the past.

I am sympathetic to the whole question of Hong Kong passport holders. I should like to put one or two thoughts to my hon. Friend the Minister in the hope that he will convey my suggestions which I make as a contribution to further discussion. This is a complex matter. I do not pretend that what I am about to propose can be assumed automatically to be appropriate. I should like my proposals to be tested.

As a number of hon. Members have said, there is a wide range of existing passport holders in Hong Kong, and that raises serious problems. Already there are some problems for the so-called British dependent territories passport holders. There is plenty of evidence, from conversations that I and others have had, that those who come into this country with such passports experience difficulty, even as regular travellers, in making their way through customs and immigration. From time to time, there are particular problems with delays, investigations and so on.

It would be helpful to have a visa stamp in the passports emanating from Hong Kong that are used by regular travellers. Those regular travellers who can establish—I believe they can do this easily—a bona fide reason for their regular travel patterns should have their passports stamped with a visa. That would follow the American path whereby, after the initial visa is stamped, the passport holder can, in due time, move into a higher category of unlimited access. The British dependent territories passport allows that system, but I believe that my principle would help in two ways. First, the visa stamp system would facilitate the movement of regular travellers with a bona fide reason for travel. We could reasonably put it to the customs and immigration authorities that the movement of those travellers should be facilitated. Trade and investment and the links between Hong Kong, Britain and China would be facilitated if the passage of travellers were eased in that way.

Secondly—I hope that my suggestion has a wider significance and provides additional reassurance to Hong Kong residents—it would follow that, when the passport expired, the visa stamp would be transferred from passport to passport. After 1997, the authorities in the People's Republic of China could be reasonably expected to honour such a visa stamp. People are genuinely worried about the future of their passport after 1997. I believe that the use of a visa stamp would help to alleviate the difficulties. Having moved in that direction, I should expect the Government to look to the Commonwealth countries and members of the Community to follow suit. The assurances about access and, therefore, freedom of travel might prove helpful in the short term and, above all, in the longer term.

I do not agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), although he made a good speech. He brushed aside the importance of accountability to the House. I support the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) in putting forward a proposal, which I advanced in Hong Kong, for an annual debate in the House. I suggest that a convenient time to hold that debate would be during the annual foreign affairs debate. I believe that there should be a printed report on the work of the joint liaison group. It is true that the assessment office has provided us with a worthwhile agenda, but the provision of an annual report would help us to focus our debates. We may not want to debate this issue in every foreign affairs debate, but over the next few years such a debate would provide us with a check list on which we could work. It is important for the House to be seen to commit itself to that process of continuing observation and comment. In considering the work of the joint liaison group, there may also be opportunities for us, through the Select Committee system, to make a positive contribution. I accept that a great deal remains to be done.

With regard to the question of a wider franchise, I am somewhat reluctant automatically to argue that the Westminster model should be transplanted to Hong Kong. I believe that progress in that direction should be left essentially in the hands of those whose future lies in Hong Kong. In saying that, I am not overlooking the fact that there are probably many people in Britain who can make a contribution. This House and Her Majesty's Government have a continuing responsibility. I hope that a genuine feeling for democracy will be nurtured within Hong Kong on a basis that is acceptable to the people there as they face the realities of their future relationship with the People's Republic of China.

When I argue that we should continue to look at the role of Hong Kong—and the relationship of Hong Kong not only with Britain but with China—I do so because I strongly believe that in this House there are many friends of Hong Kong. Many of us have had great opportunities to be involved in trade and industry there. We have made many friends and have come to admire the tremendous success story that Hong Kong embodies.

The partnership between essentially Chinese people and British people has had many things to commend it. Despite my earlier strictures about the levels of British trade and investment, there are still outstanding examples of that partnership. In its own way, it has drawn on the peculiar

[Mr. Michael Marshall]

skills and character of the two peoples. I hope that it may long continue, and that this House will play its part in ensuring that it does.

9.37 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I regard the debate as one of the most important in this Session of Parliament. I think that it is as important as any other debate that may arise from the Queen's Speech.

I regard the economic development of Hong Kong, its stability and its future prosperity as of the first priority. I agree with the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) that we should seek to arrange the affairs of Hong Kong with the help of the people of Hong Kong—I shall develop that theme later—so that not only do they prosper but there are economic ties with the adjoining parts of the Chinese mainland.

I should like to refer to two points on which I think there has been a certain amount of fudging. The first is whether the part of Hong Kong that was ceded in perpetuity is viable. Everyone says that it is not viable. I also think that it is not viable. It is not viable because, as the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) said, the Chinese could turn off the water taps. It might prove to be very difficult if the water taps were turned off. However, any part of the globe can be viable if other nations have the will to support it.

The Falkland Islands is not a very viable colony. However, it seems to be of strategic value and there may be wealth from the sea and from Antarctica, so we are prepared to spend hundreds of millions of pounds in ensuring its viability.

I remind the House that there is a place in a somewhat similar position to Hong Kong—the city of West Berlin. It is an island surrounded by a political system completely different from its own, yet it is viable. It thrives and its people are satisfied.

I am not advocating that we should take an opposite view to that of the White Paper and that we should stick out for the continued independence of that part of Hong Kong. That would be extremely difficult, but more important, I do not believe that we should do so because the original treaty was unequal. It was forced on the then Chinese Government, and I agree with the People's Republic of China that it was unequal. The People's Republic would have every right, if it wished, to insist on gaining sovereignty.

How do we equate that undisputed right with the right of the people of Hong Kong to self-determination? That does not necessarily mean independence, or becoming part of China or part of the United Kingdom. My definition of self-determination is that we should accede to the wishes of the people. How therefore, do we equate China's natural desire to regain the sovereignty of Hong Kong with acceding to the wishes of the people of Hong Kong?

There is no guarantee that that can be done, but I have every confidence that the People's Republic will act with integrity. If the people of Hong Kong wish to proceed along the lines of the White Paper, I have every confidence that the principle of self-determination for the people of Hong Kong will be satisfied.

I give credit to the People's Republic and to the Foreign Secretary for taking this first giant step—there is still a long way to go—along the road to satisfying the principles to which I have referred. Clearly, anxiety and apprehension will increase as we get nearer to 1997. There is no way in which that can be avoided. We must therefore do everything in our power to ensure that there is continued stability in the colony.

There is no guarantee about what will happen after 1997. This House should order its arrangements so that it does its best for the colony up to that time. After that, there is nothing that we can do. We live in a world of nation states where sovereignty is sacrosanct, and we must realise that. It is, I believe, appreciated that when we hand over the welfare and future prosperity of the people of Hong Kong it will become the responsibility of the People's Republic of China.

How can we be satisfied that the people of Hong Kong agree with the White Paper? I am not completely satisfied that the assessment office has done enough. I admit that it tried to do this work independently and that it has genuinely sought to obtain the views of different bodies, institutions and people in Hong Kong. It received a few thousand replies, generally from people who are articulate. Unlike almost every other hon. Member who has spoken, I have not been to Hong Kong, but I know that arrangements were made to take down any views which were given to the assessment office if the person concerned did not wish to write them down.

There is no substitute for democracy, and that means one person, one vote. Until there is a democratic declaration by the people of Hong Kong that they wish to go along the road of the White Paper, I cannot be completely satisfied—it does not matter how elaborate the assessment has been—that this is their genuine wish. Some Conservative Members, excluding those who made the last few speeches, implied that democracy is all right for the United Kingdom but is alien to Hong Kong and China. I find that elitist attitude objectionable. I am certainly not advocating adversarial politics, politics based on the Westminster model or on any of the other western European models. Democracy means that on an issue as important as this one can go to a polling station and cast a secret ballot to say yes or no to a proposal. I need hardly remind Conservative Members that they advocate ballots for certain matters pertaining to trade unions from time to time. People are people whether they live in this country, Hong Kong or elsewhere.

It is important that the White Paper is understood by the people of Hong Kong. They must take time to reflect on it and come to a decision. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) is muttering the question, "What happens if they say no?" I have every confidence——

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: What happens if they say yes?

Dr. Marek: If the right hon. Member wishes to intervene, he may do so, but I shall take issue with him.

Regardless of what other hon. Members think, democracy is an absolute prerequisite for the development and determination of any peoples in any country. The people of Hong Kong should be able to vote on the proposed treaty.

I am confident that people who are sensible, everywhere on the planet, will realise the position and history of Hong Kong, and will say yes. If Conservative Members are not happy about that they are performing a charade because they are congratulating themselves on a

wonderful treaty and saying that it is good for the people of Hong Kong. I notice Conservative Members smiling. If that is their attitude they are being dishonest. They should be honest, and put the treaty to the test via a referendum.

Mr. Deakins: Does my hon. Friend agree that even the British people do not have the right to pronounce on the treaty or the subject of tonight's debate, because treaties are under the royal prerogative? We are being asked to approve the Government's intention to sign the treaty, but not the treaty itself, but the British people, although we are a democratic nation, are not being asked to approve the treaty.

Dr. Marek: There are shortcomings everywhere. In a recent debate the Secretary of State for Education and Science made a memorable phrase when he said that indirectly elected bodies are nearer to the democratic end of the spectrum. That caused a great deal of laughter, but it is true. A representative democracy is never perfect. Our problem is to get a representative system of democracy as near to perfection as possible. Simply having an assessment office is not good enough. I suggest that we can get nearer to true democracy by having a referendum on the White Paper and how Hong Kong people envisage their future Government.

I take up the pleas of other hon. Members who have said that there must be progress to some sort of directly elected body, whether the Executive Council or the Legislative Council, or another. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) put it well in his speech when he said that we should involve the people of Hong Kong in the development of their institutions. Other hon. Members said that we should make haste to do so. I do not disagree with that. We have time. It is only 1984 and we have until 1997.

But it is of the utmost importance that we make some sort of progress during that period, so that by 1997 we have a directly elected representational Government or an advisory Government. At this stage, I am not too concerned to spell out exactly which way things should go. That largely depends on the people of Hong Kong and how they see their institutions developing. But it is vital that we should have some form of directly elected democracy in Hong Kong. That is our duty and we should not fudge it. We should not say that Hong Kong and China have never had any democracy and so they should not have any now, because whose fault is that? We should not fudge the issue.

I reiterate that I am satisfied with the White Paper. But I look to the Government to take the people of Hong Kong into their confidence in their future actions.

9.50 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I shall concentrate on two matters: the position of members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service now in Hong Kong, and the question of nationality.

On the first issue, Hong Kong is a British colony like any other. Its transition from that status to that of a part of a foreign state involves the same problems for its Government servants as would its transition to full independence. Its colonial status comes to an end on 30 June 1997 and those members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service who have been recruited by the Secretary of State outside Hong Kong, but who are then serving there, will be faced with such changes of employer and conditions of service that they will be entitled — as would members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service elsewhere—to leave their jobs on accrued pensions plus lump sum compensation for loss of office. At least, that is what I hope will happen.

I must declare an interest in that I retired from the Colonial Service, now called Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service, in 1960, with lump sum compensation and a pension which I still enjoy, thanks to the generosity of the Nigerian Government. To their credit, they paid only recently the final instalment of the capital sum needed in order to pay the pensions of all their former expatriate staff.

The question is whether the expatriate staff of Hong Kong will be equally fortunate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has not said so specifically. When I intervened in his speech and asked for an undertaking that expatriate staff now serving in Hong Kong would be treated no less favourably than were expatriate staff so situated in colonies that have already achieved their independence, he used a form of words to be found in the White Paper but did not specifically give me that assurance. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give that assurance tonight, because I respectfully submit that it is simply not possible to say that British expatriate staff now serving in Government posts in Hong Kong will be treated any less generously than were the British expatriate staff of other colonies that have received independence.

In all previous cases there has been a public officers' agreement with the successor Government, guaranteeing expatriate staff certain rights. First, serving officers who continue to serve the successor Government remain eligible for transfer or promotion elsewhere in the Overseas Civil Service. Secondly, the successor Government agree not to unreasonably withhold consent from any officer wishing to accept a transfer or promotion, and agree to preserve his pension rights on transfer. Thirdly, pensions derived from service after independence — in this case, after 1997 — attract supplementary pensions for overseas service, payable by the successor Government. Fourthly, in the event of premature retirement casued by constitutional changes, the officers concerned receive lump sum compensation from the Government.

Those pledges were designed elsewhere to reassure expatriate civil servants in the colony concerned and to encourage them to remain in the service of the colony after independence, if they were required.

I should like an assurance that the Government intend to apply a public officers' agreement to the officers of the Hong Kong Government service. That is very important because, in the case of Hong Kong, the relevant agreement is with a foreign Government—one that is actually in being, rather than one that is being offered independence on terms—and, furthermore, a foreign Government that has no financial responsibility for the implementation of the agreement.

If China will not pay for the pensions and redundancy terms of Hong Kong expatriate staff, I should like to know who will pay. It may be said that the Hong Kong special administrative region will pay. The officers concerned should be told without delay so that they can make their own decisions about their future careers.

[Mr. Ivor Stanbrook]

According to part IV of annex I of the draft agreement, expatriates will be employed

"only in their individual capacities".

They will not be entitled to "privileged treatment" which I take to mean treatment special to expatriate staff, such as expatriate allowances or overseas leave with passages paid. The agreement also specifically states that, after 1997,

"heads of major government departments"—

and in some cases deputy heads — will be changed. Those posts will not be held by expatriates.

Those changes are not unreasonable, but they will fundamentally affect the conditions of service of the officers concerned. Clearly they will justify the early application of a public officers' agreement, such as we have had in the case of all former colonies, to all expatriate staff in Hong Kong.

It is not good enough to say that this discussion is premature because the event will not take place for more than 12 years. The whole point of the arrangement is to reassure existing staff, all of whom hold positions of great responsibility in the colony and carry on its government at senior levels, about their future. It is very important that the Government should make the position clear. I therefore trust that very shortly, if not this evening, the Government will give an undertaking to all expatriate staff serving in Hong Kong that they will be treated in this respect not less favourably than expatriate staff in other colonies have been treated on independence. I trust that the application of these arrangements will be made now and that the effective date of the public officers' agreement providing for pensions to be payable in Britain in sterling at a fixed rate of exchange will be from the date of the agreement with China as is normally the case with independence agreements.

It being half past Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to the Hong Kong agreement may be proceeded with, though opposed, until Twelve o'clock.—*[Mr. Major.]*

Question again proposed.

Mr. Stanbrook: Nationality issues are rather more complex. We thought when we passed the British Nationality Act 1981 that it was substantive and definitive. I wrote a textbook on the strength of that proposition, but it looks as though I shall have to write a fresh edition fairly soon. As the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) said, we have already made alterations to that legislation. It is clear from the British memorandum attached to the draft agreement that the Government are proposing to change the law of British nationality once again by creating a fresh category of citizenship. It apparently will not be British citizenship because the right of abode in the United Kingdom is specifically ruled out, so the people concerned will not become British citizens. Nor will it be British dependent territory citizenship, as that must end in Hong Kong on 30 June 1997 when sovereignty passes. It is inevitable that that species of citizenship should also end. According to the memorandum, they will get what is rather obscurely called "appropriate status".

It is suggested that that "appropriate status" might be that of British overseas citizens. That status carries few rights and few obligations except those on the United Kingdom Government. Those who now hold it are spread around the world. They already number well over 1 million. They have no right of abode in the United Kingdom and mostly live in independent countries which were formally part of the British Empire. They have retained this status because of faulty legislation of the past, in that it is a claim on future British Governments in regard to their citizenship rights. It is a species of British nationality and perhaps creates a moral obligation.

It is quite clear that, irrespective of whether "appropriate status", as described in the agreement, turns out to be British overseas citizenship, we will be adding to our existing embarrassment in having large numbers of people around the world who have this form of moral claim on the United Kingdom, and unnecessarily so. According to the official Foreign Office estimate, there are 3 million British dependent territory citizens in Hong Kong who, on 1 July 1997, will get the new citizenship. Their number will be added to the more than 1 million existing British overseas citizens. What rights will those 4 million people have? They will have the right to some kind of travel document or passport issued by the United Kingdom, entitling them to travel round the world under the diplomatic and consular protection of Her Britannic Majesty.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): What is wrong with that?

Mr. Stanbrook: There is a great deal wrong with that. They will be hostages to immense trouble and problems arising from the fact that they do not have a proper citizenship, although they have rights against this country. In many cases, those rights eventually terminate with the presence here of such people who then become entitled to full British citizenship.

Many of us who were on the Standing Committee which considered the British Nationality Bill hoped that such a continuing obligation would end naturally with the absorption of the people in question into the citizenships of the countries in which they live. Apparently, we were wrong. Even worse, we are now adding to the number of people who will be able to travel around the world in that way. In this case, they will have the right to live in Hong Kong, to leave Hong Kong freely and, in theory, to return there with the right of abode there, but in the meantime they will be entitled to draw upon the protection of the United Kingdom Government.

The 3 million people concerned are mostly of Chinese ethnic origin. We understand from the Chinese memorandum that such people will automatically be entitled to Chinese nationality. A number, however, will not be defined as Chinese compatriots. The official Foreign Office figure for those people is about 6,000. They include people who have been naturalised as citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies in Hong Kong and people born in Hong Kong. As my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) said, many of them will be of Indian origin and, I dare say, will have some prospect of settling in India.

These people constitute a different group, likely to become "stateless" but having a continuing right to call upon Britain. Many of them have a genuine expectation of assistance from us. According to figures supplied to me by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, 188 of them were naturalised in Hong Kong. If such people become stateless and do not receive the status of British overseas citizens or British dependent territories citizens, or the "appropriate status", I believe that they should be considered separately from the rest of the 6,000 and that special arrangements should be made for them.

Provision of that kind is fraught with problems and likely to involve us in considerable difficulties with individual people, but I believe that special provision should be made because when those people became citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies, albeit in the colony of Hong Kong, they swore allegiance to the Queen and no doubt believed and expected that their British passports made them British, with all the rights entailed by that. In 1997, however, their status will be terminated. I believe that in their case that would be unfair, considering the circumstances and the fact that they will not get Chinese nationality. We should make special provision for them and perhaps give them British citizenship. If we do not do so, we shall be storing up trouble for ourselves and at the same time depriving ourselves of the industry and talent of some very remarkable people who, out of all proportion to their numbers, have helped to make Hong Kong the remarkable place that it is.

10.9 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I apologise to the House for having been absent when the two Front Bench spokesmen made their speeches. I was attending the Select Committee on Employment. I am sure that the House understands that hon. Members do other things besides attending the Chamber. I have explained that point because I may repeat some of the remarks that have already been made.

I was privileged to visit Hong Kong a few weeks ago. It is of great benefit for an hon. Member to see a country at first hand rather than seeing documents. I was surprised, even shocked, to see the great dimensions of success, drive and energy that Hong Kong is enjoying. There is obviously a spirit of co-operation, and I am glad to say that it prevails between the Government and the people as well. I pay special tribute to the Civil Service, which seems a most excellent and competent body.

Before I went to Hong Kong, the Green Paper making recommendations on the proposals for electoral reform had been issued. When I arrived, being accustomed to the democratic system in the United Kingdom, I thought that there would be great enthusiasm, and people would be pressing on the doors, demanding to have the recommendations implemented immediately. I was surprised to learn that many people in Hong Kong were satisfied and were taking their time to say what they wanted. There seemed to prevail among them the wish that there be a process of gradual change. I must confess that when I spoke to one or two of the Hong Kong people I felt rather impatient, but this was probably because of the traditions of the United Kingdom. I felt wiser after I had returned, and understood some of the traditions of the Chinese people. I still believe in the democratic system and in elected bodies. In 1997, we should leave the people of Hong Kong with a system of which they will approve and be proud.

Registration is important. In the past the number of people who registered was extremely low, but there was a genuine attempt by the civil servants to encourage Hong Kong citizens to take up registration so that they could participate in the coming elections. I am sure that all hon. Members who have been to Hong Kong and had meetings with various sectors in the community would still nail their colours to the mast and say that they believe in free speech, the freedom of religion and of travel, the right to strike and to organise. There should be a balanced and a caring society from that basis.

When I was in Hong Kong, the assessment office had just been opened, and the following week it went into operation. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) was there with me, and we closely questioned officers and asked how they would approach this problem. Both sides agreed that it would be rather difficult. There was a genuine attempt to get some true cross-section assessment as to what people felt. I was delighted to note that nearly three million copies of the White Paper had been printed and circulated. To distribute nearly three million copies of the White Paper to a population slightly larger than 5·3 million was no mean achievement. I should say that it was an honest endeavour to consult the people. I hope sincerely that there were no citizens who did not respond because of fear. I am sure that the assessment officers were anxious to ensure that their deliberations were fully representative. It seems that there was general approval. It seems also that a most excellent job was done. One recognises that there will always be qualifications, and some were included in the assessment summary. However, I feel confident that the agreement has the support of the Hong Kong people.

It pleases me to think that people in the United Kingdom are genuinely interested in the people of Hong Kong. I received a letter only the other day from the Greater Manchester county ecumenical council. The council addressed itself to Hong Kong and I took it as a sign that British people are genuinely interested in the important future of the people of Hong Kong. The council's letter is a fairly representative document. It includes the views of church leaders and representatives of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and free church of the area.

One paragraph states:

"people from Hong Kong who were once British subjects have been progressively stripped of a meaningful nationality and the rights that go with it, to be left after the recent British Nationality Act with a second-class British dependent territories citizenship."

The letter continues:

"The British Government should recognise its responsibilities towards the Vietnamese refugees in closed camps in Hong Kong."

I agree with those sentiments. I took the trouble to see for myself some of the conditions of the unfortunate Vietnamese refugees. I do not believe that the refugees are solely the responsibility of the British Government, and they are certainly not the responsibility of the Hong Kong Government. Unfortunately, we all seem to be casualties of the Vietnamese war. The warring factions withdrew and left the problem of the refugees to others. The refugees are floating around, landing in different countries and creating a serious problem. They should not receive inhuman

[Mr. Ken Eastham]

treatment, but I wish that other countries, especially the United States, would take a greater part in facing some of the problems that have confronted the Hong Kong people as a result of the war.

The council's letter observes that:

> "Hong Kong residents . . . will not become Chinese citizens on the reversion of the Colony to the People's Republic (i.e. those not born on Chinese/Hong Kong territory and without Chinese ancestry)."

There will be serious problems for those people and they should receive sympathetic consideration.

Furthermore, everybody appears to believe that it is a good agreement. I congratulate the Governor, who was very closely involved over many weeks and meetings in negotiating the deal. We must now encourage the people of Hong Kong to feel confident. Nevertheless, we have to recognise that the citizens of Hong Kong will always have reservations about the agreement, because 2·7 million of the inhabitants are refugees from the mainland on account of the tortuous period of the Chinese cultural revolution. It has led to a certain element of fear and distrust among those people. Therefore I hope that these 2·7 million citizens out of the 5·3 million citizens of Hong Kong will feel confident that the agreement includes them, that there will be no reprisals and that together with the remainder of the people of Hong Kong they will be able to look forward with confidence to the future.

Turning to industry, it is believed by many people that the industries of Hong Kong are based upon textiles and clothing. That is not the case. Hong Kong has made great strides in electronics. There may, therefore, be problems unless something is done about this problem. The United States, for example, has introduced an embargo upon electronics. Unless that kind of problem is resolved it will be very damaging to the electronics industry in Hong Kong. One has to stand still only for six months or for 12 months in the electronics industry and the company dies. The technology is changing all the time. Therefore, this aspect needs to be carefully considered.

When I left Hong Kong I made one comment about the proposed agreement. It may not meet with the approval of everybody. However, I believe that the agreement should be endorsed by the United Nations. I do not mean to insult the Chinese Government or the British Government. However, this will be an international agreement. Therefore I believe that the United Nations ought to be involved.

Whatever agreements are signed and whatever may happen in 1997, other fundamentally important matters will have to be considered. The most important of these is lasting friendship between the United Kingdom and the people of Hong Kong. We have fostered very good relationships for many years. There is no reason why we should not look forward confidently to good business relationships after 1997. We should not adopt the attitude that after 1997 the curtain will be rung down. There is no reason why arrangements should not be made through the Chinese Government for a conference to be held every year or every two years after 1997 in order to discuss issues which are of mutual interest to the people of Hong Kong. Nor is there any reason why specialist teams should not take an interest in Hong Kong and why the tourist industry should not continue. There is no reason why we cannot carry on promoting trade between Hong Kong and Britain. With those remarks I would like to extend the very best wishes to the people of Hong Kong.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. It might help the House to know that the wind-up speeches are expected to begin at about 11.10 pm. Five or six hon. Members have sat here for a long time hoping to speak. If hon. Members could restrict themselves to 10 minutes or less, it should be possible to allow every hon. Member to speak.

10.24 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I am pleased to follow the thought-provoking speech of the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), although I do not agree with every word that he said.

Last week I attended several constituency functions, both political and otherwise. Many points were raised on subjects such as student grants, the deduction of £1 from heating additions and sugar beet quotas, but Hong Kong was not mentioned. Had Norfolk farmers put Hong Kong before sugar beet quotas, something fairly dramatic would have had to have happened. It is a compliment to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary that it was not mentioned; because it shows that he has got it right.

I join many right hon. and hon. Friends who congratulated both my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce), those people on the negotiating team from both sides and those many people from Hong Kong who were closely involved in the crucial negotiations. We have learnt today that they were painstaking, at many times frustrating and disheartening, but ultimately rewarding. They can certainly be proud of their achievement.

When UMELCO came here in May they issued a statement that laid down full criteria by which the acceptability of a Sino-British agreement to the Hong Kong people would be judged. I am sure that they would agree that those criteria have been met virtually in full. They have been met in a way that many people would not have dreamt possible three or four months ago.

When that statement was issued, it was as though UMELCO were saying that that was what they hoped would be achieved but that they had grave doubts. That was very much the mood three or four months ago. Things have changed a great deal and in their debate they made a strong recommendation to the people of Hong Kong to accept the draft agreement.

What about the people of Hong Kong themselves? There has been great mention of that today. The report of the assessment office covers not only the organisations and pressure groups but several important opinion polls and surveys. They will have got through to many ordinary people, and, again, the result was fairly overwhelming. In the most important opinion poll 71 per cent. said that the agreement was quite good and 14 per cent. said that it was good in some way.

There can be little surprise that, with such an overwhelming feeling of general acceptance, some basic anxieties come to the surface and will continue to do so in the months ahead. We have heard about the fear of conscription into the PLA. Will my hon. Friend the Minister look carefully at the suggestion made by one or two members of UMELCO about the volunteers being expanded and a regular battalion being attached to the existing territorial battalion. Perhaps they could take on a role that even the Chinese would accept and approve of. Will my hon. Friend look carefully at that?

At the same time, will he consider the future role of the Gurkhas? We are now entering a new era of relations with the People's Republic of China. I see no reason why, after 1997, we could not have the Gurkhas stationed in Hong Kong. We have troops stationed in the countries of many allies. I hope that will be considered carefully in the months ahead and that some definite arrangement will be arrived at with the Chinese.

There are bound to be anxieties about the development of representative government. There may be great pressure internationally but also in the House for direct elections. I would be one of those hon. Members who would urge caution on that point. The Hong Kong Government's White Paper strikes a balance. I agree with the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) that at the moment there is no obvious demand in Hong Kong for direct elections. We must proceed with caution. Of course, we want direct elections eventually. I should like to see them everywhere in the world. But in this case we must be realistic and proceed with caution.

The nationality problem causes anxiety. That thorny subject is mentioned in the memorandum attached to the agreement, which shows what a difficult problem it is. We shall discuss that subject when we consider legislation in the near future. That is the time to go into more detail. I voice my concern about the 6,000 British dependent territories citizens who are of neither Chinese nor British origin. After 1997 their children could become stateless. My right hon. and learned Friend referred to that, but it still causes anxiety.

I take exception to some of the remarks by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook). We are being shortsighted about the Hong Kong Chinese and the possibility of them coming here. The people have no great desire to come here, but it would be a safety net if they knew that we would be liberal in our interpretation of discretion under the 1981 Act. If 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000 Hong Kong Chinese came to Britain we would be fortunate. It would be an occasion for rejoicing rather than for throwing up our hands in horror.

The next 12 years will be crucial. If stability and prosperity are maintained, there is every chance that they will be guaranteed thereafter. However, we must have a determined and strong commitment from the Government. The transition must be smooth so that 1997 does not represent a sudden break with the past, but a continuation of the gradual process of evolution. I like the idea voiced by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) of an annual report to the House. We must be kept in touch.

Confidence is of the utmost importance. Hong Kong's prosperity and stability depend on highly volatile financial and business markets. If confidence is eroded the markets could collapse. That has been said by many today, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker).

We have heard about Peking's great modernisation programme and how it is trying to quadruple its industrial and agricultural output by the year 2000. That will depend upon the maintenance of political stability in China and upon the development of the offshore oil reserves. Above all, it will depend upon the continuing prosperity of Hong Kong. That is why China has such a vested interest in maintaining the status quo in Hong Kong.

There will be great investment opportunities for British firms in China. Indeed, C. Y. Cheng, the economics professor at Indiana state university, estimated that to reach its goal China will have to spend $1 trillion. That is a huge sum and there will be rich pickings for British firms. They must not assume that because we are

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

embarking on a new era of relations with China that orders will fall into their laps. They will have to go out there and capture the orders.

When I was in Shanghai recently it was impressed upon me that we are not being aggressive or competitive, and that we were not cutting the bureaucratic barriers like the Italians, French, Germans and Japanese. We have a long way to go.

The uncertainty is over. The Hong Kong people can face the future knowing where they are going, with growing confidence. I praise the Secretary of State for the work that he has done, but we are a long way from a diplomatic triumph.

Many Chinese people believe that it is a great tragedy that the British administration is coming to an end. Many are critical of the way in which we embarked upon the negotiations and raised so publicly the question of the treaty and convention. That meant that the Chinese had political face to save. Many are critical of the appalling human rights record in China.

Now is not the time to look back. Now is the time to be positive, because the Hong Kong people are realistic. Before we leap for joy we must remember, as the right hon. Member for Leeds, East said, that we are dealing with a post-dated cheque. We can be optimistic when we know that that cheque will be honoured. The future holds much potential, but it is also full of risks. If all three parties play a constructive part in minimising those risks, the future will have a great deal to hold for the people of Hong Kong.

10.35 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham). I agreed with some of his comments, particularly about British dependent territories citizen passport holders and citizenship.

I think it was Henrik Ibsen who had someone say in the play "An Enemy of the People" that in a democracy the minority is always right. From time to time that statement gives some comfort to the alliance. I may take comfort from it tonight, because I fear that I will introduce a jarring note into what has otherwise been a gentle and well-modulated debate.

I shall start on the easy side by joining other hon. Members in congratulating the Government on the general tenor of this agreement. There is a Chinese statement which, for the benefit of the World Service, goes, "tien xia de shih wu mei you shih chien shih mei de." I am sure that all the hon. Members who are present in the Chamber know precisely what that means but, for the benefit of those who will read those words in *Hansard* in the morning, it means, "There is nothing under heaven which is completely perfect". That is true about this agreement. It is, nevertheless, as near perfect as the Government could have got in the circumstances. The British Government are to be congratulated on that, as are the Chinese Government.

Such reservations as I have are not related to the Government, but rather to the way in which the House has handled the issue. A very old and wise Member said to me before I became a Member of Parliament, "The moment when you must be most suspicious is when there is common agreement on all sides of the House of Commons". Both this debate and the previous Hong Kong debate have been characterised by a tenor of common agreement on both sides. I am deeply suspicious about that. There are good reasons why the previous Hong Kong debate had to be carefully conducted and why we had to be statesmanlike. At that stage, the agreement had not been drawn up. On this occasion, it has.

I have not been in the Chamber for the entire debate, but I have discussed it with my colleagues. I apologise for the fact that I have not been present, but I had to be away for an hour or so. There has not been, in the tenor of the argument from both sides of the House, the real and genuine fear—I go further and say "anger"—which I noted in Hong Kong and which I found on discussing the matter with my Hong Kong friends and colleagues, felt about what the British Government have done and are doing in terms of the future and citizenship of the people of Hong Kong. Those who study the White Paper with a careful eye will see signs of that feeling. The Hong Kong people were asked to assess whether an agreement should be accepted. The only alternative was an agreement imposed unilaterally by the Chinese. It was an agreement based on whether the people would like it or lump it. It is not surprising to know that the population of Hong Kong has chosen essentially to like it.

Some aspects of the assessment should concern us. As the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said, one third of the individuals who commented on the agreement said they were against the agreement and criticised it. Furthermore, nearly half of the organisations that put in statements on the agreement chose to remain anonymous. That is remarkable, in view of the general climate in which the assessment was conducted.

On page 80 of the White Paper, the monitors said, rightly, that the comments were made by people who were traditionally reserved in political matters. We must not expect from a population that has been anaesthetised from politics—largely at our request—for so long the type of fairly pungent comment that is heard in the House of Commons. There is concern about what is happening to the people of Hong Kong. I am depressed by and worried about the fact that that worry has not been expressed with the force that I observed in Hong Kong, which I believe characterises the views of many Hong Kong people. It is right to say that many in Hong Kong are angry about what is going on. Many are concerned, and some feel betrayed. Those words crop up in the assessment.

It may be that some hon. Members do not like the word "betrayal". Some may feel that it is inappropriate. I believe that it is inappropriate. But it is as well that we should recognise what people feel. It is as well that we should recognise that there needs to be a voice in this House which is capable of expressing their anger. I believe that the tenor of the debate will not be understood by many of those who hoped that their fears, their concerns and their sense of betrayal would be reflected here, albeit in terms of challenging the Government. I do not criticise the Government. I criticise in a sense the way that we in this House have reacted to our responsibility to express the views of the people of Hong Kong in a forthright fashion.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who is not here, said that the Hong Kong agreement is the greatest issue in the Queen's Speech. I suggest that it may well be the greatest issue that this House has dealt with in the past 20 or 30 years. We are handing over the future and the rights of 5 million people to a Government from whom

many of them have fled. They all remain deeply concerned about the future. We have never done such a thing before. We have never been faced with such a sense of concern. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) says that we had no option, but it is right that this House, carrying that responsibility and duty on its shoulders, should express the views of those people clearly and forthrightly.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Like the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), I have not been able to be here throughout the debate, but I believe that he is doing a great service to the House in reflecting the views of the vast majority of the people of Hong Kong who, because they are not part of the moneyed class, the moneyed mandarins, will not be able to leave Hong Kong. It is up to Back Benchers such as ourselves to reflect the views of those who cannot leave, and whose views have not been adequately monitored in the lead-up to the draft agreement. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those who are at the grass roots in Hong Kong are deeply concerned about the agreement?

Mr. Ashdown: I confirm that that is my view, at all events. Those people believe that there is a moral duty on the British Government that has not been adequately fulfilled.

I recognise the imperatives under which the Government have had to operate, but I believe that we in this House have allowed our Government too easily to slough off that moral responsibility, without sufficient question.

We all understand that we are not now in a position to alter the agreement, or the nature of it. But this debate can start the process of setting the agenda for what will happen in the next 13 years. That is the significance of the debate. It is in that spirit that I agree with the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, who said that we should review the matter on a year-by-year basis. The House might choose not to debate the issue, but reports should be produced on how we fulfil our duties and responsibilities towards the people of Hong Kong. The House should have the right to debate the issue annually.

The area in which the anger, concern and sense of betrayal of the people of Hong Kong is most significantly expressed is that of citizenship. There are those who are holders of British dependent territories citizens' passports and who, in good conscience in Hong Kong, and with a deep sense of duty, actually took an oath of loyalty to the Queen. They find that no sense of reciprocal duty has been shown by the British Government. They are concerned about that.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East introduced a significant, interesting, imaginative and daring concept when he talked about setting up an "Operation Haven". It may be too tall an order, but we should at least try to do something along those lines. If we could put such a scheme into operation, its very existence might act as a back pressure on the Chinese Government to operate strictly in terms of the agreement.

The Government of the People's Republic of China have operated an open door policy. They have committed themselves to open doors for Hong Kong for the next 50 years. But an open door is of use only when, having stepped through the door, one has somewhere to go. They have honoured their side of the open door policy. That must be in the best interests of the future of Hong Kong. There is a duty on us to see what, if anything, can be done at least to investigate the possibility of ensuring that something happens on the other side of that open door. If that can be done, it will give considerable reassurance in terms of confidence building over the next 10 to 15 years.

The importance of Hong Kong to the future of the south-east Asian Pacific basin is now absolutely vital. Whether the free capitalist economies which now exist in some of those countries survive as the norm will, at least in some measure, depend on the survival of Hong Kong as a free institution under the terms of this agreement. That is important, because many nations—ourselves included—wish to see this emergent and powerful industrial force develop in line with our way of life, our freedoms and our industrial and economic system. I suggest that a certain international status is attached to Hong Kong. It is important that it be allowed to develop as a free institution because it will encourage that kind of institution elsewhere in this important area.

It would be appropriate for the British Government now to go along to their friends—NATO was mentioned—who are also interested in the survival of that kind of institution in that area, to see whether something can be pinned together to bring "Operation Haven" into reality. Perhaps that cannot be done, but we should at least try.

If at the very least, we can provide some international substance for the Hong Kong travel document post-1997, which assures freedom of movement if not right of settlement, that will be a recognition of the importance of Hong Kong's future trading capacity and the free institutions in the colony.

I very much hope that the Government will accept the moral duties that now rest upon them. I hope that they will use this period to see whether we can give some substance to concepts such as "Operation Haven" and to the document under which the Hong Kong people will live.

I was concerned and disappointed to hear the Foreign Secretary say that only officials in the Hong Kong Government would sit on the joint liaison group. The case that he made did not convince me, nor will it convince the people of Hong Kong. There is no reason whatever why membership of that group should be confined to members of the Hong Kong Government. However, if that must be, it should not be confined to expatriate members of the Hong Kong Government. It should at least encompass ethnic Hong Kong-Chinese members of that Government who have a commitment to the colony because they have lived there all their lives.

If the free democratic institutions of Hong Kong develop along the lines that the Government wish and we get directly elected representatives, are the Government saying that even in that instance those who represent the people of Hong Kong on the joint liaison group will still be the bureaucrats? It would be outrageous if those who were elected under such institutions were not allowed to serve on the joint liaison group. I hope that the Minister will clarify that point.

In conclusion, this is the greatest issue in human terms that the House has faced for a long time. A moral duty rests upon us. Many hon. Members believe that we should make every effort to honour that moral duty and ensure that the opinions and concerns of the people of Hong Kong are more adequately expressed in the House than they have been during the debate.

10.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I also had the good fortune this summer to be the guest of Hong Kong. I, like many of my colleagues, returned impressed by the energy, inventiveness, creativity and social sophistication of the colony. Few British people who had to live in the sort of houses in which the squatters have had to live for up to 10 years, would ever have achieved the degree of meekness and homeliness which they have achieved under those astonishing conditions.

I was struck, in my ignorance, by how remote Hong Kong has felt from us, despite our presence there. That has inspired a range of myths and legends. One might have expected a land of sweat shops instead of intensely sophisticated manufacturing units, the conditions of many of which are better than in many places in the world and, indeed, better than in some of our cities. The remoteness is a two-edged weapon. It has enabled Hong Kong to escape some British diseases, such as over-regulation, over-taxation, over-unionisation and, therefore, over-pricing. However, it has also led to a realisation that it is not at the forefront of British thinking.

We owe a great debt especially to UMELCO. While we were in Hong Kong and during the visit of its members here, they gave us a model of what a good briefing should be. I pay tribute to S. Y. Chung and his team for a remarkable educational exercise.

I am distressed by the tenor of much of tonight's debate. The line between realism and pessimism is often too narrow. I have an edgy feeling that tonight we may be seeing the beginnings of a diminishing interest and our gradual move away from involvement. That may have been an inevitable part of disengaging ourselves from other parts of the former British Empire. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) is right that Hong Kong may have difficulty in entering the next stage of its economic development in competition with the rest of south-east Asia, our commitment will become more valuable and not a glad excuse to distance ourselves because in 12 years' time we shall no longer have direct responsibility.

Hong Kong has a great deal to teach us. I was impressed, as was my wife, who is a specialist in these matters, to see the enormous skill with which it runs an integrated service for the handicapped. We were impressed by the way in which it runs a successful national preventive health campaign, which has many models for us.

It is indispensable to the future prosperity of the United Kingdom that we learn and create the mechanisms for sharing in Hong Kong's sophistication to understand China. It is entirely within the Government's power to accelerate and encourage the formation of joint endeavours with Hong Kong in that most important area — for example, British universities should be much more closely linked with the universities of Hong Kong. There it is possible to study the changing moods and understandings of China more easily than we can here.

I shall concentrate on one detail, which would seem to me to be of enormous importance, in the report of the Assessment Office. It was reported that there were anxieties about the accreditation of Hong Kong's academic courses and degrees. It is vital that a mechanism —I cannot say whether it should be the one suggested, of an independent council—should be provided whereby Hong Kong is assured of its ability to accredit its courses and to authorise its diplomas and degrees in a way that will make international recognition instantly possible.

Anyone who has taught in a university knows perfectly well that it is one thing to have a paper accreditation and another actually to see the students as they come to do post-graduate work, or whatever. Another way of ensuring that the standards are up to international standards—as they certainly are in the case of some of the courses put on in Hong Kong—is to make sure that we have much more common work together.

Britain is in a peculiarly privileged position to assist in the development of Hong Kong, and vice versa. If we or the Government can do anything to encourage, for example, the great British companies in Hong Kong—which seem to use their London offices much less than they might do to inform people about Hong Kong—to put their corporate weight behind helping fledgling British companies to make their mark in Hong Kong, and eventually in China, we shall have made a remarkable contribution.

Ultimately, it is not just an economic but a philosophical and political question. If Hong Kong's economy falters, it may become less attractive to China. If China's politics go wrong, Hong Kong will be in very serious danger and trouble. It is absolutely essential that, whatever we say about economics, we should remember that for 100 years Hong Kong has been our responsibility and, if the going gets tough because politics go wrong in China, to the greatest possible extent that we can contribute on the international stage to improving relations between Hong Kong and China, it will be our duty to do so.

10.57 pm

Mr. Ron Lewis (Carlisle): I shall certainly take your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and at this late hour my contribution to the debate will be very brief.

My interest in Hong Kong is that of an ordinary Back Bencher who has been following the fortunes or misfortunes of a colony known as Hong Kong, which at present comes under the British flag. When we were advised that the Foreign Secretary was setting off to meet the Chinese to seek an agreement over the future of Hong Kong, most of us — regardless of party — had certain doubts and misgivings as to whether our British Foreign Secretary and Government would not go to Hong Kong and have to acquiesce in everything that the Chinese had to say. But that has not been the case. If hon. Members are honest with themselves, they will all agree that the Foreign Secretary and his team came away from those talks with a far better agreement and understanding than any of us had envisaged.

One thing about the debate has been the great unanimity on the part of hon. Members. However, the exception was the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who has just left the Chamber. But I felt aggrieved when, long before any agreement had been reached, and almost before any meeting had begun, I read that Jardine Matheson was pulling out of Hong Kong. I believe that that move gave a very bad impression to other businesses concerned, and I hope that, even at this late stage, Jardine Matheson may have second thoughts and perhaps agree to retain an office in Hong Kong.

I have listened upstairs this week to the views of the members of the official delegation who are in this country

on their mission. They were speaking and lobbying Members of Parliament. I formed the impression that even the majority of those who are here on an official visit find the agreement acceptable, although of course they would have liked it to go much further.

Yesterday, I also met an ordinary citizen from Hong Kong. I had quite a discussion with him. He posed a number of questions, of which I shall mention only two. First, he asked me what is likely to happen in the event of a change of Government in Hong Kong. None of us knows the answer to that, but I believe honestly that, whatever Government may hold power, Peking will honour the agreement arrived at with the British Government. I told that ordinary citizen that such was my belief and my faith.

The second question was a very important one—at least to me and to that ordinary citizen of Hong Kong, who is a deeply committed and very evangelical Christian. He asked me whether we can be assured that people in Hong Kong will have religious freedom, without any interference from the State.

I believe that many good Christian people, and many people who do not belong to any basic Christian faith, are wondering what is likely to happen after the Chinese takeover in 1997. I could say only that I believe that we must have a basic trust that the undertaking given will be fulfilled whatever happens.

I hope that my plea, uttered in this British Parliament, will echo not only through Hong Kong but throughout China. After 1997 I want to see complete religious freedom in Hong Kong, with no interference from the State whatsoever. I believe that that should be one of the main objectives of the joint liaison committee. In its meetings over the next few years, the committee should try to move further along that road.

I undertook to raise those points in the debate, and I have done so. It remains only for me to say to the Hong Kong people in general, in the words of the old hymn with which, as a Methodist preacher, I am very familiar:

"Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head."

11.4 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I have only five minutes so I shall put only a few thoughts on the record. First, I repeat the congratulations that have been given to my right hon. and learned Friend and his officials. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has taken its share of the blame for Britain's economic ills during the past 20 years, so let us recognise a success when we have one.

The agreement shows that differing political systems can be brought together in agreement when mutual interests can be identified. I strongly hope that the same mixture of firmness and patience, which my right hon. and learned Friend specialises in, can be brought to bear in the search for an agreement with Argentina over the Falklands and with the Soviet Union over arms control. I am glad that that skill has already yielded results in Gibraltar.

All the democratic institutions in the world will not save Hong Kong unless we preserve its economic prosperity and success. I should like to reinforce what the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) said about the future of Hong Kong's trading rights and quota allocations. I hope that Opposition Members were listening to him because some have little right to speak for Hong Kong when their protectionist policies for the United Kingdom would spell disaster for the employment prospects and prosperity of Hong Kong. I hope that when the protectionist tendency in the Labour party next raises its head it will remember this debate.

The People's Republic of China knows quite well that a Socialist Hong Kong is of no use to it. It is interesting that the agreement states not that Hong Kong may retain its capitalist lifestyle for the next 50 years but that it will do so. If some oriental Labour party were to take root in Hong Kong, it would find that its decrees were null and void if they conflicted with the basic law. It is fascinating that the world's largest Communist power is guaranteeing for 50 years the success of a capitalist offshoot.

How else is Hong Kong to be protected? How else is this delicate and vulnerable system to be preserved? Surely it is by building up Hong Kong's political confidence and ability. There will be many difficult times between now and 1997 and beyond. There will be ups and downs and moments of despair and gloom as well as of euphoria. That is the nature of any society that is founded on risk. As the moment of British withdrawal grows nearer, that security must be replaced by a home grown set of political institutions capable of taking the strain.

Right hon. and hon. Members have commented on the White Paper on representative government. I do not like the functional constituencies. I do not think that people should be represented according to whether or not they belong to some producer interest group. But the most important thing is not what form of election Hong Kong goes for but how the elected men and women are to control their Government. How are they to scrutinise the workings of the Civil Service and the Executive? Will there be a ministerial system? Is it right that officials should sit on those representative bodies? Not all of those decisions can be made now, or even soon, but time is short. We have only 12 years and the direction of the constitutional changes must be embarked on soon because Hong Kong cannot afford any mistakes. Other societies can afford one or two false starts, but not Hong Kong. Whatever system is chosen, it is vital that it should be supported by those twin pillars of democracy, a free press and the rule of law administered independently. Both now exist in Hong Kong and both are rare commodities in the world. Their preservation will be the real test of the agreement and of the sincerity of the People's Republic.

Personally, I am an optimist. I believe that developments in China towards greater personal and financial freedom are irreversible. There will, of course, be difficulties. China has problems, with its immense population pressures, rising expectations and a society and country far more diverse than we realise. Nevertheless, I believe that it is through its revolutionary stage and embarking on a long period of development, and it is important that this country should play a part in that economic development. There are 1 billion people in China, all with massive unfilled wants. I urge British business men to look to China rather than to the saturated markets of Europe for orders in the 1990s. China is not an easy market. It is not an easy country. Business men will have to get to know the provinces as well as Peking. They will have to invest both time and money. But if the future of the world is to revolve around the axis stretching from the United States to Japan and China, it is vital that this country plays a part.

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

I believe that the real achievement of this remarkable agreement will be if our extraordinary but fruitful relationship with Hong Kong can be translated into an equally exciting and peaceful relationship with the largest and most populous country in the world on the mainland.

11.11 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): This is a late hour in the House, but it is just dawn in Hong Kong. We understand that the debate is being taken live by the media there and that large numbers of people will have been listening through the night to our deliberations in the past five or six hours. Those who have listened here and elsewhere will recognise that it has been a wide-ranging and informed debate on a subject that the whole House has treated with appropriate seriousness. I still regret that the Government felt unable to allow two days for the debate. Despite the 10-minute rule, which ensured a reasonable number of contributions today, other Members on both sides who wished to express their views were no doubt deterred by the limited chance of being able to do so.

The gravity of the subject for the people of Hong Kong has been well recognised in the House, and very few of the fears, apprehensions and potentials have been left unexplored. That is right because, as has been stressed so many times today, this is an historic occasion for the House and for the people of Hong Kong. There are few examples in the world of such an amicable and equable transfer of sovereignty as this change will mean. For this nation, it is unique in that sovereignty is being passed not to an indigenous population but to another nation. Those facts emphasise the uniqueness both of Hong Kong's status since 1897 and of the new status promised from 1997. That status has been the root of Hong Kong's economic success so far and in it lies the basis for a future success based, as many hon. Members have said today, on the entry point to the massive Chinese market.

Some have characterised the debate as having a foregone conclusion. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) admitted that he introduced a jarring note into what has been a fairly unanimous debate. There was a weakness in his argument, however, in that he did not say how he would have achieved a better agreement or indeed what kind of better agreement could possibly have allayed the accusations of betrayal that inevitably come when such a traumatic change takes place.

Mr. Ashdown: I was rather careful to say that I think that the Government have done a good job. I was criticising the House and not the Government for not having a Member to express those fears in the way that they should have been expressed.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman was frank enough to admit that he had not been here for the whole of the debate, but he underestimates many of the fears that have been expressed, both in the assessment report and by right hon. and hon. Members in this debate.

Those who have said that the debate is a foregone conclusion are right in fact, even if they are misguided in tone, because the foregone conclusion was already there, as with the year 1997. As that year was predetermined, most of what has followed from it can be said to have been predetermined as well. However, the draft agreement whose terms we are being asked to endorse tonight was never a foregone conclusion, and nor were the details in it, which will provide a protective framework for Hong Kong society to continue virtually unchanged for at least 62 years.

As in all good negotiations—I speak as one who was a negotiator for more than nine years—the ground was prepared in advance for the likely outcome. However, few would have dared to make a prediction about the likely final package, however sceptical or optimistic one started out. The official Opposition have already commended the success of the negotiators, especially the professionals in the team, in achieving this agreement, and have deliberately, both in the negotiations and the subsequent reception of the results, sought to make no political capital out of a highly sensitive subject. It is as well to underline the point made by the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) that, if the same realism was shown in other negotiations on other subjects, many hon. Members would be happier about foreign policy.

Given the provocation of the Government in almost every other subject, the generosity in this one will be difficult to achieve again. However, we believe that to attack, undermine or harass the Government at times of such delicacy and confidentiality would have impeded progress and would have brought benefits only at the expense of the interests of the people of Hong Kong. Therefore, we are happy to do what right hon. and hon. Members have done today and commend the amount of detail in the agreement, the reassurance it provides on central issues such as freedom before the law, and for the signal that it more than anything represents—that the People's Republic of China is determined to maintain the uniqueness of Hong Kong and to protect the prosperity that has provided such benefits to the People's Republic.

There is a gamble associated with living as a populated merchant bank for a Communist state, but it will be no more of a gamble for those who have already lived in the immediate shadow of the cultural revolution, which scythed its way through China but left vulnerable, invadeable and easily established Hong Kong unscathed and unaffected.

Therefore, it is difficult to accept that China would have entered into such a visible, verifiable, legally binding agreement if it had no intention to abide by it. The valuable and cherished international reputation of China, its respectability in the eyes of traders and competitors and even superpower equals is on the line. The Chinese Government know it, we know it, and the commitments have been given with their eyes fully open.

A framework now exists, and it is in high international profile, for Hong Kong's future for at least 62 years. That is longer than most of us have any such detailed framwork to work within. Faith will perhaps be needed to make it work, but also realism and a common continuing concern for shared interests and perceptions. Shared interests, or the lack of them, dominate relations throughout the world and the position of the people of Hong Kong will be little different from that of the rest of us over the next few decades.

Much has been mde of the suggestion that has come from Hong Kong, first from Miss Lydia Dunn, and then endorsed by the rest of her colleagues in UMELCO, about the possibility of a continuing interest in Parliament and in the United Kingdom generally on progress within Hong Kong. Many of the detailed matters that have been raised in the debate, by the UMELCO submissions and, most

importantly, by the valuable report of the assessment office could not be raised fully in a debate such as this. They cannot even be debated while we discuss the legislation that will be introduced in the new year. They can be dealt with only over the years as events unfold.

The joint liaison group conducts its work and many of the issues which have been raised will be on its agenda. Now that the sensitive negotiations are over and the agreement has been made—it will probably be endorsed tonight—with the consent of the Hong Kong people, there is little need for secrecy and undue confidentiality. It has been said in the House and elsewhere that we have a duty to ensure that progress towards 1997 is open and accountable. That is why the idea of an annual report from the joint liaison group through the Government to Parliament and the possibility of a debate in the House on it are the minimum offers that we can make. Regular monitoring by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs is also a means of open administration that we should be willing to put forward.

Progress towards more representative institutions is the clumsy title which the Government of Hong Kong have used to describe a movement towards more democratic institutions. The creation of democratic institutions in Hong Kong has been resisted over the years, partly and mainly because the very suggestion of independence or self-determination has been enough to set alarm bells ringing in Beijing, which have caused experiments to be kept to a minimum. That reason for caution has gone. With sovereignty acceded, with the agreement in existence and with China's declaration that the next 12 years are Britain's responsibility alone, that major inhibition has fallen. Perhaps the overriding objection has also gone.

It was interesting to hear earlier this evening from the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who I regret is not in his place for the Front Bench replies. The right hon. Gentleman made a remarkable contribution, as we have come to expect from him over the past few weeks. I have usually enjoyed them. The discomfiture of those on the Government Front Bench has warmed the hearts of most of my right hon. and hon. Friends. However, I did not derive much comfort from the right hon. Gentleman this evening. He sought to advance a number of arguments that will not offer great comfort to many in Hong Kong. He suggested that a lack of democracy in Hong Kong was something we should regret and be ashamed of. He said that the arguments advanced for the proposed system have come from those in appointed places who want to enjoy keeping them.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup is not a humble Back Bencher. He is not in my position of being a relatively junior Member of the House who has enjoyed only a fragment of a moment of his party being in power. The right hon. Gentleman was Prime Minister from 1970 to 1974 and I would wager a considerable sum that the governor of Hong Kong during his period of office appointed many people. I would wager also that some of those who are in London this week representing UMELCO — nominated members of the Legislative Executive Council — were probably appointed under the Government who were headed by the right hon. Gentleman. It ill becomes him to start preaching democratic reforms at this stage in Hong Kong's development when he had it considerably in his power to do something substantial, constructive and fundamental to strengthen democracy in Hong Kong.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Robertson: No, I shall not give way.

Sir Paul Bryan: Why not?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman, from a sedentary position, asks "Why not?" The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has allegedly preached a doctrine in favour of the ordinary people of Hong Kong, but in a debate which began at about five o'clock the hon. Member for Macclesfield appeared at a quarter to eleven. That is why I shall not give way.

Fear of Chinese over-reaction was not the only inhibition on institutional change. I address my remarks also to my hon. Friends the Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and Wrexham (Dr. Marek). There still remains in Hong Kong the traditional Chinese antipathy to confrontational elections which my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) mentioned and, crucially, the problem of introducing elections into a society without any experience of them —in addition, a society with two substantial, externally motivated partisan electorates which we cannot ignore.

The progress towards the more elected and representative Government that is proposed in the White Paper is perhaps unduly cautious. The Government of Hong Kong must be ready in the 1987 review to consider holding direct elections and having a greater proportion of directly elected legislators and extra members than they seem willing to contemplate at the moment. The danger now is not of Chinese over-reaction to democratic reform but of insufficient time before 1997 in which to create a strong, viable, locally based system which will withstand the inevitable pressure and traumas as 1997 advances. The priority must remain that changes, reforms and improvements must proceed at a pace which does not threaten the all-precious stability and prosperity upon which Hong Kong's future security is based, but must be at a pace and of a nature moulded in Hong Kong by the people in Hong Kong whose future depends upon it.

Much has been made this evening of the institutions that exist in Hong Kong. As the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said in his brief but relevant contribution, side by side with the reform of government through elections in Hong Kong must go administrative reform. The accountability of the newly reformed institutions is as important as the elections themselves. The transition from colonial rule to a self-governing administrative region must involve open, accountable government at all levels.

I turn to the fraught question of nationality. The assessment office report has found grave dissatisfaction among some sections of Hong Kong life with the provisions in the memorandum of agreement on nationality. This is hardly a surprise since the same sense of let-down, disappointment and even accusations of betrayal occurred after the passage of the British Nationality Act. The attitude displayed this evening and the views expressed by the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) and the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) perhaps underline the feelings which were expressed at that time. But whatever provisions had been adopted on nationality then and now, the very fact of changing the particular status at present enjoyed by Hong Kong residents would have led to protest.

[Mr. Robertson]

Nobody who has enjoyed the right to the blue passport and the quasi imperial injunctions we have heard quoted this evening will ever lightly give it up. But some change was inevitable, given the magnitude of the new arrangements. However, some areas still need to be examined: first, those people who have been mentioned by a number of hon. Members who will be rendered stateless by the changeover. I welcome very much the Foreign Secretary's assurance that at the end of this process nobody will be left in that state.

Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said, we have to consider the circumstances of some people in Hong Kong for whom we have particular regard — those citizens who have, by virtue of their public work or background, reason to believe themselves vulnerable in the new circumstances. They will have to be given protection by Britain and they have a right to know it in advance. The Government must be prepared to give assurances on that soon.

Points have been raised this evening on the question of the basic law and the participation by the Hong Kong people in the drawing up of the Chinese basic law on the agreement. Nobody should, in considering that issue, under-estimate the problems of such a complex and unprecedented handover of power. That is why the implementation of this agreement is bound to throw up practical issues which can be dealt with only as they arise.

Some of those problems have been raised in this debate and they will be raised in the debates on the Bill that will come before Parliament in the new year. But the basic law is not within the power of this Parliament and it would be wise not to be transfixed by that issue at this time, especially as China has said that the process of drawing it up will take up to 10 years to complete.

Nevertheless, the demand from the Hong Kong people for a monitoring of the process must be taken note of and deserves attention. It is not for Britain to say yes or no to the request for Hong Kong's participation. That is up to China, and how persuaded it is of the merit of the idea. Our responsibility is and remains to ensure that the terms of the argeement are discharged and are eventually, before 1997, included in full in the basic law.

Many other matters have been raised in this debate. The international acceptability of the new status of Hong Kong is one obvious area that bothers hon. Members and will bother people in Hong Kong who know that their future prosperity will depend on its own international acceptability.

The question of conscription into the Chinese army and the location of elements of the Chinese army in or near Hong Kong has also been raised. There is the problem of the refugees, and, in particular, the Vietnamese boat people who are in Hong Kong in large numbers and whose status has still to be clarified. That will have to be taken up at a future date.

Those are matters of real and understandable apprehension, but not matters which we can raise in a debate of this nature. Those fears and apprehensions exist and must and will be pursued with the other subjects in the transition period until the handover.

The future of Hong Kong is not about institutions, be they social, economic or political. Nor is it about buildings or systems of concepts, however grand. It is about people who, over the past 88 years, came to live in Hong Kong in the knowledge that its incredible mixture of colony, free trade area, super-plan city and bastion of free expression had a finite life until 1997. They may have come to make money, for freedom, or to find cash or refuge. They may have come for a financial killing or for a way of life distant from arbitrary arrest or directed labour. Whatever they came for, they did so on time borrowed from the large neighbour next door.

Nevertheless, they are people who demand our attention and who deserve it, however great may be the historical accident which has placed their future in our hands. The next and crucial phase in Hong Kong's remarkable history is about to commence and we in this Parliament will play a pivotal part in making sure it promises all that those people, 8,000 miles away from us, really can expect. That will demand from us constant vigilance which we can readily pledge, but it will also demand a hard-headed realism on the part of the Hong Kong people, knowing that their future, perhaps for the first time, is completely in their own hands. How they choose to use it will determine the kind of society that they will inherit.

We shall discharge our obligations and our onerous responsibilities. We can offer no less. But we must do so conscious that our real obligation now is to provide the means, the machinery and the institutions which will put the momentous and personal decisions into the hands of Hong Kong's own people.

11.35 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): Ministers cannot often claim that a debate has been historic or moving, but without doubt I can claim that today's debate has been historic. It is a debate of great importance, and the range of contributions has been remarkable. I go further. The House has shown a tremendous sense of responsibility towards the 5·5 million people who live in Hong Kong, contrary to the contention of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who implied that hon. Members were not particularly bothered about the anxieties of the Hong Kong people. The debate has shown that they are concerned. The Assessment Office report also reveals that concern.

The British Government's duty is to do their best for the people of Hong Kong. That is precisely what we are doing now. We have a draft agreement which attempts to achieve just that. It has been widely welcomed in the House. The agreement should give the people of Hong Kong a chance and a feeling of hope for the future. It enables them to maintain their economic system and their way of life after 1997 and, as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, for at least 50 years thereafter. Whether he and I will still be around in 63 years' time I am not sure, but that is the agreement with the Chinese.

The agreement provides for continuity. It sets the framework for continuing continuity, stability and prosperity. It contains a large amount of detail to cover every facet of life among the Hong Kong people. It provides a high degree of autonomy and enables Hong Kong, after 1997, to administer itself and to run its own economic, financial and commercial affairs. It allows Hong Kong to continue to play a unique role in the world as a trading and financial centre. All that is placed in an

international agreement between the United Kingdom and China. We are talking about a unique agreement for a unique set of circumstances.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), my hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller), for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) and for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), and my right hon. Friends the Members for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) talked about the Government's responsibility in the next 12½ years. It is important to make it clear once again that the Government will maintain full responsibility for administering Hong Kong until 1997 and will continue to work hard to build up Hong Kong's strength and prosperity.

Many hon. Members suggested an annual report to the House of Commons. We shall take such ideas seriously and some system of regular accountability to the House is of great importance to the people of Hong Kong, as is the interest that right hon. and hon. Members will maintain over the next 12½ years.

There has been much discussion about the implementation of the agreement. As my right hon. Friend said, one can never, in this world, have an absolute guarantee, but we have a legally binding international agreement. More important than anything else in this matter is the fact that the best prospect for success is the self-interest of all the parties to make the agreement a success.

The hon. Members for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) and for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South have all stressed the self-interest of China in making this agreement work. China's economic interest, general policy on reunification and reputation for sticking to international agreements are factors that we are entitled to take into account. There is certainly a strong British interest in ensuring that the agreement works. I believe that the United Kingdom and China will work effectively together to fulfil our joint interest and our determination to honour this agreement. That self-interest on both our parts has been more important than anything else to the people of Hong Kong.

We have been considering the White Paper and the draft agreement in the context of the report of the assessment office and its conclusion that most Hong Kong people find the draft agreement acceptable. That conclusion was endorsed by the independent team of monitors who believed that the assessment office carried out its task accurately, fairly and impartially. The assessment office's report highlighted a considerable number of reservations and anxieties in the minds of the Hong Kong people. Many of those anxieties have been clearly and fully evoked by hon. Members during this debate, and rightly so. I want to assure the House that those views will be carefully borne in mind by the Government in any future discussions with the Chinese Government on the implementation of the agreement.

I should like to answer every contribution, but that would be extremely difficult. I shall, however, make that attempt. I assure hon. Members that if I miss their contributions I shall write them a letter answering their points if I can. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), the hon. Members for Hamilton and for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston), my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) and many other hon. Members raised the important subject of nationality. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has emphasised, the Government will introduce legislation in the new year to give effect to the nationality provisions in the United Kingdom memorandum. That will involve the creation of a new form of British nationality for former Hong Kong British Dependent Territory citizens who obtained a passport before July 1997. In general, they will enjoy the same benefits as British Dependent Territories citizens, except for the transmissibility of their status to their children.

During the negotiation, we argued strongly for transmissibility. The Chinese side that it could not in any circumstances accept it, and in the end, we had to accept this measure. The House will have the opportunity to debate further the nationality questions connected with that legislation. Individual rights of abode in the United Kingdom are not affected by the agreement. British Dependent Territory Citizens do not have this right of abode now, as the right hon. Member for South Down knows, nor will their future status carry that right. Rights of abode in Hong Kong are fully protected by the agreement.

The right hon. Member for South Down and I served together in Committee on the British Nationality Bill during the four months of its proceedings, and his speech did not come as a great surprise. The right hon. Gentleman is worried about the possible flow of immigrants into this country.

There are only an estimated 20,000 British citizens in Hong Kong. They have the right to enter and live in the United Kingdom, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. The 3 million or so British Dependent Territories citizens in Hong Kong do not have a right of abode in the United Kingdom and will not have it in 1997 if they acquire the new status for which they are eligible under the terms of the United Kingdom memorandum. Our efforts have been directed to achieving conditions under which people will not wish to leave Hong Kong. We believe that the agreement provides those conditions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford and my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) asked about travel documents and passports. According to section XIV of annex I of the Joint Declaration, residents of the SAR will be able to use travel documents issued by the SAR Government. They will record the holder's right to return to the SAR. The Chinese Government will assist or authorise the SAR Government to conclude visa abolition agreements with states or regions. Those who are on 30 June 1997 British Dependent Territories citizens by virtue of a connection with Hong Kong will be eligible to retain a status which will enable them to use British passports after that date. Those passports will make it clear that the holders have a right of abode in the SAR, and Her Majesty's Government will do all they can to secure for the holders of those passports the same access to other countries as that enjoyed at present by holders of British Dependent Territories citizens passports. There is no reason to believe that third countries will not recognise those passports.

There were several speeches in which the dangers of statelessness were raised. The hon. Member for Warley, East mentioned it, as did many other hon. Members. It is important that I should say something in addition to what my right hon. and learned Friend said. There are concerns which, understandably, are felt by members of the community in Hong Kong, that they might become stateless as a result of the agreement. We intend fully to comply with our obligations under the 1961 convention on

[Mr. Richard Luce]

the reduction of statelessness. It is possible that some British Dependent Territories citizens who may not be considered to be Chinese nationals will not acquire the new status in 1997. There is also the question of children born after 1997 to ex-British Dependent Territories citizens who are not considered to be Chinese nationals. I assure the House that we shall provide for such people to have a form of British nationality if they would otherwise be stateless. The House will have an opportunity to scrutinise the legislation in due course.

There were several questions about international help with resettlement. The question was raised by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) who is not here. Our aim all along in the agreement has been to provide security for the future of the people of Hong Kong in such a way that they would not wish to leave. We have a very good agreement which does just that, and I do not think this is the moment to be taking steps to ask other countries to assist with resettlement of the Hong Kong people. Other countries would find incomprehensible such a display of lack of faith in the agreement that we have just reached, and I cannot believe that they would find our arguments persuasive. Moreover, because it would display a lack of faith, it would inevitably be very unsettling for the very people in Hong Kong for whose security we are seeking to provide. Therefore, I suggest that that is not the best way of proceeding.

There have been speeches in the debate about the very important position of the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. That does not affect the agreement immediately. I am sure that my hon. Friends will understand it if I do not go into too much detail save to say that the matter is of very great concern to the British Government. We are very conscious of the important problems that it raises, particularly for the Hong Kong Government, with their very heavy responsibilities there. We are making every effort, in co-operation with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and with other countries, to seek permanent solutions to the problem of the Vietnamese refugees who are at present in Hong Kong.

A number of hon. Members have asked about consultation with the people of Hong Kong. In particular, I single out the Joint Liaison Group and the Basic Law, which were referred to by the hon. Member for Yeovil, the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley)—who gave me notice that he would not be present — and my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster among others.

There is not a great deal that I can add to what my right hon. and learned Friend said, except that we attach very great importance to the Joint Liaison Group as a forum for consultation with the Chinese Government over the implementation of the agreement. The detailed procedures will be worked out at a later stage, although the framework for its activities are already set out in annex II to the Joint Declaration. I expect the United Kingdom side of the Joint Liaison Group to include appropriate Hong Kong Government officials. The group will be an organ of diplomatic discussion between the two Governments. Therefore, it is likely that we shall have to keep participation at official level. But I remind the House that the range and sophistication of consultation in Hong Kong is now very strong, and I am certain that we shall be able to find ways of ensuring that the views of the people of Hong Kong are taken fully into account during the discussions in this important group.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Luce: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but if I am to do justice to the House I must proceed. I understand his concern, but I should try to answer the debate.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Thomas), and my hon. Friends the Members for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) and for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) asked about the Basic Law. As the House knows, the drafting of the Law is a matter for the Chinese Government. However, the agreement states that the policies described in the Joint Declaration and annex I will be stipulated in the Basic Law. We therefore already have a good idea of what it will contain.

The Chinese Government have made it clear that the people of Hong Kong will be consulted on its drafting, although the exact form of this consultation has not yet been specified. In the period between now and 1997, there will be a need for close co-operation between the British and Chinese Governments. The Joint Liaison Group exists for this purpose, and we look forward to a close and constructive partnership in that connection.

In his short but moving speech, the hon. Member for Carlisle spoke of basic freedoms, including religious freedoms. That is a matter of profound importance to the people of Hong Kong, and, as he knows, all existing freedoms will be stipulated as a result of this agreement in the Basic Law.

The constitutional development of Hong Kong has caused great interest and a large number of hon. Members have expressed legitimate concerns. We all fully accept that we should build up a firmly-based, democratic administration in Hong Kong in the years between now and 1997. The White Paper sets out the proposals on elections to the Legislative Council in 1985, after taking account of public comments on the earlier Green Paper. For the first time in Hong Kong, some Legislative Council members will be indirectly elected, rather than being appointed by the Government. The White Paper envisages a step-by-step approach — that is the right way of proceeding—to more representative government which takes fully into account Hong Kong's special circumstances and traditions.

A review of possible developments will be held in 1987 before the 1988 elections. Public reaction to the Green Paper in Hong Kong was generally in favour of its aims and of the gradual and progressive nature of its proposals. The public recognised the need to ensure that the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong are not put at risk by introducing too many constitutional changes too quickly. However, the Hong Kong Government have responded to public feeling by increasing the number of Legislative Council members to be elected in 1985 from 12 to 24. That is the sensible basis on which we should proceed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington asked about the position of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service. He was a distinguished member of it, as I was, so we have a joint interest in ensuring that its interests are safeguarded. We have its interests closely in mind. As my right hon. and

learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said, the draft agreement provides satisfactorily for continuity of service by serving officers in the public service in Hong Kong on terms and conditions, including pay and pensions, no less favourable than before, to 1 July 1997. The resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong by the People's Republic of China raises similar issues in respect of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service as independence has in other dependent territories. I remind my hon. Friend that the public officers' agreement, to which he referred, has generally been negotiated at the last moment before independence in the case of other independent territories, and signed after independence. Constitutional change is still more than 12 years away in Hong Kong and the Government have, and will continue to have, closely in mind the interests of that particular group of civil servants as well as of contract officers, other expatriates and local civil servants.

Other important points were raised, including points about defence and the position of the People's Liberation Army. Under the agreement, China would remain responsible for foreign affairs and defence, but public order will be the responsibility of the Special Administrative Region. The House will wish to take that division of responsibility fully into account.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) made an important point, which was backed up by my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford, on the question of Hong Kong's membership of international agreements. At present Hong Kong plays an important role in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the multifibre arrangement. The agreement allows its continued participation in GATT and any successor to the present MFA. It also provides that the Hong Kong SAR will have the status of a separate customs territory. A priority task of the joint liaison group will be to consider action to be taken by the British and Chinese Governments to enable the SAR to function as a separate customs territory and, in particular, to ensure the maintenance of its participation in GATT and other similar arrangements. We shall therefore work together to secure and protect Hong Kong's position. Given the widespread international good will expressed since the publication of the agreement, I have no doubt that our partners will show sympathy and support towards Hong Kong. We shall certainly work to that end.

The agreement has been widely praised as giving Hong Kong a strong chance of success. It was achieved under the supreme leadership of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary with the fullest possible professional support of the Governor of Hong Kong and other professional advisers, and in close co-operation with members of the executive council and legislative council under the leadership of Sir S. Y. Chung. That has made an outstanding contribution to the progress that we have made.

The Government have done their best. We have given the people of Hong Kong a firm basis on which to build a prosperous future. We and China will work as strongly as we can to make the agreement a success. The political will is there. We believe that it can and will succeed. The Government will work in the closest possible co-operation with other countries, especially China, to ensure that it is a success. For the next 12 and a half years we maintain full responsibility for Hong Kong and its administration. We expect and believe that the international community will give its support to us in this. It is in the British interest that this agreement should succeed, and I am confident that the people of Hong Kong will work hard to make it a success. I therefore strongly commend the agreement to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, having considered the views of the people of Hong Kong as set out in the reports of the Assessment Office and the Independent Monitoring Team published in White Paper, Cmnd. 9407, approves Her Majesty's Government's intention to sign the agreement on the future of Hong Kong negotiated with the Chinese Government, which was published in White Paper, Cmnd. 9352.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 10th December, Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Jenkin relating to the draft Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 with the substitution of One o'clock or three hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later, for the provisions in paragraph (1)*(b)* of the Standing Order.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

PETITION

Human Embryos

12 midnight

Mr. David Mudd (Falmouth and Camborne): I beg leave to present a petition signed by 939 of my constituents who have expressed concern over the contents of the Warnock report. I join with them in that concern.

The petition states:

> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned). And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

British Telecom Computer Centre, Portsmouth

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

12.1 am

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am fortunate to have the opportunity of this Adjournment debate so soon after the unfortunate occurrence in Portsmouth involving the closure of BT's computer centre.

I have the dubious pleasure—if that is the right word—of being the first Member of Parliament to challenge the consequences of BT's privatisation and the effects on employees, many of whom have given BT very loyal service only to find in the opening days of privatisation that their jobs are at risk and that the centre in Portsmouth will close.

I do not believe that the tragic upheaval and trauma facing those people has been seriously considered by the management of BT. Indeed, I do not believe that the Government considered that prior to privatisation. Anyone reading the Act that allowed BT to change hands, would find it very difficult to discover provisions that gave the House any responsibility. Surely, it should have shown some loyalty to the staff who have worked for so long within BT's organisation.

The closure is a double loss for Portsmouth, which has the worst unemployment of anywhere on the south coast and which is desperately trying to encourage the sort of industry represented by that computer centre. The job prospects of the 150 people working at the centre, and of the young people in the area who have been trained in those sophisticated skills, will be lost. Presumably, as far as BT is concerned, they will be lost for ever.

There has been a complete loss of morale among the staff at the computer centre and a waste of good-will. Indeed, that centre had a marvellous industrial relations record and its employees had given loyal and devoted service in the interests of the Government. The waste of public money alone prompted me to write to the Public Accounts Committee, urging it to investigate the closure. About £20 million of the taxpayers' money will go down the tube when the centre closes. That money was hard-earned in the first instance, and, having had the privilege of seeing round the centre, I agree with the employees there that the money was well spent, too. It will now simply be frittered away.

British Telecommunications has behaved in a most deceitful way. The decision was made before privatisation took effect, but was deliberately suppressed. Indeed, I believe that the management of BT came clean only after my final letter to the regional director in which I suggested that unless I received an answer within 14 days I would raise the matter in the House and ask the Minister to confirm what the future of the site was to be.

The decision was deliberately suppressed before privatisation, and carried out afterwards. Adopting a phrase used recently in the House, I would say that BT is playing bingo with other people's money. The real losers will be the employees at the centre.

The centre was brought into being in 1980 after pressure from local Members of Parliament, the staff sides and the regional management of BT. It was opened in 1981 at an initial cost of £500,000 for the building, a conversion and adaptation cost of £1 million and some £7·5 million for the equipment installed at the time. The site was a disused warehouse, so the centre made use of surplus land in the city. It became a centre of employment offering jobs for over 150 people.

According to BT, the centre is recognised as the most cost-effective centre in the country. BT has itself recognised the fact that the work load at the centre is extremely heavy and that it does a good job. Indeed, despite the closure, BT has agreed to spend nearly another £4 million on enhancing the equipment there and will be taking on about another 100 people. It was a sad reflection on the members of the management of BT that in their recent letter to me they made it clear that anyone taken on after next January to cover the workload would be told that the job would be a very short-term experience. The £4 million is to be added to the colossal amount of money already consumed by the centre. It will simply be thrown away.

The centre's work covers an enormous area. It deals with 3·5 million subscribers' accounts and the ordering and work load of 12 telephone areas. The centre is being closed, apparently, because BT wants to adopt a new concept — the front office concept. To arrive at that decision it has had to dabble in new types of computer and to consider different practices in this country and abroad. For instance, BT bought the Cincinnati-Bell system. BT in fact experimented to the tune of about £17 million of taxpayers' money, which has subsequently been written off because the experiment was a complete failure. If BT has learnt nothing else, it should surely have learnt that the centre in Portsmouth is worth saving. Its equipment has been tried and tested. Its staff has responded to the job given to it.

Because of the establishment of the new districts, the need arises to absorb the existing computer centres within BT's new district organisation. A problem thus arises for three of the existing centres — Portsmouth, Derby and Rochdale. The problem has been alleviated in Derby and Rochdale because BT has suggested that, because those centres are close to the areas that they serve, they can be absorbed. It is ludicrous that a company such as BT, which we are told almost daily is in forefront of new technology, finds it impossible to base a computer centre in Portsmouth to communicate with Brighton, which is only 46 miles in one direction, or Southampton, which is 25 miles in the other.

There must be a better way of doing things. The Minister could use his influence with BT management on at least two. The centre could remain open and meet the needs of the south downs district—the new name for the district in which Portsmouth will be based. The distance from Portsmouth to Brighton, the district headquarters, should not pose a problem. If we can cover the world by satellite I am sure that we can bridge 46 miles. The city has well established data communication links. A precedent for that solution has already been set at Derby and Rochdale. The centre can justify its existence as it can cope with the work load. Indeed the south downs district will represent a slight reduction in its work load.

The second solution is that the centre could remain open and meet the computing requirements of the Southampton district. No decision has been made about the Southampton computer site, so it is not too late for BT to

designate Portsmouth as the centre which deals with the Southampton area. Such a solution would use existing expertise and capital investment.

I hope that the Government have the wit to recognise that they have an obligation to the centre's employees and to youngsters who need the type of jobs that the Secretary of State for Education and Science constantly tells us people should train for. Our city needs the jobs. The Government should use their influence with BT management in that regard. What proportion of BT computing staff are employed at Portsmouth? How many jobs are likely to be created in BT computing in 1985 and 1986? What guarantees do Portsmouth employees have that they will be selected for those posts? Why is BT unable to use its data communication technology to retain Portsmouth as a centre for Brighton and Southampton when it currently covers areas as far away as Norwich and Cambridge and has data links with sites as far away as Edinburgh? What proportion of the money that is to be spent in the next four or five years developing the front office concept—the real culprit—is needed to retain the Portsmouth centre?

Finally, what will be the total cost of making staff at Portsmouth redundant and the cost of redeployment throughout BT? BT itself suggests that it will cost about £17,000 per employee to transfer staff to other sites. For th staff, many of whom have given 20 years service at the Portsmouth centres, the most annoying aspect is that they will have to apply for their own jobs. Not one of them has the right to have his own job guaranteed to him. That is a very sick, sad state of affairs.

Under the Act the Secretary of State has specific powers to use his influence to instruct the Director General of Telecommunications as to the way in which the service should be run. He has a specific responsibility, given to him by this House, to promote the interests of consumers, purchasers and users. It cannot be beyond the wit of anyone to see that that responsibility must be used to investigate what I consider to be the scandal of the proposed closure of the Portsmouth centre, the absolute waste of countless millions of pounds of taxpayers' money and the writing off and disregard of the loyalty and integrity of the staff.

I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this matter before the House today and I hope that the response will be an initiative by the Government to see whether there is any way in which they can express their concern and their willingness to try to direct British Telecom to retain the Portsmouth centre.

12.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) has asked for ministerial intervention in the detailed local affairs of a large private sector company and I have listened carefully to all that he has said. I was a little surprised at the somewhat intemperate language of his harsh and, I believe, unfair criticism of British Telecom. I do not wish for a moment to give the impression that it is not right for him to pursue the interests of his constituents in whatever way he sees fit. Nevertheless, although there may well be value in a public airing of a perceived problem, there is no substitute for direct approaches to the management of the company in a case of this kind.

I can answer many of the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but on the extremely detailed matters that he raised in the latter part of his speech, although I am anxious to respond, I am afraid that I shall have to look up the details and reply to him by letter.

The hon. Gentleman has already sought a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the hope of persuading him to intervene but has been told that there is nothing that Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry can do. It may be helpful if I clothe that rather bare statement with some more general explanation.

The operations of British Telecom, like those of any large employer, are of interest to a wide range of people — individual and business customers, suppliers and employees. There is also room for interest in its operations from the wider standpoint of the role that the company can play in encouraging growth in the economy through its research and development. Individual Members of Parliament may have points to raise wth a company from any of those standpoints, but it is understandable that the aspect that most are quickest to raise concerns decisions affecting employment. Such decisions, however, have to be made in the context of the company's overall objectives. Among these, in the case of British Telecom, the provision of an efficient service to customers rightly, in my view, ranks high.

The hon. Member has, I believe, been in correspondence with British Telecom which will no doubt have told him that the local communications services division, the division with the main direct contact with the public, is at present being re-organised—the hon. Member touched on this—into 24 management districts in place of the former 61 areas. I would not think it useful to debate the merits of the new structure here, except to say that British Telecom is satisfied that it will help to make the company more responsive to its customers. That must be welcome to us all. Similarly, I would not see merit in exchanging views on just why one area headquarters is chosen to be the headquarters of one of the new and larger districts, while another is not. Most of us in such a discussion would stick up for the case of the headquarters in or near our own constituency, although we would recognise that there may be good company reasons for preferring another location. It happens that the British Telecom decision has been to make Brighton the headquarters of the south downs British Telecom district rather than Portsmouth, and it also happens that the proposed rundown of the Portsmouth computer centre is part of a similar reorganisation of the computer back-up that the new reorganisation in districts needs.

It is the right of the hon. Member to seek further explanations from the British Telecom management, who will I am sure take careful note of all that is said in tonight's debate. I understand that the British Telecom director concerned, who would be very happy to see the hon. Member, is Mr. Noel Tappenden, who can be contacted at Telecom Centre, Newgate street. I have, however, no reason to suppose that British Telecom has not weighed carefully the points that have been made about the development of the Portsmouth computer centre and the capital expenditure involved in it.

The hon. Member argued in the earlier part of his speech that had British Telecom still been a nationalised industry the Government would have been in a position to intervene in a matter of this kind. Perhaps they would with an Alliance or Labour Government, but it has been this

[Mr. David Trippier]

Government's firm policy to give the nationalised industries the maximum possible freedom to reach their own commercial decisions on such matters. Therefore, if this point had been raised two, three or four years ago my answer would have been that this must be a matter for the business judgment of the corporation's board, and I would have invited the hon. Member to take it up with British Telecom direct.

If that were inappropriate then, it is surely doubly inappropriate now. I think that everybody in the country must have noticed that in the past few days British Telecom entered the private sector. It has entered the private sector with more than 2 million small shareholders, considerably more than any other private sector company in the country.

Mr. Hancock: Surely, if this had happened two years ago, the hon. Gentleman, as a responsbile Minister of the Crown, would have wanted to investigate how about £20 million worth of investment since 1980-81 had been written off after such a short time. Would he not have questioned carefully the management of BT about the ethics of doing this, and about the merits of pursuing a policy that will lead the company to spend about £20 million developing another centre in place of the one in Portsmouth?

Mr. Trippier: I am anxious not to encourage the hon. Gentleman to make another speech, but I draw his attention to a number of Adjournment debates in which I have participated, referring specifically to the Post Office, rather than to BT. He will find a common denominator in my replies to those debates, in that I said that we do not interfere in the commercial judgment of the Post Office, which is not privatised.

The Government meant what they said in the prospectus of BT. We said that we did not intend to use our shareholding—to which the hon. Gentleman referred—to intervene in the commercial decisions of the company.

The hon. Member surely cannot expect us to intervene now with the company in what is an entirely commercial decision of its own. It would be a complete breach of faith with those 2 million new private shareholders for us to do so, and I am sure that the hon. Member will understand that.

I understand that British Telecom has replied fairly recently to the hon. Gentleman, setting out its intentions and the arrangements for the full consultation that it has in mind. We should bear in mind also that it is not proposed that the closure should take place until 1988. If the hon. Gentleman and his constituents wish to avail themselves of the opportunity, there can be considerable consultation with the company before then. The hon. Gentleman should understand that it is no good trying to enlist us in his support, and he will understand well that it is not my place to go into the merits of the decision.

The hon. Gentleman has made much of the situation in Portsmouth and its employment problem. I do not deny that problems exist and that they are a source of much concern locally. However, I feel that he does less than justice to the splendid efforts of the Portsmouth city council, of which he is still a member and, by all accounts, an active one.

The city council's promotion of new industrial and commercial developments, together with the encouragement of tourism, have done much to mitigate the effects of the rundown of the naval dockyard, which for so long dominated the local economy. By its diversification, the city council is laying the foundations for future prosperity.

As I am sure the hon. Gentleman well knows, I have had the privilege of visiting Portsmouth on a number of occasions. I have always been struck during these visits by the initiative and enterprise displayed by the city council. These are key ingredients for success.

Many of the initiatives have been on the small firms front, and here I must declare an interest. I have always been conscious when speaking in Portsmouth — where initiatives to help small businesses abound — that I preach to the converted when I tell the City Fathers that this sector is so very important for our future prosperity.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the foundations for future prosperity are being laid locally by the city council. There is an exercise in self-help taking place there. The community is pulling itself up by its bootstraps. For its part, my Department has contributed nearly £3 million in grants under its support for innovation programme towards 19 projects since 1979. It is supporting also the Portsmouth ITEC, as the hon. Gentleman will know.

Our general economic policies are creating the conditions in which businesses of all sizes and types can flourish. Business in Portsmouth, which has the full support of the city council, is well placed to take full advantage of the opportunities that we have created.

I have referred to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the Portsmouth computer centre would not be run down if British Telecom were not being privatised. I want to lay stress on the argument that I advanced earlier. I think that the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is entirely wrong. British Telecom's decision arises from its increasingly commercial attitude as it is faced with commercial competition. It is nothing to do with privatisation. The Government can take some responsibility for British Telecom's commercial attitudes, as we have encouraged the competition and appointed the present strong management at British Telecom. To that extent the hon. Gentleman can reasonably lay some of the responsibility for British Telecom's commercial decisions at the Government's door. But the sale of British Telecom to the public is a quite different matter. This complements the decisions taken earlier but does not directly affect the reorganisation of computer services of concern to the hon. Gentleman.

This reorganisation is part of a policy which has brought the public great benefits—a far better service for customers, lower real prices for telecommunication services as a whole and a more efficient management of resources. That must be generally welcomed.

It is important to stress the Government's standpoint in British Telecom and other employers enlarging the number of jobs that they can maintain viably and not shirking the need to make organisational changes where these would enable a more efficient service to be provided. When the modest reductions in employment in British Telecom are considered, thought should be given also to the increased employment resulting from other companies taking advantage of the new competitive environment. As I said earlier, Portsmouth should be well able to take the closure of British Telecom's computing centre in 1988 in its stride.

I shall not intervene in the hon. Gentleman's dispute on behalf of his constituents with British Telecom. I cannot and should not do so, and it would be a breach of faith with the 2 million new shareholders to do so. The hon. Gentleman might like to think how he would convince those many thousands of the 2 million who live in his constituency that it is in their interests for British Telecom to preserve these jobs at any cost. For the power to determine the future of British Telecom has now been transferred to them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

North Sea Herring

1. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in negotiations between the European Economic Community and Norway on the shareout of the herring stock in the North sea.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): Negotiations between the Community and Norway on the arrangements for 1985 under the EC-Norway fisheries framework agreement are continuing. While there has been some progress, no agreement has so far been reached on the respective allocations to the Community and to Norway for herring in the North sea.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that informative reply. Will he assure the House that when the negotiations continue on 11 and 12 December in Oslo he will ensure that, if there is any question of an agreement being reached on herring stocks in particular, he will safeguard the interests of the British fleet in order to ensure that total allowable catches are not reduced?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can assure him that at the Council meeting on Tuesday this week the Council insisted on maintaining the Commission's firm line on negotiations on Norway's herring demands, which we regard as unreasonable. That was the position that we took. It is better to delay rather than rush negotiations in order to arrive at an acceptable conclusion.

Dr. Godman: While the Minister is dealing with fisheries agreements between the EEC and other maritime nations, will he tell us whether it is true that one of the major remaining stumbling blocks in the current continuing negotiations between Spain and the EEC is a fisheries agreement? What concessions are likely to be made by the EEC to Spain over fisheries, and what concessions will the EEC demand of Spain in the negotiations?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will have seen that agreement was reached at the Council this week on the negotiating position that the Community should take in relation to fisheries and enlargement. The Community is taking a firm line to protect British fishery interests. It would obviously be unwise to reveal the entire negotiating position, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the decisions reached this week at the summit were satisfactory to us.

Mr. Mark Hughes: Will the Minister accept that it might have been to the convenience of the House if he had answered written question No. 122 today in the name of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on the outcome of the meeting of the Council on this question rather than try to hide it away in a written answer?

Mr. MacGregor: I would have much preferred to answer it now, but it is a lengthy answer which will be given later this afternoon. However, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point and wish that it could have been taken into account today.

Milk

2. **Mr. Knox** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the Government's attitude towards the milk co-responsibility levy.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): The Government are opposed to the co-responsibility levy, since it has not been effective in controlling the milk surplus.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever the previous justification for the levy might have been, the introduction of milk quotas and the super levy have rendered it completely unnecessary? Does he hold out much prospect of getting rid of it in the near future?

Mr. Jopling: I hope that when we reach the next price fixing in the early months of next year we shall be able to obtain a cut in the levy in the context of a tough prices policy.

Mr. Nicholson: Is the Minister aware that farmers in Northern Ireland will pay almost £7 million this year in co-responsibility levy on top of £5 millon in dairy quota levy? Will the Minister assure the House that he will add his weight to the abolition of the co-responsibility levy, as it is now unnecessary after the introduction of dairy quotas?

Mr. Jopling: I am intrigued to hear the hon. Gentleman's comment about the level of dairy quota levy that might be payable in Northern Ireland for this year, because he is making assumptions about the amount of milk likely to be produced between now and the end of March. As I said, we are opposed to the co-responsibility levy and will seek a cut.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Which, if any, members of the EEC favour the retention of the levy following the introduction of quotas instead of financial measures?

Mr. Jopling: I regret to say that some EEC member states are in favour of the co-responsibility levy in varying degrees. If none had been, it would have been easier to get rid of the thing.

Mr. Torney: As the dairy quota scheme seems to have overtaken the co-responsibility levy, is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that the scheme is being operated adequately by other member countries, particularly France, in the way that Britain is honouring it?

Mr. Jopling: I have no grounds for supposing that the co-responsibility levy is being improperly or illegally implemented in any member state. If the hon. Gentleman has any evidence of that, I hope that he will send it to me with the greatest possible urgency.

Mr. Harris: Instead of hoping for a cut, will my right hon. Friend go further and press for the complete abolition of this discredited levy?

Mr. Jopling: The problem that we must face is that if we were simply to scrap the levy without at the same time operating a firm prices policy we could create possibilities of there being incentives at some future time to increase milk production in the event of the quota scheme being abandoned. I still hope that at the end of the five-year period we shall be able to abandon the quota scheme and return to a market that is managed, as it should be, by the discipline of price.

Aujeszky's Disease

3. **Mr. Freud** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the evaluation and administration of claims by his Department as a result of Aujeszky's disease; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Peggy Fenner): A number of representations have been made about the Aujuezky's disease control and eradication programme, in particular in relation to the cost of the scheme and the Ministry's handling of the salvage operation. My right hon. Friend the Minister answered questions on these points at a recent meeting of the Select Committee on Agriculture, making it clear that he did not accept these criticisms.

Mr. Freud: Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary reconsider her decision not to give further assistance to the eradication scheme? Will she accept that pig farmers are the most ill-fated of the members of the National Farmers Union, and will she do something to help them?

Mrs. Fenner: No, Sir. The industry opted for the scheme after a second poll and did so on the basis of the industry paying for the scheme. The second poll enforced that.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary stop trying to get round the fact that the scheme has already cost more than twice as much as the Department originally estimated and is now adrift by about £15 million? Do the Government want to eradicate Aujeszky's disease? If so, why will the Minister not accept responsibility to underwrite a fair proportion of the cost?

Mrs. Fenner: I welcome the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) to the Dispatch Box. Estimates at the inception of disease control programmes are necessarily speculative. The producer poll form—the original document—emphasised the difficulties of estimating and stated that the net cost might be at least £6 million, excluding consequential loss payments of £3·5 million, paid against Ministry advice, and interest payments.

Mr. McQuarrie: Does my hon. Friend accept that the cost was £27 million and that at the present moment the actual debt due on Aujeszky's disease eradication is £15·4 million? Should not the Minister consider that and not penalise the producers?

Mrs. Fenner: As I have just said, at the second poll the producers asked for matters to be arranged in this way and they did so on the basis that the pig disease eradication fund would pay.

"The Way Forward"

4. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the Government's response to the National Farmers Union's policy paper, "The Way Forward."

Mr. Jopling: This is in general a helpful statement of the National Farmers Union's views on the directions which future agricultural policy should take. I look forward to reading the more detailed paper which the NFU is now producing.

Mr. Baldry: Does not that policy paper show that the NFU is anxious to contribute to a policy of responsible use of resources on the land, but that it is confused about what the rest of society wants from it? As agriculture has been successful for many years and has produced ever more food, the NFU now regards the problem of surpluses as one on which society says that it does not want so much food. In addition to a more detailed paper from the NFU, would there not be some merit in the Government producing a White Paper on what we want farmers to produce and future agricultural policy?

Mr. Jopling: The Government have worked extremely hard on these lines for several months. As part of our thoughts on these matters we are interested to have the views of the NFU and other similar bodies. We must get the general guidelines that we think it right to give clear in our minds before thinking about what method might be used to put out those views.

Mr. Ron Davis: Is the Minister not somewhat embarrassed by the fact that the NFU is now proving to be more radical in terms of agricultural policy than the Government? Is he aware that the report calls for a better relationship and a different approach to agriculture so that environmental objectives can be properly taken into account? Does the right hon. Gentleman have any firm objectives to meet in response to the NFU's paper?

Mr. Jopling: I welcome the NFU's views on conservation matters. Farmers and others have welcomed initiatives that my Ministry has taken. Perhaps I could draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to our initiative in Brussels to introduce conservation matters to the new structures directive, which we shall discuss again in Brussels on Monday and Tuesday.

Mr. Cockeram: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, now that the NFU accepts that there is a need to restrain the production of agricultural surpluses, that represents a unique opportunity for the partnership between the Government and agriculture to plan the future? Will my right hon. Friend take an initiative in that respect?

Mr. Jopling: We are all glad that the NFU has been sufficiently responsible to recognise that it is not possible to continue having an agricultural policy which is based on increasing production almost at any price. We must

consider together how to cope with surpluses. The problems of structural surpluses generally arise from support price levels. I hope that we can get an agreement that action on prices is the right response to the problem.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister tell the NFU that the Think Tank report of November 1983 forecast that subsidies for British farming in 1984-85 would be £1,000 million and that that, added to CAP assistance, would be equivalent to a subsidy of £20,000 per farmer? As farmers do not pay rates, will the right hon. Gentleman have a word with the Prime Minister after he has met the NFU and ask how the Government can manage to subsidise farmers to that extent when somehow or other they cannot manage to look after pits and miners? We are not after £20,000 per miner—we will settle for less than that.

Mr. Jopling: I do not want to make any remarks about the current miners' dispute. If every group in Britain had made the contribution to the British economy that agriculture has made since the war, Britain would be a great deal better off.

Diet and Disease (Report)

5. **Sir Peter Mills** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has come to any decisions about the report of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy on Diet and Disease.

Mrs. Fenner: Our officials are examining those recommendations of the report which fall within our responsibility, and are discussing their implications with interested parties. We hope to be able to make an announcement of our response to the report within the next three months.

Sir Peter Mills: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that a greater threat to the dairy industry than milk quotas is the health lobby? The continually declining level of consumption of milk products must be taken seriously by the Government. Will she also bear in mind that doctors and others have phases and fads? A few years ago we were told not to eat bread and potatoes, but now we have to eat them for roughage purposes, and some of us are chewing the cud in the evenings.

Mrs. Fenner: The report recognises that the evidence is short of proof, but the recommendations are based on a careful review of all the available evidence, and the report represents the best scientific and medical advice that is available to the Government. The nation's health is of vital importance. Changes in diet resulting from that report will not take place overnight. They will result from consumer choice. The trend to healthy diet has already begun and is not an attack on a particular sector. I assure my hon. Friend that consumers are free to choose their own healthy diet.

Mr. Cohen: Is the Minister not ashamed of the United Kingdom's conspicuous placing in the world's coronary league? The separate countries of the United Kingdom —[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—are in three of the top five places for males — [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—I am going to say it anyway. And in two —[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] of the top five for females, for cardiovascular disease.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Fenner *rose*——

Mr. Cohen: I have not finished yet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may have a quick look at his question, but he should not read it.

Mr. Cohen: I am going to have my say, because this is an important matter.

Does the Minister share the concern of the medical profession for Government action to improve food quality? [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Why do the Government not take preventive measures such as those that have been adopted in the United States, Canada, Australia and Scandinavian countries, which have had an impact on heart disease, or has she completely sold out to the vested interests in the big food corporations?

Mrs. Fenner: Of course the Government are concerned, and that is why COMA produced this considerable report, which we are studying. We are also looking at the ways in which we can implement those recommendations that require action by my Department.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I welcome the tinge of encouragement in the Minister's reply, but does she accept that not enough is done towards the prevention of disease rather than trying to cure it? Will she use her influence on her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and bring to bear whatever powers she can to make him realise the crucial need for prevention?

Mrs. Fenner: The import of the report was to encourage prevention. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's criticism. At the moment we are looking at the practicalities of the problems of labelling food with a fat content. We are having discussions with consumers and enforcement authorities on the best way to do this. We are commissioning a study of consumer attitudes and understandings of labelling, because if we are to label we want to be sure that the labels are intelligible. We are discussing with the drink trade alcoholic strength labelling, and we are discussing with industry how it can introduce ways to produce food with less fat and less salt. I am sorry to answer at some length, but the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) questioned the action that we are taking, so I have told him about it.

Eggs, Poultry and Pigmeat

6. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, following recent reductions in cereal prices, there has been an increase in the United Kingdom's production of eggs, poultry and pigmeat.

Mr. MacGregor: It is too early for the recent fall in cereal prices to have been reflected in the production levels of intensive livestock.

Mr. Hunter: Bearing in mind the cyclical nature of the intensive livestock sector, does my hon. Friend believe that reduced cereal prices will have a long-term benefit for that sector, especially as regards its competitiveness in the Common Market?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree that it will have a considerable beneficial effect. In the many discussions that I have with the industry, especially the pig industry, we are agreed that one of the main ways in which it can be benefited is through lower feeding stuff prices. That is one of the areas where the Government can help most

while maintaining our efforts in the Community to get longer-term restraint on cereal prices. That helps both with margins for producers and in making sure that the products are competitive. But I agree with the Select Committee, which pointed out that the problem of cyclical instability will not be resolved by adjustments to prices of feeding stuffs alone and therefore that it is necessary to continue to have action within the industry on marketing, processing and matching output to demand.

Mr. Home Robertson: In reviewing the prices and the production of these commodities, will the Minister assure the House that he will not favour the closure of uneconomic farms or the obliteration of agricultural communities? Will he also commend that enlightened policy so that it can be adopted by another member of the Administration in another strategic and vital primary industry?

Mr. MacGregor: It is essential to get the support pricing policy right in the Community, in order to avoid excessive costs to the taxpayer. Within that there are always structural adjustments in agriculture. That has been taking place over many years, and I believe that it will continue to do so.

Mr. Jackson: With regard to the future course of cereal prices, it seems clear that the guarantee thresholds agreed this year will have been triggered by the output. The rumour is that it may require a reduction in target prices of about 5 per cent. at the next price fixing. Is it my hon. Friend's intention to insist that those guarantee thresholds are honoured in full?

Mr. MacGregor: We have not yet seen the new Commission's proposals, but I can assure my hon. Friend that it is the Government's view that cereals are best dealt with by a clear policy of long-term price restraint. Within that my hon. Friend is right to say that guarantee thresholds will bite next year, and we shall expect them to do so.

Mr. Beggs: Is the Minister aware that grain prices continue to rise in that part of the United Kingdom that I represent? Does he also recognise that if it continues it will lead to a further decrease in the production of eggs and pig and poultrymeat and possibly to further job losses? Will the Minister consider again releasing some intervention grain to Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: We have to follow Community rules on the release of intervention grain, but I take note of what the hon. Gentleman said, and I shall consider it.

Dairy Industry

7. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the present state of the dairy industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The dairy industry is showing that it has the enterprise and will to cope with the quota system constructively. When we have achieved a better balance in the market, the industry will be on a more sound and stable basis for the future.

Mr. Howells: Will the right hon. Gentleman assure British dairy farmers that he will abolish the basic co-responsibility levy in 1985. Can he give the House the latest information about which countries in the Community are collecting the super levy, and what is the position in Britain?

Mr. Jopling: I answered the hon. Gentleman's first question earlier. I hope that in 1985 we can get a cut in the levy in the context of a tough price policy.

The hon. Gentleman also asked which countries were currently collecting the super levy. As far as I am aware, the only country which has collected it up to now—and no payments become due until 14 December—is West Germany. We shall be discussing these matters at the Agriculture Council in Brussels on Monday and Tuesday.

Sir Michael Shaw: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great desire in the industry that the uncertainty over future quota levels should be resolved as soon as possible so that some stability can be returned to the industry?

Mr. Jopling: I am aware that problems still exist because some producers do not know the final level of their quota. It is to quicken this process that we have agreed to treble the size of the tribunal from 30 to 90 members.

Mr. Kennedy: Is the Secretary of State satisfied with the effect that the outgoers scheme is having on the price of stock within the industry? As the Treasury appears to be in a concessionary mood this week, will he take steps to try to persuade it to relieve dairy farmers in the scheme of the capital gains tax imposition, which falls so heavily on the first payment?

Mr. Jopling: I invite the hon. Gentleman to compare the price of dairy cows for the current period with that of a year ago. He will find that, whereas a few months back prices were running somewhat below last year's, the gap has closed considerably and the difference in price is now very small.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the unnecessary stresses within the industry is caused by the lack of flexibility between the wholesale quota and the direct sales quota? Can he sustain pressure on his colleagues within the Council of Ministers to achieve this very necessary flexibility?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend is right to highlight this lack of flexibility as perhaps the greatest single difficulty in implementing the scheme. I have been drawing the attention of the Council of Ministers to the problem of inflexibility between direct and wholesale quotas ever since the summer. I shall raise the issue again when I go to the Council next week.

Mr. John: Does the Minister accept that the fact that we are not likely to achieve the quota in the United Kingdom this year speaks volumes about the haste and the lack of forethought preceding the introduction of the milk quota scheme? Will he direct his mind to two further questions, one of which follows previous supplementary questions? When does he think that the uncertainties over quotas and appeals will be ended for the dairy industry? Secondly, as dairy workers are losing jobs because of their efficiency, and not inefficiency, should not the Government be turning their mind to proper redundancy terms so that these workers can be helped at a difficult time?

Mr. Jopling: I begin by welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new duties. I hope that he will enjoy his

wide-ranging and highly complicated brief. I am sure that we shall have a good many tough debates between ourselves.

It is a fact that we have, so far, cut our milk production below the level of our quota for the period that we are discussing. I reject the suggestion that there was a lack of foresight. The answer lies in the considerable drought in the summer. Some of my colleagues in the Council of Ministers have approached me and expressed some envy in that they did not have the same drought, which reduced milk production.

When do I expect all farmers to have received the final levels of their quota? I am not able to answer that question. The tribunal—as I have said, it has been enlarged—has a great many appeals and exceptional hardship cases before it. However, it is too early to estimate when farmers will know their quotas. We are moving as quickly as we can.

The hon. Gentleman asked about compensation payments for dairy workers who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs because of the reduced number of dairies. I draw his attention to answers that have been given on many occasions. These answers refer to the statutory scheme for redundancies and the special arrangements that are made by many of the dairies.

Farm Wardens

8. **Mr. Conway** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hours of training his Department's farm wardens will require to enable them to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Mrs. Fenner: Farm wardens would be appointed from people with a good knowledge of farms and farmers in their area. Their job would be to provide a link between these farmers and the Department's wartime organisation. Their training would be simple and I am confident that appointment and training could be completed within a few days.

Mr. Conway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. How many individuals are involved in the scheme and what will be the total time needed for implementation?

Mrs. Fenner: We believe that we shall require about 6,000 farm wardens for the United Kingdom as a whole. That is about one warden for each 20 farms. We do not think that it will take long to get them together, and the areas are being delineated roughly on that basis.

Mr. Corbett: What arrangements, if any, has the Minister made to ensure that the 6,000 wardens will be spared in the event of a nuclear attack? What plans does the Ministry have to update the ludicrous advice that it gave to farmers a few years ago to protect their dairy herds from the effects of a nuclear attack by spreading tarpaulins over the top of the lanes?

Mrs. Fenner: The Government's duty is to make plans to defend the people. Of course we cannot guarantee that all will live. I am answering a specific question later about the hon. Gentleman's second supplementary question.

Milk

9. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the source and level of the financial resources to be made available to meet the commitments arising from the delay in the collection of the milk levy.

Mr. Jopling: Receipts from the milk supplementary levy are credited to the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund. They represent, however, only a very small proportion of total expenditure. The decision to defer into 1985 half of the levy payment originally due this year will therefore only marginally reduce the funds available to offset guarantee expenditure in 1984, the net provision for which is fixed in the Community budget at 18,376 ecu. The actual level of expenditure requirements to the end of the year cannot, however, be predicted with any accuracy at this stage.

Mr. Marlow: As Minister responsible for food and a jealous guardian of the public purse, is my right hon. Friend not concerned about the level of public financial resources expended on agriculture support at a time when other Government programmes are being severely cut?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend refers to delays in collection. The amount of levy postponed to 1985 represents only about one day's expenditure, and therefore the effect is not likely to be significant.

Mr. Deakins: Does not the Council of Agriculture Ministers' approach to the milk levy illustrate once more its complete lack of financial responsibility when dealing with Community funds? Is that not one reason why the Council was not asked to approve the financial guidelines on budgetary discipline, which, presumably, it regards as not being worth the paper they are printed on?

Mr. Jopling: I am sure that the recent agreement on budgetary discipline will be helpful in containing the burgeoning rate of agriculture expenditure, which has got us into so many difficulties related to surpluses and overspending in recent years.

Mr. Home Robertson: Was not the Minister's gesture of refusing to pay the milk levy rather futile, since Great Britain is likely to fall 400 million litres short of the present year's quota? Do we not need an urgent review of this shambles to ensure that the British dairy industry meets it production quota?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman appears to have forgotten that Northern Ireland dairy farmers exceeded their quota for the first six-month period. The hon. Gentleman referred to Great Britain, but he should remember that it looks as though we are due for payment of some levy in Northern Ireland for the first six months. I have said time and time again in the Council that it would be intolerable if farmers in one part of the Community were asked to pay the levy while those in other parts of the Community were making no effort to stick to the rules.

Mr. Nicholson: During the Minister's recent and welcome visit to Northern Ireland, did he develop any greater understanding of the problems facing Northern Ireland dairy farmers? Will the right hon. Gentleman now accept that Northern Ireland dairy farmers did not receive the 65,000 tonnes and that that is causing great hardship to the Northern Ireland dairy industry?

Mr. Jopling: I enormously enjoyed my visit to Northern Ireland. I was glad to have the opportunity to

clear up misapprehensions that Northern Ireland had not had the benefit of the 65,000 tonnes which I was able to negotiate on its behalf.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that, instead of clearing it up, he enlarged the problem facing the dairy industry? Does the right hon. Gentleman now understand, after his visit, that it is the Northern Ireland dairy farmers who, alone in the United Kingdom, will have to pay this iniquitous levy? Will the right hon. Gentleman give a guarantee to those dairy farmers that the statement made by the Prime Minister from the Dispatch Box will be adhered to and that no money will be collected until every Community partner collects the same money from its dairy farmers?

Mr. Jopling: My great disappointment when I visited Northern Ireland was that the hon. Gentleman was not able to meet me to discuss these matters. With regard to the words used on 20 November by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about the payment of levies, all I can say is that I could not have said it better myself.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall hear points of order after questions.

Later——

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that when the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was answering today he implied in his reply to me that I deliberately did not meet him when he was in Northern Ireland. Is it right for the right hon. Gentleman to mislead the House? When he invited representatives of farming communities to meet him at a dinner—in Stormont I think it was—he deliberately left out the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) and myself. If he wants to meet us, why did he do that?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am responsible for what goes on in the Chamber. I cannot be responsible for who is invited to dinner parties.

10. **Mr. Andy Stewart** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has discussed with the European Commission the possibility of leasing milk quota.

Mr. Jopling: Leasing quota separately from the land is one of several possible methods of improving the quota system that I wish to discuss thoroughly with the industry and the professional bodies in the United Kingdom before approaching the European Commission.

Mr. Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, because of the urgency of this matter, we should decide, before it is too late, that this country should not go it alone?

Mr. Jopling: The truth is that it is perfectly clear that leasing a quota would, if permitted under the regulations, allow a producer with a temporary excess quota to let his quota to another producer for a fixed term, at the end of which the quota would return to the original holder. There is an advantage in that approach, because it would make the quota system more flexible and would help to ensure that the available quota was fully utilised. At the moment that is against the rules, and there is no way that we can operate against the rules.

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister will know that there is widespread concern and anger in farming circles about the apparently unjust discrepancies between the decisions taken by the various panels. Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to assist farmers to assess the nature of this problem by publishing the amounts of secondary quota allocated by each of the various local panels?

Mr. Jopling: We set up the tribunal because we foresaw that there might be some discrepancies between the panels. In the event of dissatisfaction, appeals can be made for a second look at those decisions by the tribunal.

Grain (Intervention Storage)

11. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total tonnage of United Kingdom grain that has gone into intervention storage in the current year.

Mr. MacGregor: A total of 2·16 million tonnes of grain have been delivered into United Kingdom intervention stores in the current marketing year to 1 December.

Mr. Bellingham: Is it true that, if the Government want to send grain to Ethiopia, it is cheaper for them to buy it on the open market than to take it from our intervention stores and from our farmers who have been paid for the grain? Many of my constituents, especially those who contributed to the Ethiopian famine appeal, find that absurd and offensive. Will the hon. Gentleman talk to his European colleagues with a view to reforming the system?

Mr. MacGregor: There are two main points to be made. We are sending—and have been doing so all through the year—considerable quantities of cereals out of intervention stores to Africa to deal with famine. My hon. Friend will know that at the European summit earlier this week a commitment was made to send 1·2 million tonnes next year. While we have those stores in intervention it is right to use some of it for that purpose, but it is a good deal more expensive to give it as food aid than to keep it in intervention stores. That point has also to be taken into account.

In our overall aid programme we concentrate a considerable amount of the food aid on developing agriculture and on making use of agricultural stocks that are available and cheaper elsewhere in the world. The problem with regard to Community stocks is that, with high support prices for cereals, they are expensive to dispose of.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Duffy** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 6 December.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Duffy: As the Prime Minister ponders the implications of yesterday's shabby U-turn in favour of the

better-off, has it not occurred to her that any future indication by her of the Tory spirit of one nation must serve only to highlight her own entrenched position on unemployment? "There is no alternative", as she puts it. *[Interruption.]* Does she not see that the danger ahead, as her rebellious Back Benchers become increasingly rattled, is that having turned her Secretary of State for Education and Science and her Chancellor of the Exchequer this week, they may ponder whether the lady herself may be for turning?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman clearly worked very hard at that question, although I think he lost his way a good deal long before he came to a conclusion. I thought that yesterday's statement was received rather well. *[Interruption.]* I think it was well received rather widely. There is an increase in the science budget, and it is far above what it was in 1978-79.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, contrary to what has just been said, and contrary to what was said in the press this morning, the decision yesterday on student grants enhanced the reputation of her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science? *[Interruption.]* It enhanced the reputation of this House. Will my right hon. Friend have a word with some of her other right hon. Friends and ask them to be equally forthcoming and flexible on other things in the coming year?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for the first part of his question. With regard to the second part, no, I shall not urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to allow more public expenditure. I remind my hon. Friend and other hon. Friends that there is a great need to lift taxation at the threshold to help those who are on comparatively low wages, and to increase the gap between those on social security and those on earnings.

Mr. Kinnock: Is it not the fact that, in the course of making a desirable concession yesterday, the Government robbed science in order to save their own skin, regardless of the damage thereby inflicted on British engineering, medicine, industry and technology? The Secretary of State for Education and Science said last week that

"the desparate plight of the scientists could not wait longer."

How is it that they can wait longer this week?

The Prime Minister: The science budget for the coming year is greater than the science budget for this year. Under the stewardship of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the science budget for 1984-85 is £530 million, compared with £274 million in the last year of the Labour Government. The right hon. Gentleman must have been very angry with his colleagues on that occasion.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Lady is misleading the House and the country. She should know that if one compares like with like the annual rate of growth in investment in science under the Labour Government was four times as high as it has been under the Tories. Does she admit that for four years the Government have been cutting research expenditure? Is she aware that only last week the Advisory Board for the Research Councils reported that worse was to come because the decrease in investment in science would continue as a result of Government policies? When will the right hon. Lady give up her obsession with cuts, and wasting national assets, and act in the national interest?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about an obsession with cuts, but the biggest cuts in public expenditure in the past 10 years were made by the Labour Government between 1976 and 1977. Those cuts were bigger than anything ever known. Taking everything at 1982-83 prices, the Labour Government cut public expenditure by £9 billion in one year. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the fact that his party cut public expenditure by a far greater amount than ever before.

Mr. Kinnock *rose*——

The Prime Minister: One moment—I have not yet answered the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question. He is too anxious. After that £9 billion cut, the best that the Labour Government could do for the science budget in 1978 was £274 million. It has now gone up, by far more than inflation, to £530 million. The right hon. Gentleman should be congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Kinnock: I should very much like to be able to do that, but I should have to congratulate him, again, on misleading the House. Does the Prime Minister admit that, whereas in 1979, under the Labour Government, all the alpha projects were paid for, only half of them are paid for now? If she is so proud of the Government's record, will she undertake that there will be no further cuts in the research budget in the future?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is no person to say that there should never be Government cuts, when his party holds the record for cuts in public spending. They were very hard cuts—cuts in the real value of the Health Service, and real cuts in aid. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has done excellent things for science, as I have shown. If the right hon. Gentleman's argument is true, perhaps I may point out to him that there are far more alpha projects now as a result of what the Government have done for science.

Mr. Hordern: I applaud the action of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science yesterday, but would it not be a good idea to undertake a long-term review of public expenditure as a whole, across Departments, and to bring that forward along with a review of revenue at the beginning of the year so that the fullest consultation with the House can take place? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, so far, the autumn reviews of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor have been far too much like Russian roulette, with the pistol pointing at our feet, and that it is time the system was changed?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, there are always difficult choices to be made in public expenditure, but it cannot simply go on and on rising. We saw the effect of that in the mid-1970s, when we finished up at the IMF, with the biggest single public expenditure cut ever known, and the biggest borrowing, which we are still repaying. We have to take steps to contain public expenditure, and all other Governments have to do the same. There are difficult choices to be made. Naturally, I am anxious to let my right hon. and hon. Friends have as much information as possible. We can learn a great deal by looking back, but there is no way of getting out of difficult choices. If we are to help people on low wages to have bigger net take-home pay, we have to find a way to cut taxation.

Q2. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fisher: Has the Prime Minister read the article in January's edition of *Accountancy* about the National Coal Board's accounts? It is written by five independent academics, who conclude that the NCB's accounts do not, in their view, form

"an adequate basis for informed management decisions".

Is she aware of their view that the "Accounting Statement for Pits", known as F23, is a totally flawed instrument with which to make pit closures because of its policy towards depreciation, stocks and surface damage? Will she tell the House whether F23 is the accounting basis for pit closures? If it is not, what is the accounting basis? Will she make a full and detailed statement to the House on this issue, which is central to the entire dispute?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman regards the matter of coal merely as one of accounting—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—and thinks that it can all be done with mirrors, he will be happy if we eliminate the £1·3 billion a year subsidy to the National Coal Board. That is not a matter of accounting, but a matter of fact—*[Interruption.]* It is plain that that is a matter of fact. *[Interruption.]* I am talking about the £1·3 billion of taxpayers' money. Regarding the accounts at Cortonwood *[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The behaviour of the House is most unseemly. The hon. Member asked a detailed question and the Prime Minister is replying to it.

The Prime Minister: The National Coal Board believes that the calculations of the academic accountants are misleading, especially because their calculations were based on 1981-82 results, when Cortonwood lost £6·2 a tonne. In 1983-84 it lost £32 a tonne. If it is only a matter of accounting, we could cut the £1·3 billion subsidy and be much better off.

Mr. Philip Oppenheim: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Derbyshire county council is planning to spend £1·3 million on a party political propaganda campaign? Is she further aware that the Scargillite leader of the council describes such spending as a mere pinprick? Is this not typical of the sheer contempt with which Socialists treat public money?

The Prime Minister: Yes. As my hon. Friend says, there is no such thing as public money. Money comes from taxpayers and ratepayers, and it could be spent on their own families if it were not taken for other purposes.

Dr. Owen: As someone who was for four years Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is a scientist and an honorary fellow of the Royal Society, does the Prime Minister not feel that it was niggardly to withdraw the money that science desperately needs, and merely spoil the statement yesterday and the ship for a ha'porth of tar?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. The right hon. Gentleman knows that Governments must make difficult choices. He is in the comfortable position of being in opposition, when he refuses to make those choices. He had to make them in government. Indeed, he was a member of the Government who made the £9 billion cuts in one year after years of profligacy.

Q3. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Short: Is the Prime Minister aware that a vast and growing number of people are deeply worried at the division, bitterness and economic decline that her Government have brought to the country? Before irreparable harm is done, will she make some concessions so that we can settle the coal strike, and will she shift her economic policy so that we can begin to deal with unemployment?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr. Speaker. The National Coal Board has negotiated and made concessions. None have been forthcoming on the other side. The National Coal Board can move no further.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wood: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that the Conservative Benches welcome the flexibility demonstrated by the Government yesterday. May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that a stable economy is the best way in which industry and technology in industry can be developed over the coming years?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of my hon. Friend's interest that we should do everything that we can to assist enterprise and those who work in industry. That includes raising taxation thresholds so that there is an increasing gap between low incomes and social security benefits.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask whether you have had any request from the Prime Minister to answer substantive question No. 4.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, we did not reach Question No. 4 largely because the supplementary questions today were of such great length.

Points of Order

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that yesterday I raised a matter with you about tabling a question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of the money that will be coined by the Government from the sale of the record produced by Band Aid to assist the Ethiopian victims. You will recall that I pointed out that the Government should ensure that every single penny of value added tax raised on that record should go to Ethiopia. I submitted a question to the Table Office in accordance with your instructions yesterday. I have not yet seen it tabled. I am told that it has gone to you so that you can adjudicate upon the matter. It is important, when young people get together, free of charge, to provide a record and money, that the Government should ensure that they do not make a profit out of it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to put a supplementary to a question that I have not yet seen. I was pleased to hear the record played to me just before lunch.

Sir John Wells (Maidstone): Agricultural questions, both today and generally, run for some 40 minutes. One third of the food that you, Mr. Speaker, eat and that we all eat, is of horticultural origin. The only question today that had horticultural implications was question No. 5. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner) replied at very great length. I know also that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) read his question at very great length. Despite these two long interventions, is it not unfortunate that you did not see fit to call some hon. Members to raise horticultural questions?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member looks at the Order Paper he will see that nearly all the questions up to question No. 18 came from his side of the House. I have an obligation to balance the interests of both sides of the House. I am very sorry that I was unable to call the hon. Member on that particular question.

Business of the House

3.36 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business of the House for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 DECEMBER — Second Reading of the Representation of the People Bill.

Motion on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order.

TUESDAY 11 DECEMBER — A debate on European Community documents on the draft general budget for 1985, when the White Paper on developments in the European Community January to June, 1984, Cmnd. 9348, will be relevant.

The document numbers will appear in the *Official Report*.

Motions on the International Development Association (Seventh Replenishment) Order and on the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1984 Selective Capital Increase) Order.

WEDNESDAY 12 DECEMBER AND THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER — Progress in Committee on the Local Government Bill.

FRIDAY 14 DECEMBER—Private Members' Motions.

MONDAY 17 DECEMBER—Until Seven o'clock, Private Members' Motions.

Afterwards, motions on the Merchant Shipping (Liner Conference) Orders.

Motion on the Appropriation (No. 3) (Northern Ireland) Order.

The House will wish to know that it will be proposed that the House should rise for the Christmas Adjournment on Friday 21 December, until Wednesday 9 January 1985.

The following documents are relevant to the debate on 11 December:

1984 Supplementary Budget

(a)	*8322/84*	*Preliminary Draft Supplementary and Amending Budget No. 1 for 1984*
(b)	*8879/84*	*Letter of Amendment to the Preliminary Draft Supplementary and Amending Budget No. 1 for 1984*
(c)	*(Unnumbered)*	*Draft Supplementary and Amending Budget No. 1 for 1984*
(d)	*10222/84*	*Amendments and Modifications by the European Parliament to the Draft Supplementary and Amending Budget No. 1 for 1984*

1985 Draft Budget

(e)	*(Unnumbered)*	*Draft General Budget of the European Communities for 1985*
(f)	*9482/84*	*Letter of Amendment to the Preliminary Draft Budget of the European Communities for 1985*
(g)	*10690/84*	*Amendments and proposed Modifications to Draft General Budget for 1985*

Own Resources

(h)	*8454/84*	*Amended proposal for a Council Decision on the Community's system of own resources*
(i)	*8445/84*	*Draft Regulation introducing reserve measures to cover requirements in 1985*
(j)	*8514/84*	*Commission Communication concerning budgetary requirements of the Community in 1984 and 1985*

Financial Regulation

(k)	*5899/84*	*Amended proposal for a Council Regulation amending the Financial Regulation of 21 December 1977 applicable to the general budget of the European Communities*

Budgetary Discipline

(l)	*(Unnumbered)*	*Budgetary Discipline: common position of the Council of Ministers*

Relevant reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 78–xxxiii (1983-84 paragraph 5.
(b) HC 78–xxxv (1983-84) paragraph 3.
(c) HC 78–xxxv (1983-84) paragraph 3.
(d) HC 5–i (1984-85) paragraph 5.
(e) HC 78–xxxv (1983-84) paragraph 2.
(f) HC 78–xxxv (1983-84) paragraph 2.
(g) HC 5–iii (1984-85) paragraph 3.
(h) HC 78–xxxiv (1983-84) paragraph 1.
(i) HC 78–xxxiv (1983-84) paragraph 1.
(j) HC 78–xxxiv (1983-84) paragraph 1.
(k) HC 78–xxxiii (1983-84) paragraph 3 and HC 32-xviii (1980-81) paragraph 3.
(l) HC 5-ii (1984-85) paragraph 4.

Mr. Neil Kinnock: I hope there will not be a rebellion because we are to have only a couple of weeks off for Christmas. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that, following the usual precedent on constitutional matters, the Committee stage of the Representation of the People Bill will be taken on the Floor of the House? We shall want a statement next Monday on the report of the European Community Environment Council. Following that, may we have an undertaking that in Government time there can be a debate in this House on acid rain? In view of the statement made yesterday by the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the recent enlightening debate in another place on the research councils, debate in the near future in Government time on science and science policy?

Finally, the Government's plans to hold a debate late next Monday night on the order to abolish elections for the metropolitan counties and the Greater London council is

thoroughly shamefaced and shameful. Because it is such an important—indeed, unprecedented—matter, I ask the right hon. Gentleman to take the matter away, think about it and allow us to have that debate in prime time, when the full attention of the nation can be focused on this place.

Mr. Biffen: Perhaps I could deal with those points in the order in which they were raised. I understand that the usual channels are at the moment reviewing what aspects of the Committee stage of the Representation of the People Bill would be suitable for the Floor of the House. I recognise the constitutional import of what the right hon. Gentleman says. I shall ensure that a statement is made on the report of the European Community Environmental Council.

As for acid rain, the Government have now made known their views on the report of the relevant departmental Select Committee. I agree that a debate should take place in the reasonably near future.

I note the right hon. Gentleman's request that there should be a debate on science policy in Government time. I cannot be forthcoming on that matter today, but I note the request.

I reject the right hon. Gentleman's use of the word "shamefaced" in relation to the amount of time being allocated for the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order. He will appreciate that, as the result of a decision taken last night, the debate will last for three hours and I cannot offer any prospect——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is the middle of the night.

Mr. Biffen: It is not. It is absurd to say that once we stray past 10 o'clock, we are in the middle of the night.

I have no wish to hold out false hopes to the right hon. Gentleman on this matter, but clearly it is an issue which could be pursued through the usual channels.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): In view of the effect that a move towards the taxation of lump sums under occupational pension schemes or towards discontinuing tax relief on pension contributions would have on the budgets of millions of people, will my right hon. Friend consider suggesting to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that if, happily, he has decided against such a move, it might relieve a great deal of anxiety if he could be persuaded to make a statement to that effect in advance of the Budget?

Mr. Biffen: It would be thoroughly undesirable if the Chancellor of the Exchequer were bounced on decision after decision to deny representations of lobbyists. My hon. Friend makes a fair point in representation to the Chancellor. It is best proceeded with through the normal delicacies that occur in representation to the Treasury at this time of the year.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the division of a Bill in Committee between the House and Standing Committee, though we have become accustomed to it in recent years in connection with the Finance Bill, is inherently undesirable and results in a less satisfactory consideration of the Bill and a net increase in the time spent on Bills?

Mr. Biffen: Yes, but I have to point out to the right hon. Gentleman that that is what happened to the London Government Bill of 1963, to which he lent his hand.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is useful for the time of the House to be directed to subjects of national importance? In view of that, would not the unnecessary prolonging of the coal strike by Scargill's stormtroopers, who are destroying jobs inside and outside mining communities, be a highly appropriate subject for debate?

Mr. Biffen: There is no provision for a debate next week and I must confess that I cannot hold out to my hon. Friend the prospect of an early debate. Doubtless he can use the other opportunities that exist for him.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The grapevine has it that the inspector's report on the Stansted inquiry will be published on Monday. Will there be a statement about the report on that date, and when can we expect a debate? Has the right hon. Gentleman seen my early-day motion 146, which is supported by 225 right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House?

[That this House, deeply concerned to achieve balanced economic growth throughout the United Kingdom, and believing that the proposed massive expansion of Stansted Airport would produce unjustifiable urban growth and congestion in North West Essex and East Hertfordshire, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to opt now for a policy which, while providing for a modest increase in activity at Stansted, subject to a fixed ceiling, would place the greater emphasis on taking all possible steps to expand the use of provincial airports to meet demands in the region of its origin, the case for which has been well documented and shown to be financially viable by various groups, notably the North of England Regional Consortium.]

Mr. Biffen: I have no knowledge of when the Stansted report is likely to be received, but, as the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate, the Government have already said that there will be a debate on the report before any Government decision is taken.

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): I recognise and greatly appreciate the importance that the Government attach to the views of Back Benchers, as was so recently demonstrated by their ready response to an early-day motion signed by a mere 154 hon. Members. May I hope for an equally sympathetic response to my early-day motion 37 on the Brighton outrage, terrorism and capital punishment, which has been signed by 180 hon. Members?

[That this House extends its deepest sympathy to the relatives of those killed in the Brighton bombing on 12 October and to those injured; deplores the indescribably evil and cowardly actions of those who perpetrated this outrage; re-affirms its total resolve that the freedoms of which it is the guardian must never be lost or lessened by violence or the fear of it; thanks the Prime Minister for having so stated so clearly and firmly on behalf of the nation; and is of the opinion that death should be the penalty for acts of terrorism causing death.]

May I remind my right hon. Friend that millions of people regard it as outrageous that anyone should try to kill our Prime Minister and Cabinet — and come so close to succeeding — and, in the process, kill and maim so many; that a debate will not cost the Government a single penny, a fact which, I hope will also appeal to my right

[Sir Ian Percival]

hon. Friends; and that a debate would give great satisfaction to many supporters of the Government inside and outside the House and to millions of others.

Mr. Biffen: I acknowledge at once that my right hon. and learned Friend speaks for many in their deep anxiety on this topic. Of course, I shall give serious consideration to the point that he has just made, but I hope that he will match that with a sympathy for the difficulties that I have on the amount of business that lies ahead.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Will the right hon. Gentleman find time to debate the important statement that was made last week on the £200 million cut in regional aid, bearing in mind that regions such as the northern region have lost 100,000 jobs since the Government came into power in 1979, and that, as a result of that statement, it will lose £180 million in grants over the next 10 years?

In addition, since that statement was made, it has been announced that 2,100 jobs at British Shipbuilders will be lost, 246 jobs at Jarrow steelworks and 360 jobs at Cape Insulation in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). Bearing in mind the number of hon. Members who tried to ask questions on that statement, is it not important that we should have an early debate?

Mr. Biffen: I accept at once that there is a desire on both sides of the House for an early debate on regional policy, and I hope to secure that.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): What proposals does my right hon. Friend have to allow the House to join in the consultation process which is now going on, on the Secretary of State for Social Services' document on generic prescribing? Some of us have views which we need to express.

Mr. Biffen: I trust that my hon. Friend, who is a most articulate expresser of views, will already have taken the obvious ways of representing those views to my right hon. Friend. I am sure thaat he will recognise that the debate on that topic recently was a good way of enabling the House to make known its general feelings.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): May I press the Leader of the House further on the Representation of the People Bill that is to be debated on Monday? Would it not be provocative and counter-productive to try to separate the Bill into parts and to take some on the Floor of the House and some in Committee? Therefore, will he take the Committee stage of that constitutional Bill entirely on the Floor of the House?

In view of the procedural mess that the Government got into yesterday over Scotland and Scottish affairs, might it not be an idea to have a debate on devolution shortly which might find widespread support on both sides of the House, and, indeed, Mr. Speaker, from you as well?

Mr. Biffen: If the hon. Gentleman had been here longer and was not so self-evidently a novice, he would realise that yesterday was in no way a procedural mess —just the natural virility of Scots Labour Members of Parliament.

May I use the first and more substantial part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks to return to the point that was made by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I did not wish to be dismissive when I referred to the experiences of the London Government Bill. I accept the force of the point made by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). Discussions are currently taking place through the usual channels, and we shall have to see what is concluded.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Will my right hon. Friend consider whether there will be an opportunity during consideration of the Local Government Bill next week to make a decision about a Grand Committee for London? After all, although Scotland and Wales do not have assemblies to speak for the whole country—nor do we want one for London — they both have Grand Committees.

Mr. Biffen: The opportunities for a decision effectively rest with the Committee of Selection, and I must leave it there.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Given the Government's new-found enthusiasm for listening to the views of Back Benchers, may I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 59 on hard drug abuse?

[That this House, in drawing attention to the dramatic rise in the number of drug addicts over the last couple of years, calls upon the Government to: (i) develop an effective policy aimed at breaking the hard drug supply routes to the United Kingdom which will include a large increase in the number of customs officials with special responsibility for the task, (ii) increase substantially the amount of money which is available to local health authorities to develop adequate treatment and prevention services (iii) impose the maximum sentences on convicted major drug dealers and (iv) implement the outstanding recommendations of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, particularly those on education in the community, so that the maximum number of young people are aware of the dangers of using hard drugs.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman consult his colleagues at the Department of Health and Social Security and the Home Office and come back to the House with proposals for debate before we rise for Christmas?

Mr. Biffen: On the point about the enthusiasm for listening to the views of Back Benchers, may I say that that is overwhelmingly influenced and determined by the inherent merit of the representations. I shall refer the early-day motion to my right hon. Friend so that he may be appraised of the hon. Gentleman's anxieties.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the tremendous concern among all law-abiding people in the country — especially those belonging to students' unions — about the illegal donation by the polytechnic of North London from public funds of £1,000 to striking miners? The National Union of Students has said that that action is in breach of Government guidelines on the matter issued by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. Will my right hon. Friend ask the Attorney-General to come to the House and make a statement on the matter with a view to a proper prosecution of the polytechnic?

Mr. Biffen: As I understand it, the matter is now before my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, and I think that for the moment it might be appropriate to leave it there.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Will the Leader of the House give priority to his undertaking to the Leader of the Opposition that he will consider early debate on science and science policy? Is he aware of the concern of the scientific community and of many hon. Members on both sides of the House about just what the Government are up to with regard to the science budget?

Mr. Biffen: My response to the Leader of the Opposition had all the courtesy and inherent respect which I bear towards the right hon. Gentleman, but it was, even so, somewhat tepid. However, I take note of what the hon. Gentleman says.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is an important debate to follow business questions, and another statement. I fully appreciate that this is prime Back Bench time, and I propose to allow business questions to continue for another 10 minutes, during which time I hope that I shall be able to fit everybody in.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My right hon. Friend implied a few moments ago that 10 o'clock does not in his view fall in the middle of the night. I should like to advise my right hon. Friend that Wednesday 9 January falls in the middle of my recess. Will my right hon. Friend take that as a warning?

I should also like to ask my right hon. Friend about a matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition and other hon. Members, relating to the Representation of the People Bill. Can he so organise proceedings on the Bill that important matters will be taken on the Floor of the House before it proceeds to a Standing Committee, so that those of us who strongly object to the raising of the deposit to £1,000 may register our disapproval on the Floor of the House, where it should be registered?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend is reputed for the ruthless inner logic that he brings to politics. That being so, it is just possible that he may decide that coming back a touch early in January will enable those matters to be taken on the Floor of the House.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not true that the Government are deliberately dodging a full discussion of the document produced by the five academic accontants on the subject of the National Coal Board's accounting procedures? Why does not the Leader of the House put it to the Prime Minister that Parliament would be satisfied if there were a full debate on the matter? Many hon. Members believe that, if that debate took place, some compromise positon might be found to help the National Union of Mineworkers and the NCB to reach an earlier settlement? Is it not the duty of the Prime Minister to find an early settlement, even if doing so necessitates using that document?

Mr. Biffen: I think that the five academic accountants are to be elevated to the status of the Tolpuddle martyrs in the mythology of some Opposition Members. I can say only that no provision has been made for a parliamentary debate on the matter next week. [HON MEMBERS: "Why not"] Why not? Because we have before us a substantial agenda of issues on which discussion is desired by both sides of the House, and the settlement of the miners' dispute could easily proceed the moment that Mr. Scargill and his advisers took the NACODS settlement as the basis for further talks.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): My right hon. Friend did not mention the European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Undertaking on Supplementary Finance for the Community) Order among the orders for debate on Tuesday. Can we assume that there is no question of the House being asked to approve the order next week?

Mr. Biffen: As my hon. Friend knows, the matter is still being considered in the courts and it would not be appropriate for me to anticipate the outcome. However, in a sense of realism, he can assume that it will not feature in our business on Tuesday.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, during an all-party visit to Greenham Common yesterday, the American colonel in charge of the base described what would take place in the event of a nuclear war? He said that the command to launch the missiles would come from General Bernard Rogers to two American personnel in the Greenham Common base, that they would go to a safe, open it, see whether the envelope inside matched the code given to them by General Rogers and then launch the missiles. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the House ought to have an early debate on who controls the firing of cruise missiles?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Lady's graphic description. Perhaps we might leave the matter there for the moment.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampthon, North): As my right hon. Friend said, there is an important debate on European affairs on Tuesday next week. My right hon. Friend is a keen student of European affairs. How is it that the financial mechanism will be binding on the Council of Ministers when account can be taken of exceptional circumstances? As we are to debate the issue next week, it would be useful if we knew now what the Government's views on this subject are.

Mr. Biffen: My part in this drama is to provide the time —my hon. Friend will provide the answers.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Although I appreciate that the Leader of the House is not responsible for the complex numbering or titling of European documents or for the number of minor amendments that need tc be taken, does he agree that the major topics should be announced during business questions? In that regard, can he tell us whether the disciplinary document, to which the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has just referred, will be debated on Tuesday and, if so, whether it will be part of the substantive motion?

Mr. Biffen: I strongly agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about how we present to the House the form in which we expect debates to proceed. I shall see whether some improvement can be made. As to his specific point about the disciplinary document, my understanding is that the answer is yes.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that there has recently been considerable abuse by local authorities of legislation which is designed to help people who, through no fault of their own, fall on hard times? Will my right hon. Friend find time soon to introduce legislation to end such abuses, which are for blatantly political purposes?

Mr. Biffen: I must confess that the legislative programme is already so heavily committed that I should mislead my hon. Friend if I held out any prospect of such legislation being prepared and embarked upon. However, I understand my hon. Friend's deep anxiety and the justification for it.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): As the Secretary of State for Scotland failed again yesterday to make a statement on an extremely important matter, which happens far too often, and despite the fact that the Leader of the House showed his prejudice against the Scots having a fair deal in the House, will he call a meeting of the Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and the leaders of other parties in Scotland to see whether we can find better arrangements for dealing with Scottish business in the House?

Mr. Biffen: I have an instinctive affection for the Scots. It is a most romantic affection, so I should like to disabuse the hon. Gentleman of any anxieties that he might have about my hostility. However, my affection for the Scots is matched by a corresponding affection for the usual channels and what the hon. Gentleman suggests would, I think, be best pursued through them.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): In regard to my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson), will he notice that the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill is coming before the House shortly? If the Government have the will, they can introduce legislation to prevent the abuse of ratepayers' money being used for blatantly political purposes in Scotland.

Mr. Biffen: When the Bill goes through the House, my hon. and learned Friend may be able to secure an amendment, using his admirable skills to the end that he seeks.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Although the Prime Minister thinks that the report by the five academic accountants is unimportant, does not the Leader of the House share the general view that, as the National Coal Board fought to repress this report, it clearly regards it as important? As defects in NCB accounting methods have a direct effect on Government policy, not least in the setting of financial targets for the National Coal Board, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to come to the House soon so that all hon. Members have an opportunity to put questions on this most important matter?

Mr. Biffen: I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Gentleman's point. It is just conceivable that this document, which is about to become part of the New Testament, is not as compelling in its reasoning as has been suggested. Those who are concerned to bring about an early termination of the coal dispute—*[Interruption.]* When hon. Members have stopped trying to shout down —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Biffen: Those who are concerned that there should be an early conclusion to the coal dispute have to persuade Mr. Scargill to take the NACODS settlement as the basis of further talks.

Student Awards (Scotland)

4 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Georg Younger): With permission, I shall make a statemen about the consequences in Scotland of the decisio announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of Stat for Education and Science yesterday on students' awards As my right hon. Friend said, the minimum grant will b discontinued and the contribution to students' maintenanc from better-off parents will be increased in 1985-86. Thi will not, however, extend to tuition fees, as originall proposed.

The changes now proposed will involve additiona expenditure on students' awards in Scotland of about £ million in 1985-86. Just over £2 million of this additiona expenditure will be met by an addition to the Scottis block following from the changes by my right hon. Friend in his Department's budget and the operation of th formula adjustment to the Scottish block. The remainde will be found from within the block.

Once final decisions have been taken, I shall announce the full details of my public expenditure programmes fo 1985-86 to the House. I expect to do this in the course o the next week. Subject to further scrutiny of priorities within my overall programme, it still remains my intention that additional resources will be made available to the Scottish central institutions to increase the output of engineering and technology graduates. Meantime, I am not in a position to give firm figures.

As regards the proposed review of the students' awards system, I can assure the House that it will take full account of the Scottish higher education system, and that my Department will be closely involved.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): We are pleased that a statement has been made today. The Secretary of State is the Minister responsible for funding student grants in Scotland and it is essential that he is accountable to the House for his decisions. The Secretary of State for Education and Science cannot answer for Scotland, and did not pretend yesterday that he could. This is an unsatisfactory and undignified situation, and it is fortunate that the statement has been made, as it does something to remedy the damage.

On the substance of the matter, what was the Scottish component of the £39 million that was to be clawed off student grants by the original package? Although the retreat sounded yesterday on tuition fees may mean that the Government have to forgo £5 million of the planned cuts, will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the inadequate and mean-minded 3 per cent. uprating, well below the inflation rate, the harsher parental payments demanded and the abolition of the minimum grant leaves the package as a severe blow to Scottish students and their living standards?

We understand that, of the £5 million involved in this messy compromise, almost £3 million will be recouped from the Scottish Office budget, but we also understand that it will not necessarily be from the Scottish Education Department. The Secretary of State for Education and Science is finding £11 million next year, at the expense of the university programme. Some £6 million is to come from the equipment grant in 1985-86. Will the Secretary of State for Scotland give a firm guarantee that none of this

will be found at the expense of the Scottish universities, and that the other £5 million of the £11 million total sum that makes up the English package will not come from Scotland either? If it did, there would be a real danger of double jeopardy; the Scots would be paying twice.

We are very worried that Scotland has come badly out of the mathematics of this compromise. England is finding £11 million out of the total of £21 million in cuts, with the Treasury making up the balance. In Scotland, the right hon. Gentleman has to find from his budget almost £3 million out of a total of £5 million. That is a clear and obvious discrepancy, and we should like an explanation of how it has risen and why.

I come now to the decision-making process that lies behind the budget compromise. If the right hon. Gentleman was a party to the original decision on the cuts, and the subsequent disorderly and disorganised retreat, his judgment has been discredited, and he has been humiliated just as certainly as his colleagues south of the border. If he was not a party to the decision, but meekly accepted for Scottish students damaging decisions taken elsewhere, his humiliation is even more complete and contemptible.

It is widely reported that the decision taken yesterday was the result of a meeting between the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The dramatis personae at this panic-stricken gathering included the acting Chief Whip, Viscount Whitelaw and even a junior Minister from the Department of Education and Science. It was the crunch meeting, which decided on the desperate attempt to save face and placate outraged public opinion, and which resulted in yesterday's statement. Can the right hon. Gentleman categorically reassure the House that he was at that meeting? If he was not, who spoke for Scotland?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful for the initial welcome to the statement. It is always a problem when any decision is taken that affects several parts of the United Kingdom whether, for the convenience of the House, one, two, three or sometimes four statements should be made. I accept that, but I am glad that we have had a statement today. The savings expected from the original package were between £8 million and £9 million in Scotland, and we expect them now to be more like £3 million to £4 million. The university programme will be treated exactly the same north and south of the border and it is my right hon. Friend's decision as to how much he gives to the University Grants Committee to do what it is asked to do. It is for the UGC to decide, as it does with every other part of university expenditure, what is to be the spread between various universities. Until we see what that spread is, we do not know whether there will be more or less in Scotland.

As to the comparisons, they are absolutely on all fours between the two countries, because Scotland is treated under the same formula and gets exactly the same treatment on this part of the programme as it does with any other. There is no difference.

As to the discrepancy between the amounts available to Scotland and the amounts in the United Kingdom, hon. Gentlemen are puzzled when they first see this, because the university system, the number of years of the course and so on are quite different north and south of the border. There is therefore a larger component for Scotland because there are four-year courses instead of three-year courses. That is logical and simple.

I note the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the meeting to which he referred. This was a collective decision, taken in a series of consultations, with which I was fully involved.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I thank my right hon. Friend warmly for his statement. Is he aware that many parents will be grateful for the new decision to which he has come? Will he give the most detailed consideration, particularly in Scotland, to the problems of the four-year course?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I shall give that careful consideration.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): As the £21 million that was originally announced yesterday was specifically stated to be in respect of only England and Wales, why does part of the cost come from the budget of Scottish universities?

Mr. Younger: The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the figure for England and Wales is applied, as per the formula, to the Scottish block. Therefore, that has the appropriate Scottish effect. As to the general amounts given to the UGC, it is and always has been for it to decide which university it can benefit.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Has my right hon. Friend observed that, although his statement, like that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science yesterday, has been sourly received by Liberal and Labour Members, it has been warmly welcomed by my hon. Friends? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, even on the original proposals, parents with a residual income of £13,000 will be paying less next year than this year, and that will continue to be so after the statement? Can my right hon. Friend also say what is the level of actual income which gives rise to a residual income of that type?

Finally, will my right hon. Friend make it easier for parents to be aware of the opportunities for reducing the cost of their parental contributions through the use of covenants?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said about the announcement yesterday. The effect on any individual parent or student very much depends on income, the number of children in the family, and so on. For most Scottish families with one child living away from home, the largest increase is unlikely to exceed £270.

My hon. Friend asks about contributions and grants generally. I agree with him that the longer Scottish courses are a relevant factor.

As for the level of residual income, broadly speaking students whose parents' residual income is below £13,000 will be either neutrally affected or slightly better off in some cases. Those above that will be worse off. Fewer than half the total number of Scottish students will be affected at all by these changes.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): I thank the Secretary of State for belatedly making the statement that in all decency he should have made yesterday. Does he accept that, of the four concessions which the National Union of Students and other students sought, the one that was chosen is more beneficial to the very high income families than to the lower and middle income families, who will be very badly affected? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept, likewise, that Opposition Members are

[Mr. Gordon Wilson]

not blinded by his casuistical explanation of why the Scottish universities should be penalised twice over—once by being part of the Department of Education and Science budget and again by the changes that the right hon. Gentleman will be making in the rest of the education system?

Mr. Younger: Dealing first with the hon. Gentleman's second question, he will appreciate that there are two separate components in this type of expenditure. There is that which is made in the Scottish block and in England and Wales in ordinary English Department of Education and Science programmes. Then there is that which, both north and south of the border, applies to universities. They are separate programmes. The university responsibility is with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, and the money given to the universities is always given to and distributed by the University Grants Committee. Therefore there is complete fairness between England and Scotland both in the way that the non-university programmes are spread according to the formula and in the way that the university programmes are spread in the way that they always are spread.

As for the hon. Gentleman's other question, I was glad to be able to make a statement today, but he will appreciate that it is difficult to have several statements on one subject on the same day.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my right hon. Friend take the fullest part in the review announced yesterday by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, and in doing so will my right hon. Friend remind the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that one of the grandest principles of education in Scotland is that those who did not benefit themselves from higher education enable their children to do so? They are not well off, as the Secretary of State for Education and Science describes them. They may be ordinary people, the mother a nurse and the father an electrician. They are making it possible for their children to do what they were unable themselves to do. If funds are to be found, they can be found easily by abolishing the absurdity, with respect to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), of the huge course for doctors of philosophy, which provides nothing to human education.

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. I can assure him that I shall be fully involved in the review of the student grants system which is about to take place.

As for the assertion that some of the parents affected are well off, I appreciate my hon. and learned Friend's remark. It is a matter of judgment what is the precise level at which an income becomes that of someone who is well off. However, ny hon. and learned Friend may appreciate that this change takes out the principle, which many people both inside and outside the House found objectionable, of bringing in fees to the parental contribution. That will benefit people whether they are classed as having high incomes or otherwise.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Godman.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I never expected to be named in these exchanges. I am far too modest to recommend any hon. Member to read my thesis. I think that it is a first-class piece of work, but that is to be expected.

Moving to more important matters than my thesis or the absurd comment of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn), may I ask the Secretary of State whether the position of students in Scotland and of the university sector itself would not be strengthened by a Scottish UGC or at the very least a Scottish sub-committee of the UGC?

Mr. Younger: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's view, because several academics in Scotland have expressed views about it. However, it is a different matter from today's events.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Edinburgh, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be great relief among Scottish families that the proposals for the introduction of tuition fees have been withdrawn?

Was it not the late Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who said that the processes of his mind constantly readjusted themselves to the movement of outside events?

Mr. Younger: I do not know whether my hon. Friend will consider emulating the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and writing a thesis on that, but I have no doubt that it is a very wise comment.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Another PhD?

Mr. Foulkes: Not yet.

Is not it clear from the way that the proposals of the Secretary of State for Scotland were in every respect—parental contribution, the level of increase in grant, the abolition of the minimum grant and the possibility of fees—a pale carbon copy of the English proposals that the right hon. Gentleman is no longer protecting the special interests of Scotland in respect of student awards? Is it not also clear that, far from moving towards greater devolution under this Government, we are moving towards greater centralisation and copying what happens in England?

Is it not about time that the right hon. Gentleman acted as Secretary of State for Scotland in the way that my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) and my noble Friend Lord Ross of Marnock used to, and protect the interests of Scotland?

Mr. Younger: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend, the one thing that I try not to do is to act in the way that the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) did when he was Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Foulkes: Well, most of the time.

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman alleges that my announcement is a carbon copy of the statement yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. If it is a carbon copy, it is a good, strong one and not a pale one.

As for Scotland's interests, the only inference that I can draw from the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is that he

thinks that it would be in the interests of Scottish parents to be paying parental contributions to fees when English parents are not doing so. If that is his position, I disagree totally. I have stood up for Scottish parents' interests in this matter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, far from being to Scotland's disadvantage, these proposals bestow a special privilege, in that, with four-year courses, the lower contribution from parents and the fact that they do not have to contribute to tuition fees, they are getting more than English parents and English students south of the border in support from the State?

Will my right hon. Friend use the opportunity provided by the review of higher education spending, which is very much welcomed, to argue the case put forward by the principal of Stirling university, that funding of the universities should be based on the number of students that they are able to attract? That would guarantee the success of institutions such as Stirling which are able to attract students.

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend makes a good point. To the extent that this is a help to the parents of students at universities, it is 33½ per cent. more help for Scottish students doing four-year courses than for English students doing three-year courses.

I take my hon. Friend's second comment. I, too, saw the interesting ideas that the principal of Stirling university expressed, and they will be studied carefully.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What advice would the Secretary of State give to scientists working in Scotland? Would he suggest that they write long and articulate questions requiring answers to Conservative Members? Would that have some effect? Is he aware that the cut is appalling? What is the assessment of the Scottish Office of the number of alpha projects that will now be rejected? Those of us who met the vice-chancellors a fortnight ago were appalled by what Dr. Burnett and his colleagues had to tell us. Sir David Phillips, a serious science administrator, hinted in semi-public that Stirling might be one of the universities that could, in some circumstances, be axed. We do have a denial of this, do we not?

Mr. Younger: I have certainly heard no suggestion of that which formed the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I feel sure that if there had been any such suggestion, we would have heard something about it. I know of the hon. Gentleman's close interest in science. I maintain a close interest as well, along with the principals of the Scottish universities, although technically they are under the Department of Education and Science. I shall be meeting them soon and I shall be discussing these matters with them.

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, far from being a humiliation, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), his statement is another welcome example of his ability to listen to Conservative Back-Bench opinion? His reassertion of the principle that university education will be free to all students and that tuition fees will not be charged is especially welcome. Will he further confirm that that is a principle to which he will give utmost force in the review?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend that this is very much of advantage to parents in Scotland and is something that they will notice. I paraphrase my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and attribute the language of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) to his natural virility.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): First, I welcome the statement on behalf of my colleagues. I remind the Secretary of State that it should have come yesterday. It is being made today only because of protests from the Opposition Benches — [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is Steel?"] He is leading my party! It would be more appropriate if the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Science were on the Government Front Bench as well. The Secretary of State for Scotland has failed to convince me or my colleagues that he is able to protect Scotland's interests.

The right hon. Gentleman said in his statement—he has repeated the assertion several times since—that he recognises the difference between Scottish four-year courses and English three-year courses. If that is so, why did he accept the ruling of the Secretary of State for Education and Science in the first place? He said in the past that he could make a different arrangement for travel grants for students in Scotland. Does he recognise that he should adopt a completely different system of grants to take account of Scottish circumstances? Will he repudiate any commitment to student loans and maintain the grant system?

Mr. Younger: We shall all be somewhat interested and relieved to hear that the right hon. Member for Tweedale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) is leading the hon. Gentleman's party. As I have said, the making of statements is very much a matter for the House, in the last resort. The making of several statements on the same day on the one subject has always been a problem. The House will have to decide what attitude it wants to take on that. The original decision was taken by the Government and the change which was announced yesterday was similarly a Government decision in which I was fully involved.

Mr. Alex Eadie (Midlothian): The right hon. Gentleman has agreed that many parents will heave a sigh of relief as a consequence of the statement. However, against their relief must be set the great anxiety among those who are associated with scientific research in Scotland. They are concerned about their future because of funding implications. We already know that neither the Secretary of State for Scotland nor the Secretary of State for Education and Science will resign, but could they not at least have the decency now to apologise to the students who came to Parliament to exercise their democratic rights to try to influence the Government to change their mind?

Mr. Younger: It is only to be welcomed that students and many others come here to exercise their democratic rights, and long may they continue to do so. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern about research budgets. However, it is too early to have concern. As I have said, I attach high priority to increasing the resources that we put into such research.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Can we have a guarantee from the Secretary of State that the cuts that will be implemented will not again hit housing, social work or any of the other parts of his budget? Secondly,

[Mr. John Maxton]

will he prove his independence by giving a guarantee that he will not countenance the introduction of a loans system for students in Scotland? Lastly, is he aware that the Secretary of State for Education and Science said on Tuesday afternoon that he had no intention of changing his mind on student grants and that the right hon. Gentleman has said this afternoon that he was part of a series of consultations? How many meetings took place between half-past three on Tuesday afternoon and half-past three on Wednesday afternoon, how many of those meetings did he or the Minister with responsibilities for education attend, and what part did they play in them?

Mr. Younger: I do not know about the hon. Gentleman's list of meetings. The important thing is that consultations took place on all these matters throughout the time that decisions were being taken, and all the Departments involved were closely concerned with them. My hon Friends and I are considering from where in the Scottish block we shall find the money to make up for the changes that have been announced. We shall work that out over the block as a whole. As I promised in my statement, I hope that a second statement will be made next week to set out the results of all the discussions. I do not think that it would be right for me at this stage to pre-empt a decision either for or against the loan system. It is right that that issue should be part of the review that will be conducted into the supporting of students.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is it not the case that the Department of Education and Science for England and Wales has to find only 50 per cent. of the required savings from its budget while the Secretary of State for Scotland will have to find 60 per cent. from his? Will the right hon. Gentleman give a categorical assurance that, while he has greater flexibility within his budget to look for savings, they will not come out of the budgets of social work, housing or health? It would be the grossest of impertinence if he were to make ordinary people, who are suffering because of hard-pressed services, pay for the Government's priority in looking after the richest people who are concerned with these cuts?

Mr. Younger: The savings will not come out of any of the budgets that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned or any particular budget, because none of the decisions has yet been taken. The savings will come out of the Scottish block as a whole, and I shall decide how that can best be done. Student loans are difficult to compare north and south of the border. That is because the university and education systems generally are wholly different. However, the relationship between the English and Welsh arithmetic and the Scottish arithmetic is straightforwardly governed by the operation of the formula which is used for all these matters without variation. Incidentally, this is a welcome development for anyone running the Scottish block. My predecessors realise that and it will be realised by anyone coming after me.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Why must the Secretary of State always act like a simple stooge of the Secretary of State for Education and Science? First, he copied his right hon. Friend's original statement and now he is virtually copying the silly and amended statement which the right hon. Gentleman made yesterday, which will benefit only a minority of better-off parents. Will he do the decent thing and introduce a students' grant increase of at least 14 per cent. to restore the grant to what it was in 1979 when the Labour Government were in power? In the longer term, will he phase out parental contributions completely so that all students who can benefit from higher education will have the opportunity of doing so?

Mr. Younger: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I think that he might think a little more deeply about the subject. I take his point about the reduction in the real level of grants and I am fully in support of all the decisions that the Government have taken on that. The hon. Gentleman might feel on reflection that he was rather unfair about the Scottish dimension. It is clearly desirable that parents north and south of the border should not be discriminated against, one way or the other. Some uniformity is very much to our advantage as well as to that of those south of the border. When there was a clear difference between students' travel arrangements north and south of the border, I made an entirely different arrangement from that made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, and it was widely welcomed by students in Scotland.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. An important debate follows. I shall call all hon. Members who have been standing, but I ask for brief questions.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Scottish parents with children at university and others who hope that their children will attend university later understand that nothing in life is free and that education is paid for by the taxpayer when no charge is made upon the parents? They understand that. Therefore, the decision reported today will be appreciated by parents of the kind referred to earlier by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn).

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right. It is worth reminding ourselves often that nothing is completely free. The system is designed to try to concentrate help on those who need it most. I accept that introducing parental contributions to fees for the first time in recent years was felt by parents to be unfair. That is why the decision was changed.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Can the Secretary of State give some clear indication of the proportion of the adjustment in terms of the University Grants Committee and that part of the budget that comes within his responsibility? Will he take into account the crisis in education in Scotland? Does he agree that, instead of curtailing university and higher education, we should be expanding?

Is it not farcical that people who are graduating today from Scottish universities with first or second-class honours would not now be admitted to university because of Government constraints? Will the Secretary of State totally oppose any loans scheme, which would be anathema to everyone in Scotland?

Mr. Younger: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about a loans scheme. He will make his views known in the next few months when the system is reviewed. I have explained the proportions between south of the border and north of the border. Universities are and always have been dealt

with through the University Grants Committee. That is the way it should be. In Scotland the arrangements are made under the formula.

The hon. Gentleman claims that funds are being reduced. I remind him that we have increased funds, which are much needed, to our central institutions for technical education. I should have thought that he would have welcomed that.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): Why is the Secretary of State so blindly following the recommendations of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is responsible for education in England? Last year the Secretary of State for Scotland gained credit among students and hon. Members from both sides of the House when he did not follow the recommendation by the Secretary of State for Education and Science to abolish travelling expenses. He continued to grant travel expenses to students in Scotland.

Why does the right hon. Gentleman not accept today that traditions in Scotland are different? Will he examine again in the promised review the possibility of reducing parental contributions and of maintaining the minimum grant?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said about my decision on students' travel. It was welcomed, and it was my decision. If I had thought on this occasion that it was in the interests of Scottish parents to make them pay a contribution to fees, I should have suggested it. I do not think that that would be in the interests of Scottish parents, so I did not suggest it.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The people of Scotland have a right to know how decisions which affect them and them alone are taken. The Secretary of State referred to a collective decision. What Scottish ministerial representatives attended that unhappy collection of Ministers?

Mr. Younger: None of the decisions was taken without the fullest participation of Scottish Ministers, whose views were taken into account before any of the decisions were taken.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that he has given much less information to the House about his Department than his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science gave yesterday? If the money is to come from the general block, exactly where will it come from? Will it come from local government, health or housing expenditure? If the money is so vital—I cannot see that it is—why does not the Secretary of State suggest that it comes from the contingency fund, since the Prime Minister had no difficulty in using that during the mining dispute?

Mr. Younger: A large part of this money comes by means of the formula from the Treasury. I have discretion —a discretion which my right hon. Friend does not have—to take it out of the share of the general Scottish block grant. As none of the decisions has yet been taken for the spending of individual parts of that block, what we are discussing today can be taken into account before those decisions are made.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Secretary of State said that, in his review of student spending, account will be taken of the differences in the Scottish education system. Can he guarantee that if at the end of that review it appears that a system suitable for England and Wales is not suitable for Scotland, he will be free to go his own way and to make separate decisions for Scotland? If he wants to take instructions from the English Minister beside him, we shall understand.

Mr. Younger: That is not how anything works. If it were in the interests of Scottish students and of the Scottish university system for different decisions to be made, of course I would put them forward.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that his repeated assertion today that he did not make a statement yesterday because it is difficult to make a number of statements in one day is completely false? Will he confirm that yesterday he made it clear that he had no intention of making any statement on the issue and that the protests registered yesterday by hon. Members on all the Opposition Benches are the reason for today's statement? The Secretary of State was dragged reluctantly to the Dispatch Box.

Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware of the widespread suspicion, shared by some of his hon. Friends, that Scotland is the subject of double jeopardy? When he comes to the House next week with what we hope will be a more definitive statement, will he deal more specifically with the reason why Scotland should pay twice? Is the Secretary of State intending to sit back and allow science and research budgets to be cut in this way?

My right hon. and hon. Friends place on record our utter disgust and lack of confidence because neither the Secretary of State nor the Minister responsible for education in Scotland attended any of the meetings which resulted in these decisions.

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman knows nothing about it and his last point is rubbish anyway. I am glad to be making a statement today, particularly because I was requested to by the hon. Gentleman and others. I fully understand the position, although I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman does. This is the normal way of doing things. The relationship between financial effects north of the border and south of the border is clear and is operated under the formula. The system has been welcomed by many people for a long time. As for the so-called cut in extra technical education, we are proposing an increase for central institutions for that precise purpose. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for delaying the House again, but in answer to the question by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), the Secretary of State said that statements in the House were a matter for yourself and the House. *[Interruption.]* Well, he said that statements were a matter for the House, which makes them therefore a matter for you. He said that he could not make a statement yesterday because that was a matter for the House. Will you clarify the position, Mr. Speaker? The House needs to know whether it is a matter for us, for you or for Ministers to decide.

Mr. Speaker: Whether a statement is made is a matter for the Minister concerned, not for me.

Autumn Statement

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. More than 30 hon. Members are anxious to take part in this debate. I therefore intend, once again, to apply the 10 minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 8.50 pm. I appeal to Privy Councillors and other hon. Members who are called before 7 pm to bear in mind the interests of their colleagues and to keep their speeches brief.

It would be counter-productive for hon. Members to come to the Chair to ascertain where they stand on my preliminary list. I shall do my best to include in this debate those hon. Members who failed to catch my eye during the economic debate and the debate on the Queen's Speech. I shall give preference to those hon. Members today.

4.40 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 12th November; welcomes the prospect of continuing low inflation and steady growth as the basis for maintaining the trend of rising employment; and congratulates Her Majesty's Government on keeping the public expenditure planning total for 1985-86 within the figure published in the 1984 Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9143).

This is the third occasion during the past six weeks on which the House has been able to debate the progress of the economy. I welcome this further opportunity for the House to consider in particular the statement I made on 12 November and to endorse the Government's economic strategy, which has already provided almost four years of steady economic growth with falling inflation and, despite the still lamentably high level of unemployment, a steady growth in the number of people in work since the spring of 1983.

That record owes a great deal to our resolution as a Government in tackling the relentless upward pressure of public expenditure, in reducing the share of national income absorbed by the public sector and in bringing forward resources for more productive use by private enterprise. As the Earl of Stockton in his recent and memorable maiden speech in another place said about slimming the public sector:

"it is very disagreeable . . . But it had to be done and it still has to be done."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 November 1984; Vol. 457, c. 238.]

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton) *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: Before elaborating on those matters, I should like to pay tribute to the Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), and to the members of his Committee.

Mr. Heffer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: I shall not give way. The House knows that I normally give way frequently. Mr. Speaker has said that there is a shortage of time, and I shall, therefore, be a little more parsimonious than I normally am in giving way.

I pay tribute to the Committee for the expedition with which it conducted its inquiry into the autumn statement. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing will not take it amiss if I say that I do not find myself 100 per cent. in agreement with every word of the Committee's report. My right hon. Friend would perhaps be surprised, and some members of his Committee might even be disappointed or alarmed, if that were not so.

The Treasury and Civil Service Committee can justly claim to have something of a proprietary interest in the autumn statement, because it was in response to an earlier report by its predecessor Committee that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, when he was Chancellor, presented the first autumn statement to the House in November 1982. This year's autumn statement, like its predecessors, brings together a number of announcements that fall to be made at this time of the year. I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House recognise that its particular value lies in the fact that it allows the public spending plans for the year ahead to be set in the context of a fresh economic forecast.

We continue to make better progress on inflation than most commentators have expected, and this downward pressure should continue in the coming year. Although the forecast in the autumn statement does not predict much of a change in the inflation rate during the next 12 months, we shall still have achieved a significant period when inflation has been at or below 5 per cent. That was scarcely imaginable when we first took office a little over five years ago. Now, expectations are adjusting to that much lower rate of inflation, providing the basis for the further progress on inflation that our policies are designed to achieve.

Our policies are designed to achieve something else as well. By having a firm grip on public expenditure, holding it broadly constant in real terms over a period of years, we shall as the economy continues to expand, have progressive scope for reductions in taxation not just for the few, but for the many. We have achieved that already by an increase in tax thresholds well ahead of inflation, and I hope that we shall continue to do so. As I have said to both the House and the Committee, this occurs within a wide margin of uncertainty. The scope of perhaps £1·5 billion of tax reductions in the coming budget——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): What about the unemployed? Tax cuts will not help them.

Mr. Lawson: —is something which will be of comfort, as the hon. Lady rightly points out, particularly to the unemployed.

We continue to hear it said that the years since 1981 have been a period of weak recovery. A closer examination of the figures shows that the pace of recovery of output has been far from weak. If growth in 1985 turns out as expected in the autumn statement forecast, the economy will have grown since 1981 by almost 12 per cent. That would more than match the output growth during the previous recovery period from 1975 to 1979. It would also compare particularly well with our competitors overseas. As the House knows, last year we had the highest rate of economic growth within the European Community. According to the Commission's latest estimates, this year, thanks to the coal strike, our rate of growth will be around the average for the Community — no better than that. Next year, however, the Commission expects us once again to be right at the top of the Common Market league table for growth. No doubt we shall hear in due course from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that there

has been no recovery—that it is simply a figment of the imagination since, he will argue, how else could unemployment remain so high.

Of course unemployment is too high. Of course every hon. Member wants it to be lower. Only the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook could persuade himself that the four years of recovery are somehow a complete illusion. The House knows better than that, and so do business and industry, which are now earning their best rate of return for a decade.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Chancellor explain something that has been genuinely puzzling me for the last few weeks? When the right hon. Gentleman wrote and published the medium-term financial strategy in 1980 —when unemployment was below two million—he said that, as inflation came down and the public sector borrowing requirement was reduced, not only would output increase, but unemployment would come down. What has gone wrong?

Mr. Lawson: As inflation has come down, so employment has grown substantially.

There are three important ways in which this recovery differs from recoveries in recent times. First, this recovery has been accompanied by a sharp and necessary rise in the profits of industry and commerce. Secondly, there has been no great resurgence of stock building. In past recoveries, there was a great growth of stock building which proved to be an element of instability, because subsequently companies and industries tended to destock. In many cases, that is what caused the end of the recovery. Other recoveries have had to come to an end because of a resurgence of inflation, which has conspicuously not occurred during this recovery.

One great remaining worry is the level of unemployment. The level of unemployment could have improved if only real wages had grown less rapidly. It is no use the Opposition closing their eyes to that fact. I was interested to note that last weekend every Head of Government who attended the European Council meeting in Dublin—including the Socialist President of France, Mr. Mitterrand —approved the Commission's annual economic report which has, as its first item under the heading "For the expansion of employment", this statement:

"strict moderation in the evolution of real wages, consistent with the objective of achieving a pause in the growth or even a reduction in total real labour costs, which, with lower taxes and lighter burdens of employment regulation, would mean a cost structure of firms that would be more conducive to employment expansion."

That is the policy not merely of this Government but of everyone throughout the Community who has responsibility for dealing with the very difficult and intractable problem of unemployment.

Ms. Clare Short: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: However well we do in improving our own economic performance, we are inevitably exposed to the world background. The forces of protectionism threaten to poison the trading climate and weaken the fabric of international economic and political co-operation as a whole, as they did in the 1930s. The recent examples of unilateral action by the United States to limit imports of steel pipes and tubes from Community countries, and Canada's decision to maintain quantitative limits on imports of footwear, are two recent examples. The challenge before us is not merely to resist protectionism but to push forward with negotiations for further liberalisation in the framework of the GATT.

A second cause for concern remains the level of world interest rates, which is closely linked with the economic prospects for the United States. The size of the American budget deficit — in relation in particular to American domestic savings — has inevitably pushed up interest rates and thus led to a sharp rise in the value of the dollar. The counterpart to the capital inflows financing the United States budget deficit is a substantial American current account trading and payments deficit of about $100 billion a year.

The United States will soon, for the first time, become a net international debtor; indeed, it could fairly quickly become the world's largest debtor. That the world's wealthiest economy should be a persistent large borrower of capital from the rest of the world is neither a desirable nor, in my opinion, a sustainable position. No other country could sustain the imbalances that we see in the United States for as long as the Americans have done. Even they are increasingly coming to recognise the need for painful remedial action.

President Reagan made it clear only yesterday that he intends to take further action to cut the deficit. Labour Members, wo seem to persist in the delusion that the American budget deficit is a blessing that we in Britain should seek to emulate, might listen to the views of the man who has to grapple with it—the American Treasury Secretary, Mr. Don Regan. Speaking only last weekend —*[Interruption.]* I suspect that what he said after the election is rather more significant than what he said before the election. Mr. Regan said:

"Deficit reduction is by far the most serious problem facing the US, the Administration and the Congress . . . Reducing the deficit is the No. 1 priority."

Mr. Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): I do not think that anyone would disagree that the number one problem facing the United States is its deficit. Equally, I do not think that anyone would disagree that the number one problem facing Britain is its unemployment. What does my right hon. Friend say in response to the argument that if £1·5 billion is cut off taxes, much of that will be spent on imports and will help the Japanese and German workers, whereas if the same amount of money is invested in a selective capital investment programme, very few imports will be involved but a good many new jobs will be created?

Mr. Lawson: I regard it as extraordinarily defeatist to assume that whenever the British people have more money to spend, British industry is quite incapable of meeting their needs. I do not believe it for a moment.

A third area of concern is the international debt problem. We have avoided the disasters prophesied by many, but for the future it is important for financial flows to developing countries to take forms that are better suited to their needs. That means forms by which funds are committed for a longer period, and where the servicing costs are more certain or better related to the return on the assets which they finance. In particular, that means a resumption of direct investment. Many debtor countries should ask themselves whether past inhibitions on such investment should be continued. I hope, too, that those

[Mr. Lawson]

developed countries that maintain exchange controls that inhibit outward investment of this kind will ask themselves the same question.

We can be proud of the growing part that British capital has been able to play in the developing world since the abolition of exchange controls. Since 1979, private investment in the under-developed countries has averaged over £4 billion a year. Not only is that a multiple of official aid flows—about the maintenance of which the House was recently concerned — but private investment is a form of assistance that typically brings with it valuable managerial and technical skills.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I agree with what my right hon. Friend says about the American federal budget deficit and the profound danger that that constitutes, not least to the Third world countries to which he was referring just now, but will he agree that that deficit has been rather helpful to him in some of his very proper preoccupations in recent months?

Has not the effect of an over-valued dollar been that my right hon. Friend's oil revenues have been that much more buoyant and helped him to meet his target, and to put his £7 billion PSBR target back into place for 1985-86? Has not the effect also been that, because of the lower parity of sterling, our exports have been more buoyant, and my right hon. Friend's tax revenues have been more buoyant?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that is not a stable or sustainable set of circumstances and that we shall have to make further adjustments fiscally to achieve his objectives in future years?

Mr. Lawson: I agree with my hon. Friend, who made a rather long intervention — I am sure that he will forgive me if I do not deal with every point in it—that it is not a sustainable position. I do not think that it will mean making adjustments at present of the kind that he has suggested may be necessary in later years. But, as we get nearer to those years, if such adjustments prove to be necessary they will be made to maintain the integrity of the medium-term financial strategy. As hon. Members will know, following the London summit initiative last June, there are to be special meetings in Washington next April of the International Monetary Fund interim committee and the IMF and World Bank development committee to discuss these and other international financial issues that are of particular concern to developing and debtor countries.

Above all, the developing countries need imported capital for their development, and export markets for their goods. I cannot help noting that the declared policy intention of Labour spokesmen—if they ever again form a Government — is to inhibit the flow of capital by imposing controls, and to inhibit the flow of trade by imposing import controls. So much for their crocodile tears about the developing countries.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: No.

I have mentioned the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. It focused on two points in particular—how the Government set their spending priorities, and the treatment in our plans of asset sales and debt interest.

Since 1981, when the Government first moved to a full cash planning system of public expenditure control, the discipline of holding to plans, while finding room for the areas of growth in spending within them, has involved an exhaustive search in each public expenditure survey for savings and economies across the board, and a rigorous examination of priorities both within and between departmental programmes. At the end of that process there are inevitably some very hard decisions to be made. The very difficulty of those decisions throws a spotlight on the process by which the decisions are reached, and it is to that process that I should now like to turn.

The annual public expenditure survey involves a lengthy period each year during which officials in the spending Departments and the Treasury prepare an analysis of programmes with assessments of the implications of increasing and reducing expenditure in specific areas. There are meetings of officials, both bilateral between the Treasury and the individual spending Departments, and multilateral, when the principal spending Departments come together under Treasury chairmanship to consider these matters. We then come to the decision-making phase of the survey, when Ministers make their political judgments on the basis of the factual material and the analysis provided by the officials. Ultimately, there are the decisions of the Cabinet as a whole, which exercises its judgment as to which matters it will examine in greater detail and which in less detail.

Because those decisions are important and because some of them are controversial, there is naturally much interest in the particular setting in which they are taken. If a group of Ministers meets late at night or is dubbed the star chamber, that is instantly newsworthy, perhaps more so than the issues being discussed. One point, however, is fundamental. Whatever the group of Ministers or Departments involved and whatever the forum or setting, there can be no magic mechanism for setting priorities within and between programmes. However detailed the factual basis provided by the officials and however sophisticated the analysis of output and performance for the programme concerned, in the end there has to be a political judgment and a political decision. *[Interruption.]* I am dealing with the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service to which I, unlike the Opposition Front Bench, have the courtesy to give serious attention.

There is a homely analogy to be drawn, which I tried to make when I appeared before the Select Committee. Just as when a family wonders whether to have the house painted or to go away for a holiday, or whatever, there must first be an appraisal of the costs and so on, then the decision and choice. In Government there is no utilitarian calculus that permits numerical comparison of the respective benefits of, say, an extra military aircraft as against more disaster relief or more equipment for the research councils. There is, of course, extensive analysis and appraisal, but at the end there is a political judgment to be made which in practice is necessarily determined as much by constraints as by priorities.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I agree that there is no magical solution, but it is surely in the interests of the House that the mechanism should be more widely known. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House whether the issue of student grants went to the Cabinet or to the star chamber?

Mr. Lawson: All issues are set before the Cabinet, including that one.

There are two final points on this subject. After looking carefully at a range of spending programmes, Ministers may often make a judgment in the light of what the analysis reveals about the pressures on a particular programme and then set that programme at a particular level, leaving the Minister in charge to decide precisely how the total should be distributed among the various elements in the programme. That was touched on in the Select Committee report. I see no possible objection, methodological, constitutional, political or otherwise, to such a proceeding. If the Minister responsible thinks that he can improve on the benefit delivered by a given total expenditure, he must be free to do so.

Importantly, though not surprisingly, the repetition of the process that I have described in successive public expenditure surveys produces over time a marked change in the composition of public expenditure in line with the priorities of the Government of the day. If hon. Members take a close look at the Green Paper, "The Next 10 Years", published at the time of this year's Budget, they will see that very large shifts have occurred within total public expenditure since 1978-79 — shifts determined by the Government's policies, pledges and priorities.

The procedures for public expenditure plans are not and cannot be mechanistic either in theory or in practice. As I have said, the decisions are often controversial and always difficult, but they are made in the course of a procedure which properly constrains Ministers to weigh each decision against a range of alternatives. I note and welcome the fact that the Select Committee intends to return to this in future reports.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): That process having been gone through and a distribution of public expenditure having been announced, if circumstances then arise in which it has to be reconsidered, why does the adjustment that follows have to fall upon the same Department, in yesterday's case the Department of Education and Science, which then has to find more money to the detriment of the science budget than to the detriment of the Chancellor's freedom to cut taxes in the Budget?

Mr. Lawson: There are two answers to that. First, it is the Government's policy to maintain the overall level of public expenditure broadly constant in real terms. That is an overall constraint due to our policy of providing scope for progressive reductions in the burden of taxation. Secondly, within that constraint—I believe that this is true for any Government—choices then have to be made and more money for one heading of public expenditure inevitably means less for another.

The Select Committee also recommends that asset sales should not be treated as negative expenditure and that debt interest should be included in the planning total. The Select Committee recognises that that is well-trodden ground and the Government's position has been made clear on a number of occasions. Purchases of assets add to public expenditure, so it is entirely consistent for sales of assets to reduce it. Since the planning total is a control total for public expenditure, it is more sensible for it to include debt interest, which is susceptible only to very limited short-term control. That does not mean, however, that either asset sales or debt interest are ignored. Debt interest is taken fully into account in assessing the total public expenditure position. As I have repeatedly pointed out, the composition of public expenditure and receipts is taken into account in assessing the appropriate size of the public sector borrowing requirement.

The real and important question to which all Governments must address themselves, however, is whether on the basis of existing definitions the PSBR is too high or too low or, perhaps, at the right level. I note that the Select Committee is silent on that, although no doubt we shall be hearing the views of its Chairman, the right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is your right hon. Friend."] Indeed, he is my friend as well as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has said, if more money is to be spent on a particular programme, that money must be found elsewhere. We are all concerned about the level of Government expenditure. But why must it be found from the same Department? Why can it not come from the total realm of public expenditure?

Mr. Lawson: In the case to which my hon. Friend refers, exceptionally an increase of £10 million was allowed for the programme in question. Nevertheless, when an agreement has been concluded between the Treasury and a spending Department, very special justification is required to reopen agreements already reached.

As I have said, the treatment of asset sales is well understood. Far and away the most important implication of asset sales, however, is the policy that lies behind it — privatisation. The privatisation programme is on course and proving outstandingly successful. Twelve major companies, a number of other enterprises and more than 400,000 jobs have been shifted from the state sector to the private sector. I stress the jobs aspect deliberately. Enough companies have now been privatised to show that privatisation is a textbook proof of the benefits of free market enterprise over collective state activity. The common thread running through each of those privatised companies is a higher turnover, leading to higher profits, more investment and more jobs. That can be seen right across the board. That is why privatisation is and will continue to be a major element in our economic strategy.

A central feature of that strategy is encouraging the spread of individual ownership. We want to make a reality of the vision of a property-owning and earning democracy that Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden first put before the British people. Last month's successful sale of 3,000 million shares in British Telecom was a massive leap forward in achieving that objective. In one day 2 million people became direct owners in one of the growth industries of the future. Probably well over 1 million of them had never before owned shares directly. When we first proposed the sale of more than 50 per cent. of British Telecom we were told that it could not be done, that it was impossible, that the market could not cope with anything of that size, that individual shareholders would not want it, that there were not enough of them to take up the offer, and that the rest of the world would spurn it.

Nevertheless, we decided to go ahead, and the ensuing sale was an outstanding success. It is the largest single issue ever undertaken in the world. It proves that the City of London has unrivalled ability in organising and

[Mr. Lawson]

arranging new finance. The sale increased from more than 170,000 to 400,000 the number of workers who have joined the free enterprise sector. It released from the shackles of state control a company of world stature in one of the industries on which our future will depend.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency, and I suspect in many others, many people who successfully purchased British Telecom shares were tenants who purchased their council houses, and five years ago never imagined that they would own either their houses or shares in any enterprise?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The sale is a central strand of our strategy and is of first and fundamental importance in the sort of society we wish to create.

The successful sale of British Telecom holds two important lessons. First, it reveals a vast and untapped yearning among ordinary people for a direct stake in ownership of British enterprise. They do not want the spurious, theoretical ownership offered by state capitalism. They are not even totally satisfied with the somewhat remote ownership offered by institutional capitalism. They want a direct stake in particular firms, with which they can indentify.

Investment in shares has begun to take its place with ownership of a home and either a bank or building society deposit as a way for ordinary people to participate in enterprise and wealth creation. We are seeing the birth of people's capitalism.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that his theory might totally satisfy all his Conservative supporters if, on Sunday 30 September one of the giants in the City, Johnson Matthey —despite being in the private sector and not having had a ballot to decide the issue—had not had to be rescued by the Government and the Bank of England, the taxpayers' bank, with a sum of £75 million? Those entrepreneurs at Johnson Matthey were running an uneconomic unit and their reserves became exhausted—the Government's argument regarding coal mines. Why, when the Government are so bent on privatisation and a property-owning democracy, did the Government use the Bank of England to rescue their crooked City friends?

Mr. Lawson: I am not sure whether on reflection the hon. Gentleman will feel that his last words were appropriate. I may have something to say about that in due course, but not today.

The second lesson from the British Telecom experience is that 2 million people have chosen to ignore the Labour party's threat of renationalisation. They have put their money on the table, and put it on the blue square. The weight of their money says that there will never by another Labour Government—at least not for so long as the Labour party remains committed to nationalisation, Socialism and the destruction of free enterprise.

The millions of ordinary people, from taxi drivers to pensioners, who have brushed aside Labour's threats of renationalisation will give business a whole new injection of confidence to plan ahead and take full advantage of opportunities for enterprise and growth, which only a free enterprise society can offer.

As the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is always a little coy about the Labour party's policies, I invite him to tell the House what type of autumn statement we could have expected from a Labour Government. Under the Labour Government there was no formal autumn statement, but an almost routine autumn crisis. In four years out of five there was a crisis, and with it came an autumn Budget to reverse the damage caused by the spring Budget or to amend the summer or early autumn Budgets. Under the Labour Government Budgets were not merely flowers that bloomed in the spring, but weeds that flourished throughout the year. Despite that, there was not one autumn when the Labour Government could report lower interest rates, single-figure inflation, 300,000 extra jobs or 3 per cent. growth.

We shall ask the House to reject the Opposition amendment. There is one phrase in it—the allegation that our policies are calculated to sustain a high degree of unemployment — which we reject with anger and disdain. It is the very antithesis of the truth. All our policies are calculated to improve the prospects for generating jobs that can be sustained into the future. No party would deliberately foster an increase in unemployment as an objective of policy. Political parties may, and do, differ as to the best means of eradicating the scourge of unemployment, but all parties are united in pursuing that objective, as they should be.

The allegation in the Labour party's amendment demeans those who made it. What is more, it comes ill from a party that knows that the miners' strike is destroying jobs, yet calculates that it is in its interest to support that destructive conflict as long as it persists. It comes ill from a party that knows that excessive pay destroys jobs, yet calculates that it is in its interests to support militancy wherever it manifests itself. The allegation comes particularly ill from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who has admitted that the Labour party's economic policy is "fatally flawed", because it ignores the link between pay and jobs. Yet, with cynical calculation, the right hon. Gentleman remains the spokesman for a policy that he has described as "incredible".

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My right hon. Friend has touched on the most critical of all matters that face the country, unemployment. Will he tell the House what the cost in money terms of unemployment is? In doing so, I respectfully ask him to answer the question put earlier. If some of the money wasted on paying unemployment benefit and financing all the manpower schemes that the Government have introduced were directed to selected capital projects, would that not be of great benefit to the country and reduce unemployment?

Mr. Lawson: There is no benefit in capital projects unless they are worth while in their own right. I am surprised that my hon. Friend says that manpower projects are a waste of money. The youth training scheme, in particular, on which we are spending unprecedented sums, is extremely valuable to young people who will find the jobs of the future.

The alliance also participates in this shabby and cynical calculation. Its policy on jobs, such as it is, has shrunk to the proposal that we should spend £1 billion on road building and other major construction projects. Yet all

hon. Members know that there is not a single major construction or road building project that is not opposed at local level by the Liberal party.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): When will the Chancellor of the Exchequer make a statement, that will be recorded in the *Official Report*, which even begins to bear out his outrageous suggestion?

Mr. Lawson: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so sensitive on that point. It obviously drove home. When the Liberal party's calculations tell it where the votes lie, jobs go out of the window. It is generous in theory but completely selfish in practice. Unemployment has been growing in Europe every year but one since 1973.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight) *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: I shall not give way. I have already given way to 50 per cent. of the Liberal party.

It is absurd to say that that remorseless and tragic increase has been the calculated consequence of the diverse policies pursued by all the Labour, Conservative, Social Democratic, Socialist, Lib-Lab and coalition Governments who have been in power across Europe in the past decade. Since the general election, 300,000 extra people have found jobs in this country. Unfortunately, that is not enough to absorb the unexpectedly large number of people seeking jobs, but it is a much better performance than the rest of Europe, where the number of jobs appears to have continued to shrink, and where unemployment continues to increase faster than in this country.

Those countries that have been the most successful in creating jobs have been those across the Atlantic and the Pacific, which have relied more upon free enterprise, low taxation, fewer controls, non-militant unions and flourishing enterprise culture. Those are the policies that this Government are seeking to introduce to enable this country to generate the jobs and create the wealth that we all wish to see.

The real weakness of the Opposition's case lies not in what they say but in what they fail to say. In repeated debates in the House they have made virtually no attempt to spell out a credible and coherent explanation of how they would resolve the problems that this and every other major country face. To them, 3 million unemployed is not a problem to be solved, but a tragedy to be exploited. They are like a doctor who offers his patients sympathy but refuses any diagnosis, prognosis or prescription. Real compassion requires from us more than sympathy. It requires a willingness to face tough choices and to stand up to vested interests.

Unless the Opposition parties are prepared to tell us what they would do—and why it would work now when it failed in the past and has been rejected by nearly every Government in the free world—those parties will find themselves in the wilderness not just for a few years but for a generation.

The Government have had the courage to make tough decisions and the resolution to stand up to various vested interests. They have had the consistency to pursue a long-term strategy that offers the people of this country the vision of a free economy, which will harness their energies to the creation of jobs and the generation of wealth—wealth that we want as much for the welfare of the needy as to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the majority of our people.

5.22pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"refuses to support an economic policy which is calculated to create and sustain a high level of unemployment; rejects the demonstrably false belief that a constant reduction in public spending will produce an automatice improvement in economic performance; and condemns the reduced levels of regional aid, student grants, house-building and improvement, overseas aid and social security benefit which are the real, but initially unrevealed, consequences of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement."

There is one aspect of the Government's motion to which I offer an immediate and heartfelt welcome. At least we have been spared the counterfeit compassion and pretence that unemployment is soon about to fall. We must assume that the Government have accepted the advice offered to them three weeks ago by the *Financial Times* which said:

"It is impossible to get away for ever with saying that unemployment will shortly begin to come down or at least level off if plainly it does not."

Until today, or until the Chancellor of the Exchequer addressed the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and told it that his estimates on unemployment had proved false, the Government's reaction to every complaint about rising unemployment was to say, "Wait a little longer and things will get better soon."

The nation and the 4 million—that is the true figure—unemployed, have now been waiting for five years, and things have become continually worse. At least it says something for the Chancellor's political acumen that he has at last begun to abandon the pretence that a strict and rigorous control of public borrowing and a constant reduction of the monetary aggregate will lead to a certain and automatic reduction in unemployment. That theory, on which the medium term financial strategy was based, and upon which all the false promises of reduced unemployment were based, is palpably wrong. It does the Chancellor's political acumen credit that he no longer pretends what has been the main thesis upon which the Government have attempted to defend their unemployment record since 1979.

Even the Government have abandoned—I welcome that abandonment—the combination of ignorance and hypocrisy which produced the constant promise that unemployment would fall. Today's motion and today's speech by the Chancellor—despite all the bogus anger at the end—offered no policy for dealing with unemployment. That is because the Government have no policy for unemployment except to sit back and watch it rise year by year while they concentrate upon the economic objectives which are more important to them and their class.

The autumn statement reaffirms the strategy—I use the word again—which intentionally increased unemployment and will increase it still further. That is the strategy for which the Government supporters will be voting tonight. They may wring their hands about the plight of the unemployed, and briefly bare their souls during the unreported evenings of economic debates; they may anonymously dissociate themselves from the Chancellor of the Exchequer privately—courtesy of the Lobby system—but tonight they will troop into the Division Lobby to vote for a high unemployment policy.

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

That, in the view of the Opposition, is the central issue of the debate and the issue with which the Chancellor has failed lamentably to deal. The central issue of the debate and of politics today—indeed, the great moral question facing the nation today—is the level of unemployment, the existence of an alternative which can reduce that level and the Government's unwillingness to adopt that alternative because they have higher priorities in other spheres.

Before I describe that alternative—the alternative that the Chancellor persists in saying is never offered to him but which is offered to him not just by me but by my right hon. and hon. Friends but by a large number of his Back Benchers who have tried to put the case to him today—I wish to deal with two other aspects of the autumn statement.

The first is the credibility of the figures upon which the autumn statement is based, and, in consequence, the credibility of the Chancellor. Everything that the Chancellor says is treated with virtually universal suspicion. It is the fate of most Chancellors of the Exchequer to be accused of deception by their opponents. The Chancellor has moved to the Back Benches. That is a new presence. I shall repeat the passage that I am anxious that the Chancellor should hear. It is the fate of most Chancellors to be accused by their opponents of deception, but this Chancellor's great achievement is that he has managed to be accused of it by his friends. Let me quote to him from the *Daily Telegraph* a leader called "Autumn Fudge". It stated:

"it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he is not quite telling it like it is."

On the same day, the *Daily Mail* rightly said:

"The House of Commons wanted above all to know if there was anything in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement which might make the unemployment outlook less bleak. What those listening to him heard instead was deliberately terse generalisations."

One almost feels sorry for Mr. William Deedes and Sir David English who, after years of unremitting sycophantic support for the Tory party, are provoked by the Chancellor of the Exchequer into a moment of honest objectivity. Indeed, the Chancellor is so reckless about his reputation that he will do and say anything to avoid the real discussion on his own policies and on the record for which he is responsible. That is why he always wants to talk about what he falsely believes the Labour alternative to be. Let me tell the Chancellor, as I have told him before, that while he remains Chancellor and presides over an economy in which at least 3·5 million, and possibly 4 million, men and women are on the dole and that while he has no policy to produce a better unemployment record and no plans for reducing unemployment, we shall make him talk about what he has done and about what he has failed to do.

No matter how much he may try to run away from it, we are debating this afternoon the real consequences of the autumn statement. They were not revealed on 12 November. They were revealed by Ministers who were drafted in to fill in the details that the Chancellor chose not to give to the House. Those Ministers were required to have the courage of the Chancellor's own convictions in order to do the dirty work for the Chancellor and give the bad news about what the autumn statement really meant.

Let me give some examples of what I refer to. The cut in regional aid—already before the autumn statement 35 per cent. below the 1979 figure—is now, thanks to the autumn statement, to be cut by a further £1·5 billion over the next five years. Let me ask the Chancellor, in relation to the cut in regional aid, a question that I shall ask him continually this afternoon: why do this Government and the right hon. Gentleman always choose the high unemployment option?

Secondly, student grants have been cut by 14 per cent. since 1979. Despite turning and running, despite the scuffle, despite the U-turn, student grants are to suffer a further fall in real value of 1·5 per cent. in 1985-86. There is to be a further cut in overseas aid, an increase in water charges, an increase in the gas and electricity tax and, most significant of all concerning the real results of the autumn statement—not a word about which we heard from the Chancellor when the autumn statement was made and not a word about which we have heard from the Chancellor this afternoon — there is to be a further cut in the housing programme.

We are told in paragraph 2.15 of the autumn statement that the cut in the housing programme is £65 million. That in itself is bad enough. It is a further blow to the construction industry where 400,000 men and women are already out of work. It is a further blow for the badly housed and homeless families who will number 1 million by 1988. It is also a deception. While the reduction in gross capital provision for housing is said to be £65 million, the figures subsequently published by the Department of the Environment show that the change in the cash limit is £495 million. The two sets of figures are massaged into compatibility by the forecast that the income from council house sales will rise by £430 million next year.

I ask the Chief Secretary, on the assumption that he is to make a serious speech tonight, to state what evidence there is to substantiate the view that the income from sales of council houses will increase next year by £430 million, thus holding the cut in council house building to the figure that the Chancellor pretends it will be. According to a parliamentary answer from the Department of the Environment, quite the opposite is possible. The answer given on 9 November states that receipts from the sale of council houses have begun to decline. That is not surprising. The first flush of enthusiasm to buy is over. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor must laugh at the Department of the Environment, not at me. The attempts by the Government to increase sales by the inclusion of old people's dwellings and disabled persons' dwellings has rightly been defeated.

What is more — here is another humorous matter about which the Chancellor may care to laugh, but which he may care to refer to the Department of the Environment —the Department says in its answer that it has no way of knowing whether income from the sale of council houses goes towards building more houses or whether it is used for other purposes. Yet the Chancellor blandly says, to justify his phoney figures, that because next year there will be an additional income of £430 million, the cut is only £65 million.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I do not know the constituency of the hon. Gentleman, but he is the one who always seems to be attending hunt balls.

Mr. Soames: If the right hon. Gentleman were to forbid the sale of council houses, how exactly would he finance his massive building programme?

Mr. Hattersley: Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall deal with the financing of the reduction in unemployment. I promise the hon. Gentleman that in a moment I shall make the case that he has asked me to make, but in my own way. May I also ask him to focus his formidable intellect upon the point I was trying to make: since there is no way of calculating the increase in the number of council house sales and of knowing what the income from council house sales will be spent on, how can the Chancellor, with any integrity, announce that that is the reason why council house building has not been cut so much as the autumn statement suggests? The answer is that the Chancellor could not with integrity make such an allegation.

The entire figure is an invention, made to balance the Chancellor's books. It has not even fooled the Building Employers Confederation, a body which is easily enough fooled by a Conservative Government. The more damage the Conservative Government do to the building industry, the more money the building industry gives to the Conservative Government. However, in this case the builders have seen through the Government. They report in their bulletin that while the Government pretend that there will be a 6 per cent. fall in building next year, in reality the fall will be 25 per cent. That is a shameful fact. It demonstrates that everybody who does business with the Chancellor—builders no less than politicians—has to look for the sleight of hand, the double counting and the dubious assumption.

The housing example which I have given has a triple significance. First, it demonstrates the Government's passion for public expenditure cuts. Secondly, it demonstrates the Chancellor's special way with figures. Thirdly, it demonstrates what I said a moment ago and shall say many times again: when given a choice, the Chancellor always chooses the high unemployment option. I say again that the Chancellor has chosen it because he has other options and priorities which are more important to him than, for instance, a building programme which would sustain a higher level of employment.

His hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) urged upon him a spending programme for capital projects. The Chancellor blandly — indeed, fatuously—replied that capital spending programmes are to be commended only if what the money is spent on is worth while. *[Interruption.]* Let the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley), who laughed, tell me whether he believes that building houses for the 300,000 families who are homeless in this country is worth while. Let me ask the hon. Gentleman, or the Minister whom he serves, whether he believes that the new capital which is necessary for British Rail is worth while, whether he believes that the infrastructure for ports and roads, which is necessary for the economy of this country, is worth while. It is, I repeat, fatuous to say that capital spending is desirable only if one can demonstrate that there are projects which are desperately needed. Every hon. Member could give the Chancellor a list of capital projects which would be desirable and which at the same time would put Britain back to work.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I realise that the right hon. Gentleman does not want to be pinned down too much, but will he tell the House how many jobs he considers would be created by the list he has given?

Mr. Hattersley: I promise the hon. Gentleman that I shall give him that information. It is not a new figure. It is a figure which has been quoted by many Conservative Members, to some of whom I shall refer in a moment. It is a figure which has been offered to the Chancellor by the Institute of Fiscal Studies and by the London Business School, the Valhalla of monetarism. Everybody in this country, except the Chancellor, is prepared to calculate the number of jobs which can be created by investment in the public infrastructure.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the rate of return for each of the proposed investments at least has to be considered?

Mr. Hattersley: When I have worked my way round to the model that I propose to describe, the hon. Gentleman will discover that we have thought of that as well. I propose to work my way round to it by dealing first with the central issue. If there is money to spare, as the Chancellor hopes and plans, how should that spare money —I put it in colloquial terms—be used?

We know that the central object of the Chancellor's economic policy is not an economic object, but a political object. It is a cut in income tax. The hard truth is that the unemployed, increasing in numbers, will have to pay for it.

It works this way: by massaging the figures, the Chancellor has produced what he calls a fiscal adjustment of £1·5 billion. That is largely a windfall, produced by oil prices being calculated in dollars and the depreciation of the pound running simultaneously with that calculation. The chief economic adviser to the Treasury told the Select Committee, to which I also pay tribute, that a fall of 10 per cent. in the sterling oil price would result in the automatic and certain disappearance of that £1·5 billion.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer seems to be shaking his head, but the comments of his chief economic adviser are on the record. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to contradict him, I shall give way at once. Answer came there none.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I think that the Chancellor has a young champion who will joust on his behalf.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman suggested that income tax cuts were a substitute for a policy to help to promote jobs. Does he seriously contend that the low thresholds of income tax that we still have, even after the improvements made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, have nothing to do with unemployment and do not contribute to it? Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that the unemployment trap exists?

Mr. Hattersley: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was about to attempt to deal with the point that I was making, but he asked me a different question, which I shall answer. I believe that a pound spent on reducing income tax at any level is less likely to have a direct effect on unemployment than a pound spent on public works. I shall justify that.

[Mr. Hattersley]

Before the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) sidetracked me, I was saying that the chief economic adviser to the Treasury insists that the £1·5 billion will disappear if the sterling price of oil changes by 10 per cent.

Let me reassure apprehensive Conservative Members that whatever happens, the Chancellor will find some money for income tax cuts in the next Budget—not a lot, and nothing like the additional tax burden of £22·5 billion a year imposed by a Government who were elected to cut taxes, but enough to allow them to make the bogus claim that at last income tax has been cut.

That is why the Chancellor is prepared to increase the fiscal adjustment by increasing the tax on electricity and gas. I hope that, as even the *Daily Mail* urges the Chancellor to stop pretending that it is not a tax, we may get a little honesty from him upon that subject. To get the surplus for a cut in income tax, national assets are being sold. To get the surplus, the Treasury is contemplating imposing VAT on books, newspapers, fuel, children's shoes and what the Treasury calls luxury foods, which turn out to be coffee and biscuits.

None of that has anything to do with economic performance, and it certainly has nothing to do with social justice. It has to do with the political imperative of cutting income tax. That political necessity, no less than other factors, such as the Government's desire to break the trade unions and their willingness to use the unemployed as a way of holding down prices, is why I repeat my accusation that the Government are intentionally running a policy which they know produces a high and increasing level of unemployment.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): If income tax were cut substantially, would the skillcentres that are being under-used or closed throughout the country be re-opened or used more?

Mr. Hattersley: My hon. Friend makes the point that Conservative Members seem unable to grasp, even though it is so obvious. If the Chancellor is producing a £1·5 billion surplus to distribute in income tax cuts, every public expenditure cut made to achieve that surplus will have to be written off as the price of those income tax cuts. If Conservative Members do not understand that, they lack a knowledge not of economics, but of elementary arithmetic.

We have always argued—and I argue again today—that a substantial relaxation in the Government's fiscal and monetary stance is necessary for the revival of confidence and demand. However, I wish to argue my case for reducing unemployment not in my own terms of an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement, which I certainly support, but in the Chancellor's terms, because he keeps telling us that he will have at least £1·5 billion to spend. If hon. Members are honest, they will all concede that he could do more about unemployment than he chooses to do. Why does the Cancellor always choose the high unemployment option?

I refer the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the work done by the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies and the monetarist London Business School, which came to a simultaneous and agreed solution: £1 billion spent on tax cuts reduces unemployment by about 30,000 in four years, but £1 billion spent on investment, particlarly capital investment in the public sector on infrastructure, reduces unemployment by about 185,000 in four years.

Why, apart from the political imperative, apart from the chairman of the associations who forced the change of mind yesterday, and apart from the prejudiced opinions of Conservative supporters who do not know much—and care less—about the unemployed, does the Chancellor choose to spend the money in the way in which he is determined to spend it?

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Do I understand the right hon. Gentleman correctly? Will the Opposition go into the next election emulating the examples of Mr. Walter Mondale who promised higher taxes? If so, they will certainly meet a similar fate to that suffered by Mr. Mondale. Alternatively, will the Opposition emulate the example of their former leader, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and try to fudge the issue? If so, they will meet the same fate as he suffered.

Mr. Hattersley: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what we shall do, but, first, let me tell him what we shall not do. We shall not go into the next election promising to cut taxes and then increase them by £22·5 billion a year.

The hon. Gentleman asked what we shall do. I shall repeat it shortly in the prepared part of my speech, but I tell him without hesitation that if I, whether as Opposition spokesman or as Chancellor of the Exchequer, have to choose between cuts in income tax or cuts in unemployment, I will choose cuts in unemployment. Indeed, I go further. I believe that Conservative Members, with a number of honourable and notable exceptions, mistake the mood of the country if they believe that our people say, "Let us have our taxes cut if we are working, because we do not care about the unemployed." I believe that many people in work would make the same choices as I propose to make and would give priority to tackling unemployment.

I want to say two other things about the Chancellor's proposals and his attitude to unemployment. I have already observed and rejoiced in the fact that he no longer cries crocodile tears and wrings his hands in mock horror. Nor does he any longer pretend that high unemployment is an act of malign fate which has been imposed on him by some external force. Now he is prepared to talk about possible solutions. If he is prepared to talk about possible solutions, that must mean that he believes that he could do something about it in certain circumstances.

The Chancellor talks about two solutions and I want to speak about both briefly. But first is the idea that unemployment can be reduced by lower real wages. The Chancellor must know that lower real wages will not come about. He should know that even if they did, they would not reduce unemployment. To talk about lower real wages every time unemployment is mentioned is really to look for scapegoats, not answers.

Mr. Lawson: How about an incomes policy, then?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall come to that. If there were a massive injection of effective demand into the economy, it would be important to ensure that that new demand, coming from a massive increase in Government spending, was not dissipated in an increase in money wages. But that, in conditions of expansion, is quite different from

what the Chancellor is now proposing at the bottom of a deflationary slide. If the Chancellor does not understand that, no wonder the country is in the mess that it is.

The second solution to unemployment, to which I hope the Chief Secretary will pay particular attention, was offered by the noble Lord Young on Tuesday. The solution that he offered to the National Federation of Building Trades Employers was the abolition of supplementary benefit for young people between the ages of 16 and 18. *[Interruption.]* Young people under 18 would have to be wiser and older than the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary for my initial contention to apply.

Lord Young proposed the abolition of supplementary benefit for young people between the ages of 16 and 18. When Lord Young was appointed as Minister with special responsibility for employment—or unemployment—I predicted that all he would do was produce gimmicks—a change in the figures rather than a change in the real level of unemployment. The idea that he might propose anything as cruelly heartless as removing young people between the ages of 16 and 18 from receipt of supplementary benefit never struck me for a moment. We want the Chief Secretary to tell us tonight whether that member of the Cabinet was speaking for the Government when he proposed that young unemployed people between the ages of 16 and 18 should no longer receive supplementary benefit.

I understand the benefit from that. It may well be that by doing that 150,000 or 200,000 names will be removed from the register of unemployed, but not a single job would be created. Not a single reduction in total unemployment would be achieved. Enormous hardship and suffering would be created. I tell the Chief Secretary a third time: we expect him to tell us tonight whether on Tuesday Lord Young spoke for the Government or whether that is a proposition which not even the Government will contemplate.

Mr. Nell Kinnock (Islwyn): He can tell us now.

Mr. Hattersley: As my right hon. Friend says, he could tell us now if he chose to do so.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: My difficulty, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is twofold.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: You must sit down when I am standing up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman does not mean me.

Mr. Hattersley: My difficulty is twofold. The first is that I am giving way more often than you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would wish. The second is that all the questions that I direct at the organ grinder keep being answered by the monkeys. Since the Chief Secretary will not answer my question I shall let the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) try.

Mr. Cash: Has the right hon. Gentleman accurately described what Lord Young said the other day? Did he not in fact say that it was only when young people refuse to take jobs or training that they would perhaps not get supplementary benefit? Will he please answer that question?

Mr. Hattersley: The answer is no, I did not misquote Lord Young. His speech was described extensively in the *Financial Times*. It was dealt with in that paper's first leader. Lord Young asked the question:

"Is it right that we should pay young people for doing nothing?"

The only possible conclusion one could draw from that question was his intention to remove supplementary benefit. That is what the *Financial Times* says he meant, and that is what I believe he meant. *[Interruption.]*

I understand the shame with which Conservative Members greet that proposition, but I assure them that it was the proposition of one of their Cabinet and I assure them that we shall want to know from the Chief Secretary tonight whether it was Government policy.

I am relieved, not to say delighted, that Conservative Members have reacted with such sensitivity to that latest and most brutal proposal. I am delighted that they are interested, particularly those who are from time to time inclined to parade their bleeding hearts whenever unemployment is mentioned. I recall vividly the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt)—not now, I think, in his place—two weeks ago speaking movingly of the unemployed coming to his surgery and saying that they did not vote for him to obtain that result. They will correct that error next time. I think movingly, too, about such Conservative Members as the right hon. Members for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) and for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), and the hon. Members for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley), for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell) and for Stafford who were willing enough yesterday and the day before to sign an early-day motion, willing enough to take part in a rebellion under pressure from parents of the prosperous young people of the suburban areas of Britain, and willing enough to stand up for the urban middle classes and the grants that their sons and daughters should receive, but who have not rebelled on the subject about which they talk so much—unemployment in Britain.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I say this to them. Their reputation for humanity and compassion—that goes for the king wet, the Secretary of State for Energy—is eroded every time they vote for the Government on the strategy which the Government now adopt. Not until they begin to rebel on unemployment shall we treat them seriously or treat them with respect. Until they vote against the Government, no matter what they say, write in *The Guardian* or say in the presence of a selective audience of conservative liberals, they will be supporting a Government who, despite all their protestations, adopt the high unemployment policy. We shall vote against that tonight and if they had any shame, they would do the same.

5.57 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): I am grateful for the kind remarks which were made both by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) about the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. I am glad that it has been possible for the Committee to produce that report before the debate. That required a considerable effort and I want to pay tribute to the hard work that has been done by my colleagues on the Committee and by the clerks and the staff of that

[Mr. Terence Higgins]

Committee. To have before the House an analysis of what is in the autumn statement improves the quality of our debate.

In that context, may I first say a word or two about procedure for the main debates during the year? It is true that we normally have this debate on the autumn statement, followed later, usually early in the new year, by a debate on the White Paper on which the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee also reports, and then a debate on the Budget in the latter part of the spring. Those are the three main debates on which the Committee bases its work in the course of the annual cycle.

The arrangement for the debates on the autumn statement and Budget is a good one. However, I am bound to say that I have rather more doubt now about whether the debate on the public expenditure White Paper comes at the right time. I have a feeling that the debate, over the years, has never been a tremendous success. It often comes too close to the budget itself. We might do better to have a debate on public expenditure in, say, late June or early July, when the House would have an influence on the forthcoming round of public expenditure decisions within the Government.

In the course of some of the controversies of the past few days, there has been a strong feeling that taxation and public expenditure ought to be considered together. Indeed, that is implicit in much that was said by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook a moment ago. That was one of the recommendations of the so-called Armstrong committee report, but the Armstrong committee also stressed the importance of having a green Budget in the autumn so that the House could have an opportunity of discussing not only the main part of the autumn statement —public expenditure—but also the provisional proposals of the Government for taxation. A final decision could then be made by the Government at normal Budget time.

I am worried about the fact that, instead of setting up some formal arrangement of that kind, which would be of immense advantage, we seem to be sliding into a situation where many aspects of taxation are debated because of leaks or rumours on particular tax changes. That is not a good arrangement. It is no substitute for a proper green Budget.

There may be a strong argument for transferring the burden of taxation from direct to indirect taxes, especially if one alters the rates of tax in the traditional way by putting more on beer, cigarettes or tobacco or perhaps even on the standard rate of value added tax. However, what worries me is that in the past few weeks there has been a series of rumours about tax changes which the Government then say they cannot deny. One often gains the impression that the rumours may have arisen from informal discussions with Treasury Ministers and others. That is a bad arrangement. The rumours have concerned VAT on books, newspapers and children's shoes, and the taxation of lump sum pensions, among other things.

There may be a case for changing the balance between indirect and direct taxation, as far as rates of tax are concerned. However, we must look carefully at any proposal—and certainly any range of proposals—which would extend the frontiers of indirect taxation beyond the area where the House has decided over many years that the line should be drawn.

There is a case for a green Budget. I do not like the constant circulation of rumours at the present time, and it would be worrying if there were any truth in the rumours that indirect taxation is to be extended into areas that the House has decided, with good reason, it should not affect.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Higgins: No, Sir. I am frightfully sorry, but I understand that Privy Councillors must not take up too much time, so I should like to pursue my own line of argument.

At Question Time today, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of raising the income tax thresholds. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that one could do that on a sufficient scale to make a serious impact on the poverty trap or the "Why work?" problem. I believe that we should be moving towards a system of tax credits. Such a system might take many years to implement and fully to finance. However, it would provide a permanent solution to the problems, and that would be better than attempting to ameliorate them occasionally, or year after year, by raising the tax thresholds.

The main part of the autumn statement is dealt with in the report of the Treasury Select Committee. The central argument on which we have concentrated this year is the question of public expenditure priorities. We expressed our increasing concern that the mechanism for determining public spending priorities, which produces the result in the autumn statement, is not working as well as it should. The events of the past few days in relation to overseas aid and student grants and parental contributions seem to confirm our view.

We drew attention to the considerable danger that bilateral negotiations between the Chief Secretary and the spending Ministers may not take fully into account the true picture across all the Departments. We stressed the fact that we took evidence from officials and from the Chancellor himself. My right hon. Friend was inclined to resort to homely analogies—as he did this afternoon—and ask members of the Committee how they reached private expenditure decisions. I am somewhat suspicious of such simple analogies, but I too will resort to one in a moment or two.

What is very worrying indeed—I commend hon. Members to the relevant section of the report—is the way in which some Ministers seem to have taken the view that if they have a certain amount to spend and if there is then a cut across the board in all Departments, that must be the limit on the amount that they can spend on the Department, even though there may be a very strong case for increasing each of the items in the Department's budget. That is a very difficult matter for some Departments with very small programmes. The Foreign Office and the Department of Education and Science are classic cases. If they have to make cuts, they feel that they must do so across the board. The Foreign Secretary, for instance, may feel that he has to cut not only overseas aid but the BBC's overseas broadcasts, the diplomatic service and the British Council, when the right answer should have been that if he needed to spend more, not less, on those areas, the savings should have been found in some other Department. But it is clear that that is not the way in which matters are being handled, and that priorities are being allocated in a very dangerous way.

The statement of the Secretary of State for Education and Science yesterday was another classic case. I believe that his original proposal was wrong. It had grievous disadvantages. The House knows all about them. However, I do not share the reaction of some of my colleagues to the package announced yesterday. In some ways, that package was even worse than the original proposal. I do not say that it was absolutely worse, but it was certainly not as good as one could have done in the circumstances, because the Secretary of State believed that he had to find within his own Department the savings that he felt ought to be made.

In answer to a question yesterday, the Secretary of State said:

"I should not like the House to get the wrong impression about the diminution of the money that might have to be made in the allocation to the adult education programme. As far as we can tell, it will be about £100,000 a year."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 366.]

When a spending Minister feels obliged to make adjustments affecting an area of public expenditure about which many people feel strongly, but announces that he is going to cut £100,000 a year, the matter is getting totally out of proportion. To coin a phrase, one might say that the Government's policy is to make a banana skin out of every candle end.

As I said, I do not like the idea of homely analogies, but I take up the point made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. My right hon. Friend suggests that we should consider what an individual does. Let us do so. If someone has to buy a new pair of trousers, he does not say to himself, "This is a special spending department; I shall have to cut back on my spending on socks." He might have to consider the jewellery department and say that, if he spent a little less on jewellery, he could spend rather more on trousers and socks. But that is not happening, and at least two departmental Ministers feel that they have to make savings in the same Department. Neither economic nor political priorities are being made on a sensible basis. That is why we clearly recommend that there should be a reappraisal of machinery for determining public expenditure priorities, with special reference to the need to improve the allocation between Departments and a more open discussion of the best machinery for achieving it.

I am mindful of your remarks about being brief, Mr. Speaker, so I shall cover just two other matters. The motion refers to keeping plans for spending in line with what was said last year. Our report makes it quite clear that the relevant measures is not whether expenditure is kept in line with plans but whether plans are kept in line with out turn or, more accurately, whether out turn is kept in line with plans. There are serious problems in that regard.

We are also deeply worried about there seeming to be systematic distortions in the planning total. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred to two—debt interest and asset sales. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's view has been, and remains, in conflict with that of the Chancellor. It is not sensible to say that proceeds from privatisation should be treated as a reduction in public expenditure. They could conceivably be treated as revenue or, as the Select Committee would prefer, as a means of financing the public sector borrowing requirement—otherwise, they give a false impression of the extent to which the Chancellor has succeeded in controlling public expenditure. That is true in several other respects with which I shall not burden the House, but I commend our report to it.

A false impression of what is happening has been given. That brings me to the PSBR. We have to look carefully at the definitions if we are to get a clear idea about what is really happening. The Chancellor is in a better position to express his view on that than am I, but I do not think that it is badly out of line at the moment. Having looked at the forecasts that we have published and selected and those which the Chancellor has published, it is probably true that the autumn statement is rather more reflationary than the Chancellor seems willing to admit. Within the limits in which I am speaking, that is welcome.

I am more worried about the statement on the so-called fiscal adjustment. The Select Committee draws attention to the fact that, in contrast with last year, when circumstances were not vastly different, we have had statements from Treasury Ministers which clearly hold out the hope of some tax reductions in the next main Budget, to the extent of £1·5 billion. The reality, however, is that that is extremely vulnerable to changes in the exchange rate. If, by the next Budget, the exchange rate goes back to where it was at the time of the last Budget, there will be no scope for fiscal adjustment. We have to live with that. It is a new situation which arises because the exchange rate is related to the oil price, although not entirely because the oil price might change. That in turn affects revenue from North sea oil receipts. It is somewhat dangerous to predicate tax changes, which necessarily will be permanent or semi-permanent, on the basis of such good fortune, which can easily be reversed. We must take that into account.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred to the effect of the American deficit. In that respect we are in danger. He referred to a balance of payments deficit, as opposed to a budgetary deficit, of about £100 billion a year in the United States. That is being financed largely as a result of the big American budget deficit, extremely high interest rates and their effect on the American dollar exchange rate which, in turn, has a repercussion on the balance of payments. That is financed by a big inflow of funds from overseas.

I do not believe that we or the Americans can assume that that inflow of funds—whether it is desirable or undesirable is another matter—will go on indefinitely. If those funds suddenly stop flowing in, everyone will decide that that is the time to get out and we shall end up with what I understand current American jargon terms a "hard landing". The implications of that, and possibly much higher interest rates to prevent the exchange rate falling, for South America and the entire financial structure are extremely dangerous. I am not yet convinced that the world community, the Chancellor or his opposite numbers in America have given sufficient attention to that problem. It is potentially very dangerous.

The dilemma is that even if the Americans take steps to reduce the budget deficit in an attempt to achieve a soft landing, we might still find that they create the same situation. I do not find that good for unemployment or any other problem. I merely raise it because the House ought to turn its attention to it, once it has dealt with the important issues that are raised in the Chancellor's statement and the Select Committee's report.

6.15 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Like many others, I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and his Committee for producing a report, this time only just in time for us to use it during the important debate following the autumn statement. It clarifies the issues rather better than does the autumn statement. I agree with many of its conclusions and its lay out is wholly commendable.

Issues arising out of priorities are dealt with in paragraphs 5 and 14 of the Select Committee's report. The reappraisal of the machinery is important. The right hon. Gentleman and many of his colleagues are a little optimistic about how far we can go in that direction. I would try to achieve something much more modest. The matter has become extremely topical because of the overseas aid fiasco and the parental contribution to student grants. We can learn from the manner in which the Secretary of State for Education and Science had to come back to the House and change his course of action. There are lessons to be learned also from the way in which he had to make decisions that were based not on what his colleagues might have considered right but on the limited resources of political opinion that he was able to bring to bear.

The matter raises the issue of how Governments relate expenditure to resources. They do so in one of two ways. Either they make a total of their favoured and necessary programmes and realise that they demand a certain growth rate which they hope can be achieved, or they rely on the Treasury. The Treasury has a solution that is born out of sad experience over the years. We are fully familiar with the optimism of Ministers about the growth of resources. Their natural reaction is to oppose expenditure knowing that others will wish to overcome their restraint. They therefore stand there like executioners awaiting their call.

Neither of those methods is right. Neither undue optimism nor indiscriminate opposition to expenditure is the right approach to public expenditure. The basis of parliamentary control of spending used to rest on Members of Parliament carrying the dual responsibility for taxation, which was bad, and expenditure, which was good. In practice, those choices never come together in time. They are debated separately and any Member of Parliament can favour general economy and particular expenditure.

The problem is how we establish our priorities. Priorities are at the heart of any rational examination of public expenditure. The star chamber is not the way to handle these matters. Either there will be a preponderance of spending Ministers who are involved in the matters they discuss and are prejudiced, or there will be Ministers who are not involved and do not have the stomach for the blood-letting and butchery that is required. Because of the nature of this process, we have to look for other ways. We know that these matters come into Cabinet, where perhaps a Minister's future is at risk. Issues are fought out there, largely on the basis of the power, strength and persuasiveness of the Ministers concerned, rather than on the strength of the case that they are able to make.

Because of the unsatisfactory nature of this process, which has been with us for so long, many of us hope that there may be some role for Parliament, through the Select Committee system, to do some of the work, which would be a slight improvement. This will not happen by opposing spending programmes. No group of people responsible in public will deny the advantage of certain programmes, as the Chief Secretary will know. Instead, we can have a better way, in which competitive bidding brings together the various pressure groups. It is astonishing how slowly the pressure groups have come to realise the importance of placing their case before the Select Committees.

It may be that through better discussion and greater involvement, we shall get solutions rather better than the one that we had this week in the case of university fees for students with better-off parents. It is better to establish priorities through pressure groups and Select Committees, which are then sifted by those who understand the political pressure — Members of Parliament — than to have Ministers coming to conclusions based on inadequate political feeling. If there is to be a fight over expenditure of public money, it is better to have onlookers there to see fair play. That is what happens in the end. At the moment, particularly with the size of the Government's majority, these matters come back to the House and the Government then find themselves faced with difficulties such as those that we saw this week.

I have been interested most in the role of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Did he come before the star chamber to put this matter, or did he go to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and say, "I believe that we should have cuts and I agree with them. This is what the Cabinet has decided and I shall put forward this cut as my offering to the Chief Secretary."? As I understand these matters, it would be astonishing if the Chief Secretary turned him down. The Chief Secretary rarely gets offers such as that. He has so many other problems that he will just say, "Thank you very much." Privately, he may question the judgment, but he has so many other problems on his mind that he will just think that that is one less. Therefore, the issue will not go before the star chamber or the Cabinet. Matters as important as this, or even more important, can be dealt with in this way.

I am saddened because the humiliation that a Minister may suffer is unnecessary. Other ways can be found to notify those concerned about possible proposals so that they can bring to bear the accumulated wisdom and judgment of far more people than the individual Minister who suffers some setback, as happened on this occasion. There are then the consequences of agonising over £10 million out of £132,000 million. I am the last person to diminish the value of £10 million, but nevertheless, out of £132,000 million, this matter could have been solved more readily and easily and with greater co-operation all round than it was.

My next point is covered by paragraphs 49 to 53 of the Select Committee report. It is handy to deal with the report rather than the autumn statement because the report has a more logical form. I offer that advice to the Chief Secretary. Here, we are dealing with nationalised industries, but the Government have not got it right. They have never had it right. They want to interfere, often for good reasons, but they do not want to appear to be interfering. They want the best of both worlds — to control the nationalised industries, but not to appear to be controlling them.

At the heart of the problem of the nationalised industries is the basic pretence that the Government do not interfere with them and so are not answerable to the House of Commons on their operation. This is convenient because it allows the Government to avoid answering difficult questions as to what they are up to with the

nationalised industries. If they want an industry to make a special concession of one kind or another, perhaps for a certain type of consumer or to a certain part of the country, it is much more convenient to pretend that all this has nothing to do with the Government but is the result of commercial considerations. Meanwhile, the arm-twisting goes on. We need a better way to explain the conflicting arguments and emphasise the commercial requirements.

The Public Accounts Committee, which I have the privilege to chair, is also concerned about the efficient use of resources, and as such it is a valuable ally to such bodies as share the same objectives. This should embrace both the Government and the nationalised industries. In reality, as we know, the nationalised industries are suspicious of the Public Accounts Committee because they want to be free to act commercially and do not fancy the idea of being questioned by a Select Committee. On the other hand, the Government want to ensure commercial efficiency but want to be free to take non-commercial decisions. Therefore, there is the basis of the deal here. The nationalised industries would be happy if they thought that the PAC would not be harassing them or pillorying them. Therefore, we need to show the way in which the Committee works, and we have to explain to them the kind of Committee that it is, and that it is composed of people who are interested in getting value for money.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: As the right hon. Gentleman is putting forward this argument, would he advocate to the Government that we have a debate on the report of the Public Accounts Committee into the De Lorean affair and the waste of £85 million of public money?

Mr. Sheldon: I would be delighted to do so, and I hope that such a debate will take place, but that is another matter, which we are pursuing in other quarters.

We have the basis of a deal if we can show the nationalised industries that we can look at these matters in a commercial way, and show the Government that we can help to distinguish the commercial and political requirements. By doing this, we can help to achieve a greater recognition of commercial requirements — the very matter that should be at the centre of the Government's aims. We can help the Government to obtain more of an arm's-length relationship. If there are political necessities dictating another course of action, these will need to be paid for, on the lines of the commuters and British Rail.

The burden of proof should lie on those who do not wish to see Parliament following public money. What is required is a body with understanding of both the commercial and political realities. The PAC consists of politicians with the strong desire to get £1 value for every £1 spent. That points the way to a greater role for the PAC.

I agree with the hon. Member for Worthing about taxation proposals. It is incumbent upon the Government to make clear what their various proposals are, so that we have before us something more than the cascade of rumour about books, lower taxes on income or whatever. Let me offer a bit of warning. In 1962, the higher rates of income tax were reduced under the surtax changes. In 1972, the higher rates of income tax were reduced under the unified tax rate and in 1979, the top rate was reduced to 60 per cent. The people who benefited had clamoured for it. They took it, and they did nothing for it.

I hope that the Chief Secretary will make it quite clear that after four years of these policies it is incumbent upon the Government to say what they now expect from spending £1·5 million in this way rather than spending the money to reduce unemployment. We have seen one of the longest periods of a continuous economic policy that manifestly has not succeeded. We have had this large increase in unemployment based upon that very policy. After such a long and continuous period of economic decline, despite all the optimistic progress reports, we need only compare the crucial figures for output, employment, unemployment and prosperity — which is what economic management is about — to see that now is the time for a fresh look at some of the objectives set out in the rosy days of 1979.

6.30 pm

Mr. Cecil Parkinson (Hertsmere): I listened to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) with a good deal of interest because he began today to retract some of his more reasonable and sensible speeches of recent weeks. He has been making speeches in which he warned his right hon. and hon. Friends that it was their promise in 1983 to make a spectacular improvement in the position of the unemployed which was not believed and which he thought played a major part in the Labour party losing the general election. The right hon. Gentleman also warned his right hon. and hon. Friends that they must not make the same mistake again. He pointed out that the problem was deep-rooted, if not almost intractable, and that they would lose their credibility if they pretended that there was an easy answer.

I agreed with those recent speeches by the right hon. Gentleman, and I was disappointed when he started today to retreat from that position. He hinted at massive increases in public spending. He said that it was wrong for my right hon. and hon. Friends to be considering tax cuts. However, immediately before that, he had begun to point out that, with our present tax thresholds and our present rates of tax, unless the thresholds were changed, a number of the unemployed would start to pay income tax.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, income tax is paid overwhelmingly by those paying at the basic rate, and it was the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and Mrs. Wise, whom no one would ever accuse of being Right-wing Conservatives, who recognised the injustice of not raising the tax thresholds and that it was the low paid who would be hardest hit if they were not raised.

When Opposition Members talk about how they would spend the money saved by not cutting taxes, I hope that they will remember that they are proposing to penalise those at the bottom end of the incomes scale who start to pay tax at too high a rate on too low an income. Therefore, let us not talk about tax cuts as an easy option which we might or might not choose to implement. There have to be tax cuts—if by tax cuts we mean raising tax thresholds and reducing the burden on the low paid.

I had an example brought to my attention recently of a man who stood to lose money — because he lost rebates, he picked up tax and he lost certain benefits— if he got a pay increase of £10 a week. He was worse off with a pay increase of £10 than he would be if we did not change the tax system. That is why I urge those who talk about forgetting tax cuts to remember who are the principal beneficiaries of raising the thresholds.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does not the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that the beneficiaries of

[Mr. David Winnick]

the tax cuts introduced by this Government in the main have been the most prosperous among us? What benefit is it to the low paid if they receive a very small reduction in their income tax liability when, as a result, there is a large increase in indirect taxation, which obviously affects the poorer elements more than those in other sections of the community?

Mr. Parkinson: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr and Mrs. Wise, both of whom made excellent speeches in the Committee on which I served explaining why the indexing of the tax thresholds and the raising of them was vital to the low paid. Unfortunately, I have not the time to develop that theme further.

I refer right hon. and hon. Members to the public expenditure White Paper and the Government's expenditure plans. Listening to some Opposition Members, I got the impression that the Government had not responded to problems, were not aware of the difficulties caused for the unemployed by high unemployment and had remained totally unresponsive and unheeding.

I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to study the White Paper. Built into next year's expenditure programme, public expenditure in respect of the construction industry is a sum in excess of £16,500 million. That is a huge amount of expenditure with one industry. The idea that the Government are not aware of the problems of the construction industry is not borne out by an examination of the White Paper.

Then we see the Government's expenditure on defence. More than £8·5 billion will be spent with the private engineering sector in the main on the procurement of arms supplies and weaponry and equipment for our forces. Again, a huge demand is being injected by the Government into the engineering sector.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Too much.

Mr. Parkinson: The right hon. Gentleman suggests that it is too much. But the Government are constantly criticised for not spending enough with the engineering and construction industries. I am glad to have his opinion that these sums are considerable.

More than £2,000 million will be spent next year on training programmes. That is a direct response to the problems of the young unemployed. It was Mrs. Shirley Williams who blew the gaff and said that when she was a member of the previous Labour Government she had never been able to raise money on that scale from the Treasury for training programmes, although the need was recognised then. The Government have responded to that need in a very substantial way.

In the industrial sphere, nearly £2,000 million will be spent next year on a variety of industrial supports, and those are different in content from the kind of industrial support that was being given when the Conservatives came to power, which in the main was funding the huge losses of a range of nationalised industries.

The public expenditure programme does not support the accusation made against the Government that they do not recognise the problems of British industry and have not responded to them. The public expenditure programme implies, however, that there is a limit to the amount of public expenditure that can be incurred before we begin to damage the private sector by pushing up interest rates.

I was interested to read the building industry's assessment of its prospects. It sees that the strongest growth in demand in the coming year will come from private sector expenditure on construction, which in itself is extremely interest-sensitive. I urge the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, in arguing that we should have massive increases in public expenditure, to recognise the impact which that will have on interest rates, which in turn will have an effect on private expenditure — an important component in the economy, although one would not guess that from listening to the debate so far.

The Government's critics claim that there is not sufficient demand in the economy and that it is the Government's responsibility to increase that demand. That is the basic criticism that comes at the Government from those who do not agree with their economic policies. An examination of the facts suggests that the cause of our problems is not shortage of demand. For example, the demand in the retail sector increased by just under £6 billion from the third quarter of 1983 to the third quarter of 1984. Over the same period, imports increased by £3·1 billion. In other words, the demand was there but British products were not meeting it. The demand was being met by products from overseas.

World trade last year increased by the staggering sum of $144 billion. There was increased world demand for expanding trade as well as an increase in internal trade. Our share of world trade is about 5 per cent.

I argue that the cause of our problems lies with our failure to supply the demand that exists and not with a shortage of demand. Injecting additional demand into the economy in the way suggested by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is merely a distraction. It is a cruel deception on the unemployed. The people know that there is no easy answer and we should not pretend that our difficulties can be resolved quite quickly by a simple injection of demand.

Why are we not meeting additional demand? That is the central problem that any Government must face. I visited Japan recently and I went to a motor company that I had not visited for six years. In those six years, which include the recession, the company increased its production of motor vehicles by nearly 900,000. That happens to be about the total of British motor production. The company is Japan's second largest motor manufacturer.

I asked the company's leading figures to explain the basic reason for the increased production. They explained that the company has not lost a day's production through strike action in the past 33 years; every British motor company has had a strike within the last six weeks. We have been volunteering to lose production and to fail to meet the demand for motor cars but our rivals are not wasting their time on that sort of divisive behaviour.

I asked the company's representatives about the strike that took place 33 years ago and the lessons to be drawn from it. The lessons were straightforward. It was explained that the company had lost production, the workers had lost wages and the company's rivals had stolen its market. At the end of the day the company had to start again with all the problems that it had had before and the additional ones that had been caused by quickly inflicting enormous damage on itself. The strike seems to be at the heart of our problems. We use stike action as a weapon of first resort while our opponents, or many of them, use the strike as the weapon of last resort.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: That does not apply to all British industries.

Mr. Parkinson: It does not apply to every industry but it is very typical. The problem lies with our failure to meet demand and not with a shortage of demand.

Mr. Winterton: I am not having that.

Mr. Parkinson: I do not care whether my hon. Friend is or is not. We must concentrate on meeting the demand that exists. There is no shortage of demand, and the more we claim that there is and emphasise it the more we delude ourselves and run away from the central problem of determining how to improve our performance.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): I, too, have been to Japan. I was struck by the way in which employers, trade unions and the Japanese Government get together to look after Japan.

Mr. Winterton: And to keep out all foreigners.

Mr. Parkinson: I do not disagree with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen) about the need for us to work together. That is why I happen to think that the miners' strike is a national disaster. At the end of the day, everyone connected with the mining industry will find himself in the position in which the Japanese motor car company found itself 33 years ago. No one can possibly gain from the miners' strike. It is a maniac's way of resolving differences. We inflict damage on ourselves and consequently benefit our rivals.

I am passionately convinced that unless we find a better way of working together we shall continue to have difficulties and troubles of our own making. I do not see the Government's move to spread ownership as an incidental approach. I do not expect us to be able to emulate the Japanese system of co-operation. We are not the same people and I would not wish us to be. However, we must find a similar answer. We must find a way of working together. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was right to say that in every instance where the Government have denationalised an industry, where relations are better and where the bridge between owner and worker has started to be built, industrial performance has improved out of all recognition. I do not regard the Government's push to spread ownership as an incidental part of their economic policy. I see the spread of ownership as the heart of their policies. We must build a bridge between those who work in businesses and those who own them. We must develop an identity of purpose.

Let us not waste our time thinking that fictitous or phoney amounts of additional demand will resolve the problem when they are pumped into the economy. The problem will be resolved only by better performance and that performance will come only when there is a change of attitude. I believe that the chance of that change taking place has been enhanced by the Government's determined efforts to spread ownership and to build the bridge of which I have spoken.

6.48 pm

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): The right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) has done the Government a great service by reminding them of the current upsurge of serious strikes in important manufacturing industries. By doing so he reminded them that since 1979 they have achieved no lasting structural change in the complex framework that is used in determining income and rewards. Under the pressure of unemployment, whether created deliberately or not, there has been some respite from exaggerated pay claims and damaging industrial disputes, but the more the Chancellor of the Exchequer proclaims recovery the more shop stewards feel that it is time that they had a share of the rewards for their members. If the Government do not tackle that difficult problem they will be in great trouble, as Governments have been before, on pay.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has proved to be a most effective reformer of financial procedures in the House. He was correct and relevant when he reminded us today that at this time of the year we should be debating a green Budget involving both revenue and expenditure rather than just an autumn statement. I am worried that the Chancellor might get away with sheltering within the narrow confines of an autumn statement. There is no attempt to update the medium-term financial strategy, and the details of public expenditure changes are bald in the extreme. It is nothing more than a tatty progress report, which is scarcely worthy of our full attention.

This is particularly unfortunate this year, because it is acknowledged in most parts of the House, including the Government Benches, that the Chancellor is a sad man who has lost most of his faith. There are few sorrier figures than a notorious evangelist who in mid-campaign suddenly discovers that his faith has deserted him.

The Chancellor is a bold man and he has done his best. He tried hard in front of the Select Committee to show that although he has had to desert some shrines he has now found others at which to worship. That is not convincing. He has had to abandon the idea to which he clung so long and bravely, that by continued and relentless downward pressure on monetary aggregates and on public sector borrowing, unemployment would be automatically reduced. The revelation that this is not so naturally is a great disappointment to him and to those who thought like him.

It now appears that the Chancellor is increasingly turning his attention to target ranges for interest rates, in which he has become passionately interested, and to the various exchange rates for sterling. The Government will be in trouble unless the Chancellor tells us soon about his new guiding stars and how he intends to follow them.

Another article of the Chancellor's faith is the importance of a downturn in real wages. The Select Committee wanted to give him an opportunity to enlarge on his new doctrine that a downturn in the increase in real wages would have an effect on the rise in unemployment. He took refuge in saying that his chief economic adviser was busy studying the subject and that we may hear about it in the not too distant future. That is small consolation when the whole country is oppressed by ever-rising unemployment and when, despite the Chancellor's attempts to disguise it, the increases in employment are almost entirely among part-time women workers. Good luck to them—they are valuable—but that is no answer to the core problem of ever-rising unemployment. The Government have, in that and other ways, fiddled the official information about total employment.

I was interested in the exchanges about what was not very helpfully described as "income tax cuts", to which the right hon. Member for Hertsmere referred in a telling fashion. I was surprised when, in such a sweeping way, with no reservation, the right hon. Member for

[Mr. Richard Wainwright]

Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) dismissed as a low priority the lifting of the income tax thresholds. At first I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was talking about 2p off the basic rate or, worse, a reduction in the higher rate. If he had meant that I should have understood his sweeping manner. But when the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Mr. Tapsell) urged the Chancellor to forget about any tax cuts and to put all his extra resources into capital projects, the hon. Gentleman was cheered by the Labour segment of the Opposition.

A delicate balance has to be struck, but it is odd, when income tax begins to bite on a married couple at a mere £60 of earnings a week, that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook should be so dismissive of tax cuts through lifting the thresholds or making a major adjustment in the national insurance threshold. The latter might be a more cost-effective way of relieving the poor of paying for their own benefits. However, it would create frightful poverty traps further up the scale. I find the right hon. Gentleman's sweeping approach deplorable.

Dr. Bray: I also listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). I understood that he was saying that any changes in income tax have a far smaller effect on unemployment than direct public expenditure. Any raising of the tax threshold can be balanced by increases in the higher rate of tax to ensure that the lower paid, but not the higher paid, are indexed.

Mr. Wainwright: I do not disagree with the words that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) uses, but he will be the first to agree that this was not the argument used by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. I hope that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, (Mr. Davis) will clarify the official Labour position.

I warmly endorse the suggestion that better information be placed in front of the Cabinet when public expenditure plans are prepared for the autumn statement. The Chancellor did his best to assure us that this is taken care of and that, up to the point where a political judgment has to be made, the present procedures fully cover the demands by reformers. He was not convincing because he is unable to claim that the original decision on the Foreign Office cut this year was agreed in detail in Cabinet. Everyone knows that it did not go to Cabinet originally. He was not able to claim that the original proposals by the Secretary of State for Education and Science for student grant cuts went to Cabinet. The House should consider how to better these procedures.

It is almost self-evident that most of the crucial domestic expenditures, especially those with large social repercussions, have heavy elements of overlap between one spending Department and others. These elements are so obvious that I should perhaps apologise for giving some instances to the House. For the record, I should like to mention the problem that most of us face at one time or another in our families — accommodation for elderly people. The provision of accommodation at the places where people are living—enabling them to stay in what they regard as their home—is a matter for the Minister for Housing and Construction, because it entails the construction of more sheltered housing and the provision of old people's housing schemes. But if it is believed that, to provide better care for those people, they should be under closer medical supervision and should go into a type of elderly persons' communal accommodation, or even geriatric accommodation, that is a matter for the Department of Health and Social Security. Inland Revenue has an interest also, because the tax treatment of the elderly is highly relevant to this matter.

There is no evidence that such overlaps — hon. Members will know of dozens of examples of similar overlaps in important matters — are properly treated. When I served on the rather notorious Sub-Committee of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which examined taxation and benefits, senior officials from the Treasury and DHSS admitted frankly that there was little mutual consultation about the interaction between taxation and social security benefits. For once, *The Times* was right in saying in its leading article on star chambers that the trouble with star chambers is that they have

"no basis of comparison of the economic or social merits of the output of different departments, because there is no part of government whose task it is to provide such an evaluation."

I believe that there should be machinery for carrying out that task. The star chamber method where matters are fought out among Ministers sitting in twos and threes, which sometimes ends with blood on the carpet, threatened resignations and all the rest of it, is no way to settle these important matters in an advanced country.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wainwright: This must be the last occasion on which I give way or I shall be in trouble with the Chair.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with the Liberal economic policy, which is all things to all men. The hon. Gentleman rightly attacked the iniquities of levying taxes on people who earn just £60 a week. How does the hon. Gentleman intend paying for the Liberal inflationary and reflationary policy programme —by higher taxes or high borrowing?

Mr. Wainwright: There is no secret about that. Three years ago, we published a compendious booklet called "Back to Work", which made it clear that, over three years, we wanted an approximate addition of £9 billion to the public sector borrowing requirment. That does not mean a crude £3 billion a year—it means building up the PSBR so that over three years there is an additional £9 billion.

I must record the alliance's bitter disappointment at the lack of reference in the autumn statement to unemployment measures. There was no mention of the task of matching the tens of thousands of people who could be employed with the public works crying out to be done. Worse still—I hope this point appeals to those hon. Members who are accountants — nothing in the document shows any Government awareness of their failure to keep up with depreciation and obsolescence of public assets. That criticism applies as much to Labour Administrations as to the Conservative Administration.

The public is painfully aware that the yearly depreciation of our public assets has not been attended to and that their conditions have become much worse. It is no answer to cut the external financing limits of important public services. I do not think that hon. Members have fully appreciated, for instance, the fact that the autumn statement shows that the return the Government expect from the water industry will almost double during the next three years. If we were to tell any business, however

brilliantly managed and successful, that the shareholders expect the return to be doubled within three years, we would be asking a great deal and would often—not always—be accused of greed and of asking for far too much. It is far too much to ask, for example, the water industry — whose assets are clearly clapped-out and which cannot deliver more than about 70 per cent. of the water gathered, into the pipes and bathrooms of the people who pay for it—to be used as an unofficial tax-gatherer. To ask such industries to be under-the-counter tax-gatherers when they are experiencing distressing physical conditions would be a breach of stewardship.

We on the alliance Benches have no time for this autumn statement. We do not believe that it is matched to the needs of the country. If it foreshadows the Budget we are to expect, the sooner the Government pack up, the better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. The 10 minute limit on speeches is now in operation. I appeal for the co-operation of hon. Members.

7.6 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): This debate, which seems to occur every year, gives us a useful opportunity to consider the development of the economy and to question some of the assumptions underlying the Treasury's forecasts. Clearly, the figures on the growth of output, the reduction in inflation, the recoveries in investment, profits and productivity and the buoyancy of exports are all on the positive side and are to be warmly welcomed. They are moves in the right direction.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said earlier, a number of serious worries remain — notably, the problem of mass unemployment with more than 3 million registered unemployed and the risk that the Treasury assumption on unemployment for the next two years or so may well turn out to be optimistic. Equally, there is obviously a clear connection with the difficulty of controlling public spending intelligently, as the Select Committee pointed out in its report, and there are worries about the shortcomings in the manner in which the Government address themselves to the ordering of priorities which is implicit in that public spending.

Without sufficient overall growth in the economy during the coming period, and bearing in mind the difficulties of controlling public spending in aggregate and disaggregate forms and the threat that unit costs may start to increase again with earnings beginning to take off in an alarming way, the prospects held out by the Chancellor for substantial fiscal relief or improved international competitiveness are not as good as some of us would wish.

Further recovery of output will be delayed as long as this dreadful miners' strike goes on. I strongly agree with the remarks by hon. Members about the need for Scargillism to be defeated in the interests of not only working miners but the entire economy. The inflation prospect could be prejudiced again by a substantial real increase in earnings and the possibility of a continued fall in the value of the pound in relation to other currencies. Investment recovery is vulnerable if profits are not sustained. Everything the Government can do must be done to expand the available market domestically and internationally and to ensure that we have realistic pay settlements.

The continued export recovery on which we heavily depend will require energetic efforts in the EEC and other international gatherings to ensure that we tackle the issue of non-tariff barriers, which must still concern my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary, since he was formerly the Minister for Trade. But underlying all those problems is the very tricky nexus between productivity and unemployment. That seems to be the "Catch-22" of our economy at the moment.

I think that the whole House would agree that we need productivity increases at least as great as output increases if we are to remain competitive in a very tight world economy. But that inevitably will tend to increase unemployment, which in turn will increase public spending, which in turn will make it harder to boost the private sector with the lower taxes and lower borrowing that we should like to see.

On the other hand, if we were to go in the direction of the so-called alternative economic strategy espoused by Labour members we might see a decline in the rate of productivity increase over the years ahead, and perhaps unemployment falling for technical reasons as a result—but, of course, at a very great price in terms of diminished international competitiveness. If the Labour party were ever to come to power, it would be driven into a siege economy, whatever weasel words it might use in a future manifesto.

The only sensible choice for Britain is to work for a higher-output, higher-productivity economy and then to use a good part of the extra income and wealth so created to alleviate and help reduce unemployment, which is the principal adverse consequence not only of an economy in decline but also, paradoxically, of a successful economy that is experiencing a recovery based on high technology and strong competition from overseas. In these circumstances, it behoves us all to give some indication of what we think the Government should be doing in addition to the sound policies upon which their programme is already based. I have not the time this evening to go into the large range of micro-economic, supply-side policies that I and several of my hon. Friends favour in that regard. I am sure that there will be other opportunities in the House over the coming months to talk about that.

I should like to concentrate briefly on next year's Budget, since it seems to me that this is an opportune moment at which to put down a few markers about the things that many of us would like to see. I want to see that Budget framed with a top priority for employment creation in as many sensible and effective ways as we can possibly manage.

We should seriously consider reducing the non-pay costs of employing more workers, because these are now very significant. They are not necessarily as significant as wage costs, but they are a factor that was very much in mind when the EC Commission was writing its excellent report recently. We should do so by cutting the employers' national insurance contributions, possibly to 9 per cent.

Secondly, we should raise the lower earnings limit of national insurance contributions to £60 a week, which is only the sort of level at which most people enter income tax for the first time. That would help greatly to alleviate the problem about which many hon. Members have spoken—that of the low paid in work.

Thirdly, I should like to mention a longer term objective which could be started in the Budget and taken forward later. We need to synchronise national insurance rates with income tax rates as far as we can, and in doing so to raise the upper limit of national insurance

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

contributions. From the Treasury's point of view, that would have the desirable effect of bringing in some extra revenue which could be used partly to offset the costs of some of the other measures that I have mentioned.

My fourth point is not so much in the sphere of the Treasury, but it underlines the point that the Government as a whole must make a co-ordinated and trans-departmental response to deal with the problems of unemployment. We should put the enterprise allowance on a demand-led basis. It is very nearly there now, because the Government, under continual pressure from their Back Benchers, are responding positively. But we should make it a formal position in which anyone who could usefully take advantage of this excellent scheme should be able to do so with the minimum of delay. My only caveat is that those who are going into the scheme need to benefit from the best possible advice as to which sectors to go into and in what concentration. I have already had some rather awkward cases drawn to my attention. For example, in some parts of the country there may be more shoe repairers than can be justified by local market conditions. Clearly, a little steering and guidance are required.

Finally, I should like to see the community programme expanded. It is now helping about 126,000 people at a net cost of about £1,500 per place. That is a fairly cheap and effective way of assisting people, many of whom have previously been unemployed for a long time. If we can do that—and do it in a way that also injects a greater training element into the programme—we shall be serving those people as well as can possibly be expected in tight economic circumstances.

I realise that the overall scale of any economic stimulus which might be implied in my remarks is not all that significant in itself, but it might help to nudge the economy in the right direction in regard to job creation. Above all, it will make an important psychological contribution to the needs of the many people in Britain who may feel that they have been forgotten and that their interests are not uppermost in Ministers' minds. Therefore, I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer say this afternoon that the tackling of unemployment is a priority task of the Government.

I hope very much that whether my right hon. Friend does good by stealth, through something called fiscal drift, or whether he does good openly, which I should like to see him do, he will address himself principally to bringing forward an employment-creating Budget—and, indeed, a series of such Budgets for the rest of this Parliament.

7.16 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The debate on the autumn statement must be seen against the background of mass unemployment. I have a list of the constituencies where male unemployment is very high. In some places male unemployment is near to 40 per cent. In my own constituency in the west midlands it is 22·5 per cent. My constituency is not alone in the region in having such a large amount of joblessness, as the list shows. The latest overall figures show that in the west midlands the unemployment rate is 15·3 per cent., and that in my own travel-to-work area it is 17·4 per cent.

In looking through my files in preparing for today's debate, I saw from the lists that were sent from the appropriate jobcentres that in March 1980, in my travel-to-work area, unemployment was 6·7 per cent., that in the west midlands it was 5·9 per cent., and that nationally at the same date it was 6 per cent. When the Government first took office, unemployment in the west midlands stood at 5·1 per cent.—the same in fact as in my own travel-to-work area.

On Tuesday evening there was what was described as a private meeting of Tory MPs upstairs, to deal with student grants and parental contributions. It seems that 250 Conservative members attended the meeting. It was apparently a very noisy meeting. From downstairs, I understand, one could hear the banging on desks. Whenever anyone criticised the Government, there was a loud cheer. The one or two brave spirits who stood up to defend the Government were apparently heard in total silence. If the same pressure were to be applied by Conservative MPs to their Government over unemployment——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: It is.

Mr. Winnick: —it would be interesting to see the result. Suppose that, at a meeting of about 250 Conservative MPs, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were told, "We shall not support your policies, which are causing unemployment and mass misery throughout the country. We shall not support you in the Chamber. We want a change of policy." I suggest that that type of pressure could well bring about a modification of economic and social policies, just as the meeting on Tuesday produced a statement yesterday from the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

There is an urgent need for investment in public services and facilities. That is the most important way to create jobs. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) in opening for the Opposition, spoke of the cuts in housing in the next financial year. There should be a substantial increase instead. There is certainly no justification for any cuts. Reference has been made to the letter sent to Members by the Building Employers Confederation which states that spending next year is likely to be between 15 per cent. and 25 per cent. less than in the current year. The confederation also believes, with considerable justification, that public housing starts will be 14 per cent. down and private housing grants 17 per cent. lower and that there will be a 6 per cent. reduction in improvements to public sector housing stocks.

Since 1979-80, Government finance for public sector housing has decreased by about 60 per cent. in real terms. If there were an increase instead of a cut, two results would follow. First, many people in the dole queue could go back to work in the construction industry for which they were trained. Secondly, it would produce the improvements and building so urgently required in public sector housing in my constituency and in so many others. In my borough, no contracts at all have been entered into for council house building since 1979. Undertaking that urgently needed housing work would be a very effective way both of reducing unemployment and of providing urgently needed improvements and new housing.

As a result of changes made by the Treasury and the DHSS, some pensioners will lose £1 of their supplementary benefit heating addition. They are, of course, the poorest pensioners. If they were not, they

would not be receiving supplementary benefit in the first place. Yet, earlier this week, when British Telecom was sold off at £1·3 billion less than the market price, the financial institutions made enormous gains. The difference in the Government's treatment of the poorest and the most prosperous elements in society is highlighted by that comparison. There is no possible justification for taking £1 from people on very limited incomes who already suffer great hardship in trying to keep warm in winter.

The former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) argued in favour of tax cuts, but there is no purpose in cuts which in the main would benefit the well off if the result is an increase in indirect taxation, which bears most heavily on people with low incomes. I am extremely concerned about the possibility of VAT being imposed on certain zero-rated items such as children's footwear. The whole House should be extremely worried about that. If such items become subject to VAT, how long will it be before food is taxed as well?

I also strongly oppose the imposition of VAT on books, newspapers and periodicals. A tax on books is a tax on knowledge. There is no justification for that, and it should be resisted. As for newspapers and magazines, it is interesting to note that in 1977 the Royal Commission on the press recommended that any proposal to end zero-rating should be strongly opposed because of the harm that it would do. I understand that there is no pressure from the European Commission on the British Government to alter the zero-rating of newspapers. Moreover, if VAT were imposed on the cover price it would undoubtedly discriminate against papers for which one pays as opposed to the free newspaper.

Therefore, I agree with the industry that VAT on newpapers would raise issues far greater than purely economic considerations. As a Labour Member, I must concede that most national and provincial newspapers are not on our side—that perhaps is an understatement—but that does not alter the argument that the imposition of VAT would be a retrograde measure and should be strongly opposed.

As in all Budget and autumn statement debates, the Government have sought to minimise what they can do to end mass unemployment. They virtually wash their hands of the matter, saying that there is little that they can do, that it is not for the Government to act, and so on. We utterly reject such excuses. We believe that the unemployment created in the past five years has been principally due to the Government's economic and social policies. These policies are largely to blame for the misery of millions of families in this country. We know only too well what happens to people who, once made unemployed, cannot find alternative work.

I believe that our amendment is entirely justified. I only hope that Conservative Members who say that they are as concerned as we are about unemployment will have the courage to join us in the Division Lobby.

7.26 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I have been a consistent supporter of the Government's original policy to reduce public spending. I have also been a consistent critic of their failure to achieve that objective. I was therefore greatly saddened by the change to the revised objective of containing public spending.

To achieve that revised objective, the Government set great store upon keeping the planning totals in line with the expenditure White Paper. Year by year, that involve increasing use of what we in the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service call "creative accounting". One of the most important aspects of this is that the budgeted amount for asset sales is increased, thus keeping the planning total in line. Cmnd. 879, published in 1983, shows a planning total for 1985-86 of £132 billion—exactly the same figure as this autumn statement. At that time, however, asset sales were budgeted at £500 million. They are now budgeted at £2·5 billion. The increase of £2 billion has all gone in increased departmental spending. So much for the Opposition's claims that the Government are viciously cutting spending.

The planning totals also do not include interest payments, which are rising this year and are due to rise by a further £1 billion next year. As I said in the debate on the autumn statement last year, although my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has my sympathy and support, year by year he is losing the battle with the spending Departments. The biggest culprit is the DHSS, which this year is spending £2 billion more than was scheduled in the 1983 White Paper. I welcome the setting up of the review boards but I am perturbed that a recent report suggests that Ministers have said that any savings achieved will be used to increase benefits rather than to reduce taxation for the low paid.

I am delighted that this year the Department will at last look at the appalling scandal of the board and lodging allowance. I hope that the Minister will be sufficiently severe to stop the financial incentives that encourage young people to leave the parental home. The cost of housing benefit, which doubled last year, has been greater than anyone anticipated. Many people in receipt of the benefit, which costs the country £2 billion, pay income tax.

We should also examine the amount paid in social security to striking miners and any other strikers. Is it right that taxpayers should subsidise people who are costing the country so much money? Should we pay social security to young people who turn down the chance of a place on the youth training scheme?

The current year's expenditure is running ahead of the budget by about £4·25 billion. About £2·75 billion will be met from the contingency reserve, leaving an outturn of £1·5 billion more than planned. We are told that it has been caused principally by the coal strike. Surely a contingency reserve is meant for unforeseen circumstances such as a coal strike. Based on this year's experience, was my right hon. Friend wise to reduce the contingency reserve in the autumn statement by £750 million?

All hon. Members accept that unemployment is the greatest problem facing our country. I do not believe that this terrible situation can be dealt with by increasing public spending. I agree with the Chancellor, who said to the Select Committee:

> "The level of unemployment would have been improved if real wages had grown at a less rapid pace."

The experience of the United States during the past 10 years supports that view. Between 1975 and 1984, 14 million new jobs were created and real wages in manufacturing industry fell by 3·5 per cent. In the United Kingdom, even during the height of the recession, wages

[Mr. John Townend]

continued to rise,—during the past 10 years they rose by 13 per cent.—and the number of jobs fell by 1 million.

In the autumn statement the Government seek to restrict pay increases for public sector workers next year by 3 per cent. If the Government are serious about letting market forces work in the labour market, as they do in the United States of America, and about removing rigidities in the market; they should take action. Some Select Committee members were disappointed when, in answer to a question, the Chancellor said that he and his colleagues

"spoke only in general terms about measures to reduce rigidities in the labour market and that no firm conclusion had been reached about these."

Is it not nonsense that, while the Government try to limit wage increases in the public sector to 3 per cent., employers of several million employees in the private sector must increase their wages year by year by more than the rate of inflation at the diktat of wages councils, which are set up under Government legislation? As the time is approaching when the Government, under their international obligations, can give notice to abolish the wages councils, they should give that notice as quickly as possible.

Further restrictions which affect the free operation of the labour market and which should be considered seriously include the national dock labour scheme. It has already destroyed Liverpool, is well on the way to destroying my home city of Hull as a port, and is doing its best to destroy Southampton. We must re-examine the Employment Protection Act 1975, which still puts the fear of God into many small employers. It is a disincentive to taking on more staff. The Government must examine the Equal Opportunities Commission, which is a bigger nonsense than before since the recent decision that a lady who works in the canteen should be paid the same rate as a skilled shipyard worker. We should look at the Commission for Racial Equality, the code of practice of which is full of bureaucratic nonsense.

Ms. Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is a nasty man.

Mr. Townend: My next remarks will sound even nastier. We can never consider unemployment without reminding Opposition Members that if the Labour Government had had stricter immigration controls we would not have the problems that we have today. In the south-east we have 250,000 foreign workers, mainly working in the catering, hotel and service industries. Why are those jobs not filled by our own unemployed people?

Ms. Short: Join the National Front.

Mr. Townend: The reason is that many young people are not prepared to accept the wages, terms and conditions for those jobs. Perhaps we pay them too well on social security, especially in areas such as the south-east, where jobs are available. The Government should consider dealing with this problem from the public expenditure point of view and with a view to getting people back to work.

There is a great deal that is encouraging in the autumn statement. Inflation is decreasing, productivity is increasing and the rate of growth is increasing for the fourth successive year. I plead with the Chancellor to open up the labour market, to remove the rigidities and to make the mobility of labour possible by dealing with the Rent Acts. He should take out his knife and slit away the legislation and bureaucracy, which is killing jobs.

7.36 pm

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): If the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) sees anything encouraging in the autumn statement, he needs a pair of spectacles. He has not changed his penny-pinching ways since we served on the Select Committee on Employment. Some of the folk whose pay and benefits he wishes to cut would have been glad to receive the consultancy fees paid in connection with the sale of British Telecom. Massive public expenditure was devoted to that, but I shall come to that matter later.

The Chancellor referred to vision. He has no clear idea where the United Kingdom is going, far less any idea of the growing lack of social cohesion that accompanies his policies. The autumn statement is probably becoming more important than the budget in determining the living standards of the many people whom we represent. The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, was right to talk about some of the problems that arise when one looks at matters in compartments. There is a growing body of opinion in the Conservative party about the cost of Trident and the extent to which that expensive project is pushing out other priorities within the defence budget, let alone extinguishing some valuable social projects and priorities.

It is outrageous that the housing benefit system was altered so that many young people were encouraged to leave home to get a better rate of benefit in a lodging house. The Secretary of State for Social Services is penny-pinching and wants to change the lodging house benefit arrangement to put the young people out on the street. The Minster should not underestimate the social problems that have emerged in our cities. There is growing homelessness and unemployment among young people, and there are more problems of drug addiction. We must address ourselves to those serious political issues.

It is all very well to look at one side of public expenditure and decide to cut housing benefit, but the present system is open-ended regarding income tax relief for home purchase. The Treasury effectively loses £3 billion through income tax relief. About £500 million goes to people who live in big houses and happen to pay the highest rates of income tax. There is no housing need relationship there; it is a house purchase relationship. That may well have to be looked at in terms of equity and parity of treatment.

The right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) mentioned the construction industry when he was talking about the importance of the private sector. The turnover of many building firms depends upon public contracts. They are building, rehabilitating, maintaining and repairing properties, and the Minister should not overlook the interrelationship between the public and private sector. The one depends upon the other. I believe in successful private and successful public enterprise, but I object to the way in which the Chancellor's policies do down both. The Chancellor is shaking his head, but that is a fact. Many private companies have found it extremely difficult to maintain their profitability while he has been Chancellor.

Last night, my Scottish colleagues and I saw a lobby from the housing asssociations in Glasgow and the west

of Scotland, because the people involved in community-based housing associations are worried about what will happen with the lack of funding and resources to tackle the problem of sub-tolerable standards, let alone engage in the new build projects that we should like to see.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said that he hoped that the Chancellor's next Budget would create employment. We all hope that, but we did not see it in the previous Budget, far less in the autumn statement. It behoves the Chancellor to realise the implications of some of the decisions that are being taken in Departments.

Value added tax has been mentioned. The Chancellor is presently trawling the highways and byways seeking extra resources to pay for the own resources contribution to the EEC. The Government's approach is inconsistent. The Prime Minister asks manufacturers why they produce goods that people do not want. However, it would appear that we encourage agriculture within the European Community to produce what consumers are incapable of consuming at a great cost to national Treasuries because we have to pay vast amounts to store the produce and to keep the warehouses busy.

There is a suggestion that children's clothing and footwear are to be subjected to VAT. Local education authorities face problems at present. They have to hand out clothing grants to kids who cannot go to school because they are not properly attired. That is serious. I hope that that suggestion will be excluded from any trawling that the Chancellor is doing while looking for extra sources of indirect taxation.

When we talk about the spread of ownership, I hope that we realise the responsibility of management, because when public assets are being sold—often at a real loss—it is strange to think that one is bringing a few people into the ownership of assets that we all owned before they were floated off at public expense.

I wonder how much longer this country can afford the present Chancellor and his policies. We should be in "never-never land" were it not for the fact that we have singularly benefited from North sea oil and that the Chancellor is presently receiving some cash on the side from the sale of public assets. What will happen when the last drop of oil goes or when the last asset—the Crown jewels have not been sold yet—goes?

The Government have become corrupted by their own power. They have become oblivious to their mismanagement and the shortcomings of their policy. The sooner they change their ways, or better still go, the sooner this country will be better off.

7.45 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): We had a robust exposition of the Government's economic policy from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. We also had an excellent speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) in defence of Government policy, with most, if not all, of which I agree. The debate has brought out the point that the Government are facing two dangers—problems which they need to examine carefully to see how they can get round them if there is to be a successful development of the economic policy that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is rightly trying to put forward.

The first of the two problems is the strategy of using tax cuts as a means of reducing unemployment. It is a strategy in which I believe, but I do not think that it is getting across. It has not reached the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), nor do I think that it has reached a number of my hon. Friends. The difficulty is that we are dealing wth a completely new labour market and entirely different conditions of unemployment from those of the 1930s. It is an unfamiliar idea to many people that jobs can be created through tax cuts. Hon. Members have almost expressed bewilderment, as if they thought that tax cuts and employment were alternatives. If hon. Members study the labour market as it is developing, with the new conditions that we face, they will see that tax reductions are the most effective engine of job creation.

The second problem is that the mechanism for settling public expenditure priorities appears to be in danger of falling into some disorder and decay. I do not have time within the 10-minute rule to discuss that at any great length, but in any case, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) in his excellent chairmanship of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service has made an excellent start, and the Committee has produced a good report which raises a number of questions.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing—I echo what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said—that there is no trouble-free or political agony-free method of settling the priorities for public expenditure between Departments or even between programmes within Departments. President Reagan, for one, is clearly finding that out now as he struggles with his budget deficit.

But I should like to think that the battle could be more between policies and less between Departments. For what it is worth, the intention of those of us who drafted the White Paper setting up the Central Policy Review Staff in 1970 was to create a mechanism which would not solve the political problems but would at least set out the choices between policies rather more clearly for central Departments and the Prime Minister than in the past. It was not our intention that the CPRS should become a think tank. It did, however, first become labelled that and then became the Think Tank. But we saw it as a mechanism precisely for trying to set out some of the expenditure choices across Departments rather more effectively than had been the case.

We are now being corralled into a greater emphasis on the famous bilaterals between Departments, and those plainly lead to dangers. It may not necessarily be right that if a Department's expenditure on one programme increases another of its programmes should be cut.

That may be Treasury logic, and a rather effective way of bringing down our bloated public spending. It has been used over the years but it is not the pattern of real life and it leads to the difficulties that we have experienced recently.

I turn now to the prime issue, around which much of the debate has revolved: tax cuts versus spending. I hope that we can put aside the question of who believes or does not believe in the importance of reducing unemployment. There is an overwhelming commitment by responsible persons in public affairs to the reduction of unemployment. The issue is how effectively and speedily it can be brought about. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook put forward a thesis in which he clearly believes: that there is a choice between tax cuts and unemployment. I believe that to be a completely false choice.

[Mr. David Howell]

The right hon. Gentleman spoke of a number of economic models which have clearly influenced him. He has obviously been talking in detail to economists. If he is interested in economic models, there are plenty of economic models which put the opposite view with great vigour. I commend them to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook if he wants to get a better grip on views about economic policy. The Liverpool economic models—Professor Minford's group—argue that for every £100 million used in tax cuts, 10,000 jobs would be created, or that for every £1 billion used in tax cuts 10 times that number of jobs would be created. He says that 5,000 jobs would be created by cutting the standard rate of income tax and that 8,000 jobs would be created by cutting the national insurance contribution.

The Warwick institute of employment research says that £1 billion in tax cuts would produce 203,000 jobs after four years, whereas it argues that if one is dealing with increases in public expenditure the figures would be very much smaller.

There is another argument which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook ought to take on board. When he says that increases in public expenditure are the way by which to create jobs he is not reflecting the proper range of economic thinking. He ought to understand that the modern labour market is quite different from anything that we have had in the past. It is not comparable with the 1930s. We ought to realise that tax reductions and reductions in the NIC are a powerful engine of job creation.

I do not rule out the suggestion that there should be increased capital spending by the Government, but I do not believe that that will be the main engine of job creation. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has not understood the nature of the modern construction industry and its very limited job creation capacities. Certainly, a great deal needs to be done for the infrastructure of this country, for a number of social reasons. By far the best report on the subject has been published by the Policy Studies Institute. It is entitled "Building the Infrastructure". I must declare an interest because I am involved with the Policy Studies Institute. It says in its report that it looks forward to a 10 year spending programme of about £3·3 billion on the infrastructure—£330 million a year. It says that the public spending element—the pump priming element via the urban programme—would need to be only one third and that the other two thirds each year of the £330 million could be induced from the private sector. The Government should include that point in their thinking.

As for the scope of the tax cuts, which are the real engine of job creation and the quickest and most effective way to restore the kind of employment in the new job market which is emerging—in particular the far better range of part-time and flexi-time employment that people are demanding nowadays—room is available not only from the £1·5 billion about which my right hon. Friend has spoken. He has more room than that. I suspect that there will be some easing room from the revenues from dollar oil prices, although I realise that that is a gamble. But I question whether adherence next year to the £7 billion PSBR is necessary.

The financial markets are not interested in precise Pstatistical figures each year. They are interested in being assured that in the medium term, over four or five years, financial, monetary and fiscal policies will coincide and be in harmony. If the financial markets saw that the Chancellor was accelerating his tax cuts and bringing forward £1 billion next year on top of the £1·5 billion, with the aim of getting on top of job creation, as I know it would do, I do not believe that the financial markets would worry about it or put him under any pressure about interest rates. So a £2·5 billion move in the Budget next spring would be a good start to the tax-cutting, job-creating strategy which is necessary to create the new jobs which are being demanded in the wholly different conditions we now face. The old labour market of the past no longer exists. I beg hon. Members opposite to understand that we are facing new conditions.

What incentives should take priority within the £2·5 billion? Good arguments have been put forward about the need for tax reductions on lower wages. I do not understand why the Labour party wants to dissociate itself from the cause of lifting the intolerable tax burden on those first going into jobs who find that they pay immediately 39p in NIC and income tax out of the first pound that they earn. That cannot be right. We must have the support of a modern, understanding Labour party. It must not turn its face against those sort of tax cuts for people in lower income groups who are in real need.

The second kind of tax cuts that I wish to see are those which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned in his speech. I refer to the need for wider ownership. This is the theme which for 10 years some of us have been pleading for in the Conservative party. It is a theme which all politicians who are opposed to old-fashioned state Socialism should embrace. This is the path to more jobs, more employment and a fairer society than anything the welfare state has been able to develop. There ought to be a massive increase in the support of for wider personal ownership. I should like 1 million more council houses to be sold. I should like there to be more specific and positive tax incentives for share ownership, following the success of BT. I should like there to be far fewer barriers to setting up new businesses. This could be done. It would lead towards employment in a way that none of the proposals could achieve which have been put forward, in particular by members of the Labour party who keep looking back to the past. Labour Members must understand the nature of the new labour market and the fact that it is through tax deductions that we shall create the jobs that we need.

7.57 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and his right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere, (Mr. Parkinson) will not find many people on the Labour side of the House who agree with them, either in their detail or their priorities. However, they recognise the problems that face this country and I am pleased that at least it is possible to have a serious debate with them about priorities, speed and the method of tackling unemployment. We recognise and welcome this commitment to tackling unemployment, even if we cannot agree entirely on the details. However, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will readily admit that that kind of recognition from him was totally lacking in the Chancellor's own speech.

The Chancellor does not recognise those problems. He lives in a different world. He referred to four years of steady economic growth. I do not know why he believes that. The claims which he made were not credible. He

claims that the Government have a firm grip on public expenditure. If a firm grip on public expenditure means such expenditure going up by £1·5 billion to £128 billion and increasing by 6·5 per cent. last year, is that really the firm grip that is needed? It is not even being held constant in real terms.

The Chancellor also spoke about inflation. He claimed that better progress had been made on inflation. However, table 1.3 on page 9 of his autumn statement shows that, except for housing, inflation is going up. It is only because of a radical drop in housing inflation that the Chancellor can show a constant inflation figure.

When the Select Committee tackled the Chancellor on this point and asked him what interest rate assumptions allowed him to show that housing inflation was coming rapidly down, he was unable to give us any evidence or facts. It is hope and assertion rather than anything else. The Chancellor is whistling in the dark to keep up his courage. Hon. Members on both sides of the House cannot believe what he says. Nor should they, because in the same debate last year the Chancellor said that unemployment was levelling off. That prediction was wrong. Many of the things that the Chancellor has said today are wrong. His track record is not good. The House ought to recognise that in the autumn statement the Chancellor has juggled with the figures to create the impression of a Chancellor in control of his own economic policy. But the real world is very different.

Let us look at some of the figures on the expenditure side. The right hon. Member for Guildford referred to a commitment to bring down unemployment, but in the autumn statement the Government accepted that unemployment will stay "stable" at 3 million. It is already at 3·25 million and shows no sign of coming down. If it is to stay stable at that level, the Government should have included an extra £370 million in their planning total.

The Government predict a 3 per cent. cut in local authority spending in real terms. No hon. Member can seriously believe that that will happen. Even if the Government achieve a freeze through their draconian targets and penalties, which is unlikely, they would still have to allow an extra £1,000 million in their planning total.

The Government say that public sector pay will be held to a 3 per cent. increase. Again, no one can seriously believe that. Most ridiculous of all, the Government assume that the miners' strike will be over by Christmas, in three weeks' time. No one believes that either.

The figures on the other side of the equation are equally unrealistic. An extra £500 million has been included for asset sales. The Chancellor of the Exchequer gave no evidence or statistics to the Select Committee to justify that assumption. Council house sales are assumed to be £400 million. The Chancellor was also unable to justify that figure to the Select Committee, and the 1983 sales figures were down by 35 per cent. It beggars belief how the Chancellor can assume another £400 million of receipts.

No one can believe the figures in the autumn statement and Conservative Members ought to recognise that they are phoney. The Select Committee refers to "systematic distortions" in the planning total. That is a polite way of saying that the Chancellor is misleading himself and the House on the contingency and the planning totals, both of which are inaccurate.

Not all the Chancellor's forecasts and assumptions will be wrong. Some will probably be correct, but it is undeniable that he will almost certainly be wrong on some. He has taken the most optimistic view of every fact. They will not coincide. The Chancellor is living in a fantasy world.

The Chancellor is especially living in a fantasy world over North sea oil. If there is one characteristic of the autumn statement, it is that it depends on the Chancellor's view of what will happen to the exchange rate and with North sea oil. He has included £2·5 billion extra revenue for this year. He assumes that the sterling-dollar exchange rate will remain at its present weak level. As the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) said in his excellent speech, that is a dangerous and unsafe—to say the least—approach. It is a complex and hazardous area in which to speculate and for our economic policy and the autumn statement to depend on the sterling-dollar exchange rate, particularly when the Government, on their own admission, have no target for that exchange rate, is an unsafe way of presenting the Government's economic strategy to the House and the outside world. I urge Conservative Members to look at the figures in the autumn statement and to recognise that they are being asked to accept figures that are, at best, highly optimistic, and often phoney.

If the Chancellor is satisfied with the figures, he is deluding himself. Different things are happening in the real world. Public borrowing and public spending are up. Government expenditure is up, because of increases in demand-led programmes, such as unemployment and housing benefits. Wages are running 3 or 4 per cent. above prices. The Chancellor's aspirations for parity between wages and prices will not be realised.

There are genuine demands, which the autumn statement does not face up to. Our infrastructure is collapsing and we have an older population and vastly increasing costs for the Health Service, social services, pensions and housing.

There is demand for more spending on skills, education and better services. Those are not selfish or fantasy demands. We must meet those demands if we are to respond to the challenges facing our industry.

Other problems are raised by the decline in our manufacturing industry. The right hon. Member for Hertsmere touched on that matter. The balance of trade in manufacturing has been sliding away from us in the past 18 months. The autumn statement does not address that fact.

Investment in infrastructure is inadequate and revenue from the North sea has peaked and will decline. The autumn statement does not face up to that problem. I beg Conservative Members to recognise the weakness of the autumn statement. When they see how unsafe and unsure it is, they will turn on the Chancellor and then it will be possible for us to have the necessary serious debate, which has begun in simple terms, on these matters.

Despite the fact that the Chancellor pretends that his figures add up and that he can produce a balanced autumn statement to the satisfaction of himself and other Ministers, our decline in manufacturing industry, skills and infrastructure is continuing. The Government are economically rudderless. I trust that Conservative Members will recognise that and will vote against the Government, if not tonight, at least later.

8.6 pm

Mr. Robert Harvey (Clwyd, South-West): The debate has reflected the fact that one of the main concerns of Conservative Members is not so much the general economic strategy enshrined in the autumn statement as the reluctance of the Government to accept and to give priority to what must be the most pressing issue in this Parliament.

The continued rise of unemployment after more than two years of recovery is alarming and it is no consolation that European countries suffer from the same ill. Of course Government should continue to make balanced, stable economic growth their main goal and we should be proud of the reduction of inflation from 18 per cent. to less than 5 per cent. That is one of the greatest economic achievements of the past 20 years.

However, it would be an astonishing order of priorities to have made the reduction of inflation from 4·5 per cent. where our main priority for the next three years at a time when there are 3·25 million out of work and when more than 1 million people have been out of work for over a year.

Let us remember what government is for. Like all my hon. Friends, I believe that the less government, the better. Private enterprise should be left in peace to help to create wealth, but if greater wealth is created and a major group of people are being left without any share in that wealth, social tension will inevitably be generated as the Gross of those people become pointless. It is the Government's duty to come up with an answer.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has given two reasons why unemployment has failed to fall. First, there are large numbers of working women joining the labour force. One can accept that. Secondly, the unions continue to price their members out of work. One can also accept that, although those of us who have long believed in pay restraint in the public sector, and have seen the Government come round to that principle, could have seen the problem coming.

However, both those factors are merely symptoms of the larger industrial revolution in working patterns which is staring us all in the face, but with which no political party has yet come to terms.

Is it not possible that the reason why unemployment keeps going up during a period of sustained economic recovery is that fewer jobs are required to create more wealth, as a result of the introduction of new technology?

Is it not possible that the reason so many more women and part-time workers are coming onto the labour market is because that is the kind of non-union labour that the new industries prefer to employ? Is it not possible that the fact that non-union earnings are up for those in work is that, because of the productivity improvements made possible by the new technology, employers can afford to pay more while employing fewer people?

Between 1970 there were 6,000 general purpose computers in operation. By 1980 there were 175,000. By 1983 there were about 750,000. The revolution in working patterns brought about by technological change is already upon us.

Ms. Clare Short *rose——*

Mr. Harvey: I would prefer not to give way because of the limited time. I am sorry.

In one industry after another throughout Britain, employers are working with more computers and fewer people. A local electricity board that serves my constituency employs 3,000 fewer people.

The country is looking to us to get to grips with the problem, but not by imitating an American example that cannot be repeated here. Jobs are being created in the United States, first, because a massive amount of enterprise capital was available to start up service businesses, and, secondly, because the Administration was prepared to run up a huge budget deficit. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor was entirely right to argue that we cannot do that here because we are an open economy and budget deficits to stimulate demand merely lead to import binges.

But that is not an invitation to sit on our hands and do nothing. There is a need for a significant, responsible, job-creating, capital spending programme to improve our rundown services in the regions. We need hospitals, housing and schools which will provide employment for some of the unskilled and semi-skilled labour which otherwise faces a truly bleak future. That is not an import-intensive area and if the price is to push up inflation from 4 to 5 per cent., it is a price worth paying

Secondly, because of the conservatism of institutional investors in Britain, the Government need to go further into the business of channelling risk capital to new and expanding enterprises. Thirdly, there is a need for large-scale, voluntary, early retirement schemes, additional upon providing new jobs for those entering the labour market. There is also a need for the expansion of job-sharing, sabbaticals and shorter working hours for those who want them. The Government must give a lead.

The alternative is too terrible to contemplate. It is of a society where the employed, union-protected majority grow richer while life for the minority out of work remains idle and impoverished.

I was elected last year in a constituency where unemployment averages 18 per cent. and touches 40 per cent. in some pockets. A generation is facing the future, and what ought to be the bright adventure of their lives, without hope, without a choice in life and without the opportunity to better themselves, which is, after all, what the Conservative party is all about.

The great tradition of helping those who cannot help themselves, which underlines the British way of life, has averted social upheaval in the past. Let the new wealth that the new technology is bringing be of benefit to all the British people.

8.13 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Since coming to the House in June, I have hoped to see some spark from the Government that would lead me to believe that they had learned some of the lessons of the by-election in Portsmouth, South. I looked to the Queen's Speech in the hope that the programme that the Government were laying before the House would offer some semblance of hope to the British people. I am sure that I am not alone in saying that I was bitterly disappointed at what that speech contained.

I then looked to the next major platform — the Chancellor's autumn statement. Once again, sadly, having read it and witnessed two occasions on which the Chancellor has tried to justify it, I am amazed at the complacent and cynical way in which the Government

completely ignore the problems facing the British people. That is not a unique experience for me, because in the past 15 years I have sat on two Tory-controlled local authorities. Each year, at about this time, we have the preliminaries to the budget meeting in March. Each year, the Tory-controlled councils in Hampshire and Portsmouth would wheel out their political policy and budget, which would always have some element of doom in it and which would always be grasped by the majority of Back-Bench Tory members of those councils, and certainly the media.

Over the years I have begun to realise why that was done. I have begun to realise the purpose of a smokescreen —to divert attention from the issues facing those local authorities and people in the community. It was for no other reason than to hide the complete inadequacies of the main plank of what those councils were proposing to do. Now it is the Government's turn.

What we have witnessed in the Chancellor's autumn statement is surely not what was intended in 1982, when it was supposedly intended to bring before the House a full-scale green Budget as a preliminary to allowing the House to discuss the Government's programme for the next year. This is paying but lip service to that idea of 1982.

This year we have had a charade from the Chancellor. I can only suspect that there was some sort of conspiracy in the Cabinet, when Ministers discussed what they could slip in to cause such upheaval in Back-Bench ranks that it would create a smokescreen that would cover up the programme's inadequacies. They must have decided that the most acceptable face in the Cabinet to bear the brunt of a Back-Bench rebellion was the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the subject that would gain most support on the Back Benches in an attempt to divert media attention was student grants. What a neat ploy it was. Today is rather like after the Lord Mayor's show. After yesterday's back-tracking is the pay-off — the smokescreen being so effectively deployed.

But the real crux of what this Parliament should be about and what we should be saying today is contained on page 20 of the autumn statement. Listed there is point after point, which Labour and Conservative Members have tried to expose. They have tried to say that what the Chancellor is doing is not enough and, where he is making an attempt to offer some semblance of hope, he is doing so in the wrong place.

I come from a city with an appalling housing problem. The housing waiting list increases daily. At the same time the local authorities' housing programme and ability to do anything about it recedes. That is because the Government have reduced the authority's ability to spend and to deal with the real social problems of housing. The urban programme, once grasped by local authorities to offer some added incentive to their community, is, again, being reduced. Once again opportunities are being lost. Opportunities that were readily available only two or three years ago are now being reduced until they are virtually non-existent.

The real irony of what has happened over the past couple of days on education grants must be spelled out. The changes announced yesterday do nothing to counter the impression that the Government's education policy has no direction and no strategy other than to be penny-pinching. There is not the slightest spark of inspiration or imagination. One can offer some sympathy to those Ministers in the spending Departments who have somebody breathing down their necks daily to remind them that the Chancellor is watching every move they make and reporting them back.

Despite the changes conceded by the Secretary of State yesterday, real hardship persists. Fifty thousand families must still find an extra £260 a year. The same number of students will be totally dependent on their parents. There will still be increases in the parental contribution, causing the burden of supporting the student to be shifted to the parent and away from the state. It seems that we expect those in higher education to be independent enough to vote and to fight for their country but not independent enough to make choices in education without their parents' consent, or to seek further education at all unless their parents are prepared to finance them.

The Conservative Back Benchers have been bought off at a high price. The budget for adult education, training and research has been cut, although those are the types of expenditure that we need to increase if we are to do anything about our economic decline.

Public expenditure plans allow for no priority to be given to training and retraining, yet all the evidence is that that is crucial to the nation. We should spend more on it. The engineering training board published a report last month which stated that there are many signs that skill shortages are becoming a serious impediment to national output. The report "Competence and Competition" reinforces that view.

The engineering training board showed that the demand for technicians in the engineering industry will be under-met by one third over the next few years, yet the spending plans take no account of the problems facing that industry —and that industry is not unique in today's economic climate. The money to buy off the Back Benchers was taken from the very areas on which we should be spending money. I have been a Member of this House only since last June, but I would have expected Conservative Members to see the folly of pursuing such a policy year in and year out.

Hon. Members have talked about tax cuts as a solution to unemployment. That suggestion has been made for three or four years, but the unemployment figures have continued to rise. Yet we are still persistently told by Conservative Members that tax cuts will rescue us from our unemployment mess. How long must we wait? How long must the list of the unemployed grow before we see some semblance of a return of those promises?

8.23 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): It is disappointing to follow the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) who seems to be so disillusioned so early in his parliamentary career. It was even more disappointing to realise, as his speech progressed, that he seemed to have nothing to offer except a return to the old ways of spending, and borrowing and taxing, more. If he is searching for imaginative alternatives, it is not sufficient to criticise the autumn statement without explaining—as the SDP so often fails to do—what he himself would do instead.

I should like to refer to the international scene, which was touched upon by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and also by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) who did the House a singular service by preparing the Select Committee report.

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

It is important for us to be aware that the Government's best hopes, in terms of budgetary expectations or fiscal plans, will inevitably depend on the world in which we live and with which we are increasingly interdependent. Having read some of the expectations set out in the autumn statement, I take the view that the waters will be rough in the world over the next year and that it is right to pursue a prudent course — such a course as is, broadly speaking, epitomised in the autumn statement.

Some of the world trends with which we shall have to cope give cause for concern. The United Kingdom's output has risen only half as much as that of other industrialised countries, while inflation is above average. In the United States, output is significantly above that of the average industrial country, while trends in capital investment, inflation and re-employment exceed those in this country.

At the same time, the most dramatic feature of the international economic scene is the record surplus that the Japanese economy is earning on its foreign balance of payments — £35 billion in the past year alone — compared with the record deficit by the United States of some $100 billion over the past year. Those massive movements of funds, and the trade that they imply, are to some extent areas of opportunity on which we are missing out. They reflect the still relatively poor level of productivity and competitiveness of British industry, on which my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) commented so ably.

It is also a matter of great concern that the United States, which in terms of interest and currency dominates so much of the international trading scene, continues to maintain a federal deficit this year of around $167 billion. That, together with tight monetary control, means that the rest of the world is essentially financing the resurgence of the American economy. America is recovering at our expense and — as my hon. Friends are aware — at the expense of the developing countries which face problems with their foreign currency deficits because of the strength of the dollar, sluggish commodity prices and the burden of high interest rates. However, it is the continuing rapid development of the Pacific basin, with low actual and unit wage costs, lower real interest rates, and a surge in output, trade and investment, which provides the greatest challenge — and, I hope, opportunity — as we enter the new year.

It is important to bear those international factors in mind as we try to make value judgments about how we should spend our limited public resources on industry or on social requirements.

We must recognise the importance of keeping the new United States Administration to their undertakings on achieving lower deficits. We must also move, wherever possible, to strengthen the European Community as a trading and manufacturing bloc, by means of stability in exchange rates and industrial investment, and procurement strategies which direct fewer of our capital resources to the United States and the far east. We should remove internal Community barriers to capital investment and services. We must continue to uphold policies of free capital movements internationally. The substantial increase in the United Kingdom's net assets internationally, which has resulted from the release of exchange control some years ago has been vindicated by the enormous income that we now receive — some £2 billion a year — in the form of dividends and interest from those investments. It has more than offset the enormous and tragic decline in the invisible income generated by our merchant shipping fleet, a decline of £1 billion on the level of three years ago.

The autumn statement is well set out, and a considerable improvement on the statements of previous years. I broadly support the overall level of spending for the next financial year and the intention to maintain that real level for the following two years. I am, however, concerned about the volume and nature of certain changes in spending plans since the White Paper. In particular, over £2·2 billion has been switched from some programmes to others, and much of that switch is from capital to current expenditure. For example, is it coincidence that cuts in spending on housing and roads amount to £680 billion whereas extra spending on the Department of Health and Social Security also amounts to £680 billion? One is a cut in capital expenditure, and the other an increase in current expenditure. That is difficult to justify. In my view, it is also difficult to justify spending on nationalised industries that amounts to over £1·3 billion in the next financial year when some £11 million — a relatively small sum — is being cut from the research budget of the universities. It is difficult to defend an increase of 21 per cent. in current expenditure by rate-capped local authorities when other local authorities will suffer significant cuts in support for essential and employment-promoting activities such as housebuilding and improvement and the maintenance of educational standards.

My greatest worry concerns the seeming inability to stem the ever-rising DHSS bill which now amounts to £56 billion or 42 per cent. of public expenditure. Why has it proved necessary to increase the provision of social security by £470 million when the Chancellor anticipates that the number of unemployed will remain roughly the same next year and when the rate of inflation, and therefore assumptions about the cost of increasing benefits, were no different when the last White Paper was written?

What has happened with the major review, which we discussed last year, on the future provision of social security? Can we sustain a social security bill of this size and satisfy ever-increasing expectations from benefits when we are cutting capital investment, spending oil revenue and selling off nationalised industries not to reinvest but to pay dole, supplementary benefits, pensioners and the rest?

The charges that we should be making are not those which are determined by immediate demands for larger handouts in Britain, but those determined by what is happening elsewhere in the world. We should be aware of and responding to the industrial challenge coming from the Pacific basin.

We should be rising to the competitive challenges coming from the United States and Europe in services and in manufacturing industry. We should be insuring against the day when the oil runs out. What will we say to pensioners and the unemployed then — that the money has run out because we have spent the seed corn? I believe that the Government are aware of these changes and of the course needed to avert them. This is the time to rise to those challenges. I hope that we shall have the conviction to do so.

8.31 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The complacency of the Chancellor's speech was quite shocking. It means either that he does not live in the real world or that we have two nations in Britain. Birmingham, which is the second city of Great Britain and the heartland of its manufacturing, has 30 per cent. registered unemployment in its inner core, as was made clear by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). When the Government came to power in 1979, unemployment was between 5 per cent. and 6 per cent. All that deterioration and all the misery, suffering and poverty in Birmingham has come about since the Government came to power and is the result of their policies.

The hon. Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) suggested that our problem is new technology and that we are producing less because robots are taking over the jobs of people. That is not the problem. If we discount oil-related growth from our total economic growth, we find that we are producing less than in 1979. It is not true that we have applied new technology and are therefore producing more. We have thrown people out of work and closed down factories and are now undermining our economic base. When the oil runs out, we shall be in enormous trouble.

The suffering of the people of Birmingham is disastrous. We have the highest level of long-term unemployment in Britain. The only higher level is to be found in Northern Ireland. Until recently, our region was as prosperous as the south-east. We have the greatest concentration of poverty in the United Kingdom measured in terms of the poorest census enumeration districts. The people of Birmingham experience that suffering and worry about the economy because anyone who drives out of the city on major roads will see factory after factory, which used to employ people, closed and decimated.

We are told that Birmingham has benefited from the recent announcement on regional aid because we have been included in a second-tier authority for the first time. Birmingham is highly dissatisfied because the new travel-to-work area, which the Government are using as a building block of their regional policy, is so massive that it includes areas such as Stratford-on-Avon, which is highly prosperous, thus reducing the average level of unemployment in the region, which means that we are in the second rather than the first tier. There is also a grave danger that when new investment comes to the area as a result of the aid, it will go to areas such as Stratford-on-Avon and possibly make central Birmingham even more poverty-stricken.

Another feature of the Chancellor's speech which I found highly objectionable was the re-writing of the history of unemployment in Britain which he has pursued for some time. Every time he makes a speech on this subject he suggests that unemployment in post-war Britain has risen relentlessly under successive Governments and that therefore some radical measures must be taken to deal with it. The truth is very different. Until 1970, unemployment in Britain was either just below or just above 500,000. We then had the Tory Government of 1970 with the philosophy of Selsdon man—one might say, the first time round for monetarism—under which unemployment shot off to 1 million. We then had the famous U-turn because, in those days, 1 million was considered unacceptable. Unemployment came down again to 500,000. We then had the Labour Government of 1974 and the first oil crisis. Unemployment rose to 1·7 million and then came down again, before Labour left office, to 1·3 million. That was the figure on the posters designed by Saatchi and Saatchi—

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Short: No, I have only 10 minutes—saying, "Labour isn't working." The Conservative Government formed in 1979 inherited an unemployment level of 1·3 million and they have taken us from there to 4 million. That is not a long-term trend: the graph shoots up in 1979. It is false of the Chancellor to suggest that it is a long-term problem and that unemployent has risen steadily. The massive unemployment that we have experienced since 1979 is a straightforward product of Government policy. It is wrong that the Government should try to re-write history, appropriately enough in 1984.

Another feature of the Chancellor's speech which was highly misleading, is the claim that Britain is doing better than most other countries. To make that case, he uses figures selectively to compare the performance of the British economy with that of other European economies. Some of the most reliable figures by which we compare unemployment rates in different countries are assembled by the United States Bureau of Labour—hardly a Left-wing organisation. It is necessary to do major adjustments to compare unemployment rates in different countries because the fgures are collected in different ways—sometimes by census and sometimes by registration. Those figures show that our unemployment is significantly higher than that of all of our competitor countries, and we started in 1979 from a lower base. We are doing worse than other countries. Our unemployment is worse as a direct result of Government policy.

Another feature of every statement that the Chancellor makes about unemployment, which is immediately echoed by his Back Benchers, is his argument that only a cut in wage levels will produce a drop in unemployment. We know a lot about that in the west midlands. In 1979, we were one of the highest-paid regions in the country. As a result of the collapse of manufacturing since 1979, we are now among the lowest paid, yet there is no sign of that massive cut in wage levels leading to any regeneration. Indeed, a recent survey of major economic investors made by West Midlands county council showed that they regarded the west midlands as a disastrous area for new investment because of the low level of economic activity in the region.

How low must wages fall to make Britain competitive? Should we go to the levels of Bangladesh or Korea? We already have lower wage levels than other major developed countries. Is there no minimum? Is there no decent standard minimum below which people should not be expected to work? It seems not. That is the only argument advanced by the Chancellor, but we know that, if all of us agreed tomorrow to take a wage cut, demand would be cut and there would be more unemployment. He may have other objectives, but it is not true that a cut in wages, which will not happen anyway, will produce the great solution to the problem of unemployment.

The Government are engaged in a mad economic experiment. As Galbraith said, Britain is doing its duty to the rest of the world by proving that monetarism does not

[Ms. Short]

work. However, the price is unbearable for the people in the west midlands, who are suffering, and unbearably worrying when we think about the future of our country and our economy. The manufacturing capacity of Great Britain is being damaged and diminished, and nothing is being put in its place. New technology is not going in, and when the oil runs out, our economy will be damaged for ever more.

8.40 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): At the heart of the debate and of the economic statement itself are the issues of public expenditure, privatisation and unemployment. Public expenditure is the Sisyphean rock of any Government, and the severity of the task facing this Government is shown by the linguistic osmosis that appears to have coloured the verbs with which Ministers describe their task. First, we heard that Ministers were in the business of reducing public expenditure, then it was controlling, restraining or holding it, and now we are told that it is being contained.

Not enough tribute has been paid to this Government for their achievement. I do not share the scepticism and criticism shown by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends earlier today. To keep so close to targets set some time ago is a considerable achievement. To keep the public sector borrowing requirement in the same order of magnitude as pertained many years ago is in itself a considerable achievement. It is a remarkable achievement to have substantially lowered from over 9 per cent. to 3 per cent. the proportion of gross domestic product that is consumed by public borrowing.

It is inevitable that while the Government tackle the problem of public spending there has to be some of the trimming and shaving that has upset many of the interest groups over the past few years. Inevitably, as a result of that, there are adjustments, simply because of the nature of public spending, during the fiscal year, which again upset many of the interests groups particularly affected by such a change.

Ministers might assist themselves if they not only provided more information on the wider issues, of which Command 9189 is an excellent example, but if they publicised more of the existing anomalies, distortions and subsidies within the public expenditure programme. For example, it might have been useful to know before last week to what extent lower income groups subsidise university education for the middle income groups. It might have been helpful for the country as a whole to know the extent to which the north and the midlands, for example, subsidise commuting in the home counties. It has always amazed me that my constituents in Darlington have to subsidise, to the tune of £250 million a year, commuting in places such as Carshalton and Guildford, to name but two.

It would be helpful to know the extent of the subsidies within the tax system—for example, the extent to which companies that are exempt from paying VAT, such as publishing companies, are being subsidised by those companies that do pay VAT. Again, I am puzzled as to why an engineering company in Darlington has for so long been subsidising a publishing company in Bedford square, London. Ministers would help themselves and the wider debate if they would make available even more information about some of the background to public expenditure.

As to privatisation and the sale of assets, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) has said, privatisation is important, not just in revenue and balance sheet terms—the technical matter referred to in the Select Committee report—but because it has much wider implications. The sale of BT shows the enormous opportunities that lie ahead, not simply for the privatisation of industry but for the privatisation of utilities, which would release customers who at the moment are subject to monopoly charging and to supply-fixed industries that could be profitable and attract funds on the capital markets. We could release them and for the first time give consumers some control in return for the standing charges that they have to pay and the amount of the services of the utility that they consume.

There are many such profitable public utilities—for example, Thames water authority. Individual gas boards or regional electricity boards may be more profitable than others. I see no reason why a nationwide programme has to be initiated. Where there are reasonably profitable regional utilities that could attract funds and finance their own borrowing and expenditure measures, my right hon. and hon. Friends must give them a chance to do so.

Unemployment has been discussed very much from the point of view of the employed. We have heard continually from Labour Members about wage cuts not being part of the solution. However, a Government who have done so much to free the economy, and the south and the midlands, must do much more to free the unemployed, and allow them to price themselves back into work. I should like to see my right hon. and hon. Friends increasingly co-ordinating a right-to-work campaign that will break monopoly power and end the wages enforced either by statute or by union diktat, and will dismantle the restrictive practices, the demarcation disputes, the excessive overtime — all the practices that maintain high unemployment and prevent those who are out of work from having the chance to put themselves into work.

In the north-east, far too many people are trapped on council estates in unemployment. They cannot take part-time work without losing benefit; they cannot leave their council houses, and they have no chance in the heavily unionised industries of putting themselves back to work. It is no accident that the north-east is the region with the highest unemployment, and is the region that is the most heavily unionised. Despite that, in 1984, as in 1974, as the new earnings survey has just revealed, it still has, outside London and the south-east, the highest average male weekly earnings of any region. As the manager of my unemployment office put it the other day, there is plenty of work about but very few jobs. That is a paradox for the House to understand and for Ministers to resolve urgently.

8.48 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): It is all very well for the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) to talk about there being plenty of work but no jobs, when he has never been to Wales. I am the only Welsh speaker to have participated in the debate so far. We have a saying in Wales "Cymru-am-byth" which means "Wales for ever". In this Chamber, it means "Wales for ever last." In the autumn statement, references to Wales are for ever last.

I have listened to a number of speeches about the autumn statement since the debate started. I have listened to a number of my hon. Friends talk about unemployment and its problems. Unfortunately, nobody is talking about the real world in the area where I live. No one is talking about unemployment, at a level in Maesteg of 25 per cent. No one is talking about the miners' strike, which is far more important than some of the issues that I have heard raised today.

The autumn statement refers to an estimated contingency fund of £3 billion. If the miners' strike continues, that £3 billion will soon be wiped out. It is estimated that the strike has cost the nation between £8 billion and £10 billion in nine months. What action, if any, have the Government taken to try to get the two sides together and resolve it?

Earlier, I listened to one of the most atrocious speeches that I have heard in my five and a half years here. I refer to the disgraceful speech of the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), who is part of the black economy with his company directorships, his wine shops and his employment in the House. Is it any wonder that there is unemployment outside the House?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer asked my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) to spell out the policies of the next Labour Government. In a remarkable speech my right hon. Friend outlined the policies that a Labour Government will pursue when we get elected—and we shall be elected.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have no wish to interrupt the debate, but there is a courtesy in the House that if an hon. Member mentions another hon. Member, especially discourteously, it is customary to give that hon. Member notice of his intention. Did the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) notify my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) that he intended to refer to him?

Mr. Powell: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are within nine minutes of the Front Bench speeches which will conclude the debate. The hon. Member for Bridlington left his seat almost immediately after concluding his speech, and we have not seen him since.

Mr. Winterton: The hon. Member for Ogmore has not spoken before.

Mr. Powell: No, I have been waiting to be called, and I am the last hon. Member to speak from the Back Benches.

I refer to another Government supporter who is not here now. If he is not here, it is not up to me to tell him of my intention to refer to him. He has participated in the debate. I have been sitting here since 2.35 pm. I came into the Chamber immediately after prayers.

The right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) referred to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and his analysis of tax concessions at the expense of higher unemployment. However, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere overlooked my right hon. Friend's comment that the Labour party would not promise massive tax reliefs to get elected and would never implement such policies once it was elected to government. That is what my right hon. Friend said, and it is quite significant, because I believe sincerely that a Tory Government would not have been elected in 1979 if they had promised what they intended to carry out. They promised massive tax concessions and we are still waiting for them five and a half years later.

I ask the House to consider the opportunities that could be afforded, especially in Wales, for building. In Wales we have some 40,000 unemployed construction workers. We are crying out for homes, hospitals, schools, sheltered accommodation, new roads, sewers, and more transport development. Instead, under the present Administration, we are getting further cuts, further unemployment and a display of indifference from them.

On page 20 of the autumn statement, against "Trade and Industry", we read:

"Additional provision is made for launch aid and for shipbuilding."

Recently I heard a speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), winding up a debate on shipbuilding. That debate spelt out what the shipbuilding industry wanted.

On page 21 of the statement, under "Nationalised Industries", we read:

"This reflects a number of changes including the reclassification of London Regional Transport as a nationalised industry; decreased requirements for Electricity (England and Wales), British Shipbuilders,"

and so on.

Can the Chief Secretary explain the differences between pages 20 and 21? What does he promise for the shipbuilding industry?

Under the heading "Capital Expenditure" we see one of the rare occasions when Wales is mentioned in the autumn statement. It says that there will be a large overspend on cash limits in England and Wales, and local authorities will be asked for further restraint. How many more jobs does that mean that we shall lose in Wales?

I am concentrating my remarks on Wales because the unemployment level in some areas has escalated to as much as 30 and 35 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) nods her approval, because her area is suffering mass unemployment as a result of the suggested closure of a number of collieries. The same applies in Maesteg. I have in mind, for example, St. John's colliery. At present we have 24 per cent. unemployment. If that colliery closes and its 834 miners are thrown out of work, it means that male unemployment will escalate to between 40 per cent. and 45 per cent.

That is what the miners' strike is about. It is not about money. It is not about increases. It is not about percentage increases. It is about jobs. The miners know, as do their wives and children, that if they do not fight now to retain their collieries and jobs it is not only the present employees who will be out of work. It means that their sons and grandsons will be without work. But not only does it mean the loss of jobs. It means the loss of communities. I was born and bred in the Rhondda, the son of a miner. I shall be proud of being the son of a miner until my dying day.

Miners are a special breed to themselves and to their communities. Conservative Members, especially the hon. Member for Bridlington, should talk to them and discuss their difficulties and problems. The people in my community have a fight. They will fight to the end because they want to retain jobs. They want to do so for their communities, their sons and their grandsons. I have great pleasure in returning to my people on a Friday and leaving the motley crowd on the Conservative Benches so that I can mix with people of real standing and stature.

8.59 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I begin by referring to the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service and the speech of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). It was unfortunate that the report was available to hon. Members only at 11 o'clock this morning. Therefore, it was not available for us to read, digest and consider it before the debate. I realise that the contents of the report must have been made available at an earlier stage to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because he dealt in some detail with his views on the report's recommendations, especially the most important ones. The lack of availability to the Opposition has made it more difficult for us to comment on it.

Mr. Higgins: The Committee was working under the most tremendous pressure of time. There was a small interval between publication and the debate because of the pressure from the Opposition for the debate to take place as early as possible.

Mr. Davis: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not take my remarks amiss. He is always free with his suggestions to the Government as well as the Opposition. I suggest that the Committee could have produced its report slightly earlier for the benefit of both sides of the House, and the right hon. Gentleman should not be so sensitive about a suggestion that has been made in such a modest way. The Committee did not meet until 19 November and it met twice during the following week. I leave my suggestion for the right hon. Gentleman's consideration.

For my part, I shall consider the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyme (Mr. Sheldon), who gave the House the benefit of his experience and reflections on the procedure that is needed to determine priorities for public expenditure. I shall study his speech and the report and perhaps we shall return during a future debate to its main recommendation, which is the need for a better mechanism for determining public expenditure priorities.

The right hon. Member for Worthing, who, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyme, has experience as a Treasury Minister, told the House that the present mechanism is not working. He referred to overseas aid and to the recent furore about student grants in giving two specific examples. I felt that he was criticising the Government's political judgment and not the mechanism. I wondered whether he was indulging in what I believe Conservative Members call coded language and criticising the judgments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the rest of the Cabinet. He criticised what the Chancellor has described as the Government's policies, pledges and priorities. However, we are debating the autumn statement and not the Select Committee's report.

The Chancellor has claimed in the autumn statement and in his speech today that the economy is making progress. He claims that we have had steady growth over the past four years. That is true if we take the output measure of growth. We shall put on one side the fact that the Chancellor has chosen the last four years and has not taken the Government's full period of office. We shall also put on one side the fact that the rate of growth has still not reached that which marked the end of the previous Labour Government in 1979.

If we are seeing steady growth and improvement in the economy, we are bound to ask what is the purpose of the improvement. During the past year, there has been no reduction in the level of unemployment. Indeed, unemployment has risen by 139,000 real people. If the level is adjusted by statisticians, there has been a greater rise, but I prefer to think of real people. Nor has there been any improvement in the standard of living of the unemployed, the sick or the elderly. There has been no expansion of public welfare or public services, which benefit not only the elderly and the unemployed but also the employed and their families.

The only objective of the Government's economic policy is to increase the private consumption of those who are still lucky enough to have jobs, especially those who are lucky enough to have jobs in privately owned industry or services. The Government are not concerned to improve the standard of living of those who work in the public service such as civil servants and National Health Service employees. It is revealed in the autumn statement that during the coming year the Government propose to squeeze the pay of civil servants and that of NHS employees by offering them only 3 per cent. at a time when the Government forecast that inflation will be running at 4·5 per cent., and at a time they forecast that wage increases in the private sector will be higher still. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said, that assumption is either unrealistic or unfair.

Unemployment has been at the heart of the debate, as it is at the heart of the autumn statement. Unemployment has been the theme of speeches by my right hon. and hon. Friends and Government Members such as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey). Of course, most Conservative Members were careful to distance themselves from Labour party policies, but they all urged that something be done about unemployment. We disagree, not about the disease, but about the cure.

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer was talking to the National Economic Development Council yesterday, he said that he too was worried about unemployment, but that there was nothing that he could do about it. What he meant was that he cannot do anything about unemployment because he is trapped between three constraints—the constraint of his prejudice, the constraint of his obsession, and the constraint of his determination to cut income tax even though a cut in income tax does not reduce unemployment as much as an increase of the same amount in public expenditure.

The Chancellor lacks both the will and the imagination to do something about unemployment. He is not usually unimaginative. He has lots of imagination about new taxes. Earlier this year he introduced a new tax—a tax for the first time on the interest on savings. Next year I have no doubt that he will introduce another new tax—on early retirement. We shall also experience a massive increase in another of the Chancellor's new imaginative taxes — the negative external financing limits for nationalised industries.

The autumn statement shows that the external financing limits will be reduced in the coming year by £500 million. I am sorry to say that that is another example of what has

been described as the Chancellor's funny figures. The real reduction in the external financing limits for nationalised industries is not £500 million, but £1·2 billion.

One of the few tables in the autumn statement which does not compare next year with this year is that which shows the external financing limits for nationalised industries. The Opposition have learnt that, when the Chancellor does not produce the figures, he usually has something to hide. When we compare the small print in the autumn statement with that in last year's autumn statement, we discover why the Chancellor is so coy. He is not comparing like with like. The lists of nationalised industries are not the same.

Next year, for the first time, he will include London Regional Transport, because of the abolition of the GLC. He will also lose British Telecom and British Airways as a result of other Government policies.

The revenue to replace the lost revenue will come mainly from the energy industries — coal, gas and electricity — and the water supply industry. The Chancellor will take £1·2 billion from consumers. At least, we assume he will. We must assume that the Chancellor will not reduce investment programmes in the nationalised industries. We must assume that he intends to raise the money, as he has before, through unnecessarily higher prices. If investment is kept at the same level even more unnecessarily higher prices will be introduced.

The consumers of water, gas and electricity include every household in the country. They include the unemployed as well as those with jobs, the poor as well as the rich, the sick as well as the healthy, the old as well as the young, and disproportionately so. The unemployed, the poor, the sick and the elderly need more heat and use more electricity and gas than the rest of us.

Electricity and gas are consumed not only by every family but also by industry. The Chancellor's decision to take an extra £1·2 billion from those nationalised industries will mean higher prices which will be paid by industry and will be reflected in higher industrial costs. That will have an inevitable effect on employment.

It is no use the Chancellor blaming trade union negotiators for every increase in industrial costs, when he is putting up the costs of every industry using gas and electricity. He is doing all that so that millions of pounds can be transferred from the gas and electricity supply industries to the Treasury to finance cuts in income tax for those who have not yet lost their jobs.

During this debate, several Conservative Members defended the use of the £1·5 billion to cut income tax by referring to the tax paid by the low paid. The right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) was especially critical of the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook, accusing my right hon. Friend of retreating from recent speeches and of not recognising that the unemployed would pay taxes if the tax threshold were not raised. He did not seem to understand that when my right hon. Friend talked about tax paid by the unemployment, he was referring to value added tax and other indirect taxes, which bear most heavily on the unemployed, the elderly and those who receive social security payments. It is too much for the right hon. Member for Hertsmere, even if he was a member of the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill, to accuse my right hon. Friend of not wanting to raise the tax threshold. The right hon. Member for Hertsmere should know perfectly well that the tax threshold will be raised automatically as a result of what is known as the Rooker-Wise amendment.

The right hon. Member for Hertsmere, who I thought used to be an accountant, does not understand the autumn statement. Clearly, the right hon. Member for Hertsmere and the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) have not read the autumn statement as carefully as they should have done. They thought that the £1·5 billion would be used to raise the tax threshold under the Rooker-Wise amendment. *[Interruption.]* That is what they thought. I refer the right hon. Member for Hertsmere to table 1.9 in the autumn statement. That table clearly shows that the implied fiscal adjustment—that is what the Chancellor calls it—is calculated at £1·5 billion, after allowing for general receipts of £148·5 million.

If the right hon. Gentleman looks at paragraph 1.59 on the previous page, he will note that, as always, the Chancellor has followed the usual practice. Receipts have been projected

"on conventional assumptions of revalorisation of the main direct tax allowances and thresholds".

The Rooker-Wise amendment is safe without the £1·5 billion. The right hon. Member for Hertsmere will note that that statement is correct if he takes the trouble to read the autumn statement more carefully.

Mr. Wainwright: That is an important point. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Labour party will regard it as sufficient if the next Budget merely complies with the Rooker-Wise amendment? Would any further lifting next March of the threshold beyond the Rooker-Wise amendment be a lower priority?

Mr. Davis: I shall come to that point directly. The hon. Gentleman must not escape responsibility for his earlier remarks. He, too, accused my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook of not wanting to raise the tax threshold.

Other Conservative Members who, no doubt, read the autumn statement more carefully argued for the £1·5 billion to be used to cut the taxes of low-paid people. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) in a persuasive speech went so far as to argue for a reduction in the national insurance contributions of the low-paid. I have a great deal of sympathy with that argument. But neither the low-paid nor the Labour party —I do not speak for the Liberal party—will be taken in by that argument.

We have had five years of Conservative Government. When we consider how the Chancellor of the Exchequer will use £1·5 billion in his next Budget, we are perfectly entitled to look at what the Government have already done to income tax and national insurance contributions.

Mr. Forman: I would listen with more sympathy to the hon. Gentleman's argument if it were not for the fact that his party, when last in government, as he knows, had many opportunities to take significant action on national insurance and did not manage to abolish the national insurance surcharge.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman, who may have been in that Parliament, will also remember what happened then in regard to income tax and national insurance contributions. He argued this evening that we should treat them equally and treat national insurance the same—as taxes paid by low-paid people.

[Mr. Davis]

I remind the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington of the figures. In the last year of the Labour Government, a single person on two thirds of average earnings paid 27·7 per cent. of his or her income in income tax and national insurance contributions. After the last Budget of this Government, that person on two thirds of average earnings pays not 27·7 per cent. but 29·5 per cent. of income in income tax and national insurance contributions. For a married couple, the comparative figures would be 22·2 per cent. in the last year of the Labour Government and 24 per cent. now. If the married couple had two children, the figures would be 12 per cent. then as compared with 13 per cent. now.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): The hon. Gentleman has totally failed to answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), which was about national insurance surcharge —the jobs tax. The hon. Gentleman's Government were only too willing to increase it. Every time they had to run cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund for a bit more money, they increased the job tax, which this Government have abolished.

Mr. Davis: What the hon. Gentleman does not know —he was not in the Chamber at the time—is that his hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington referred to national insurance contributions, and I am now replying to the debate. I should be grateful if the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) would be so polite as to attend a debate if he wishes to intervene in the wind-up speeches. I shall not give way to anyone else who was not present during the debate.

The Labour party advocated the abolition of its national insurance surcharge. It is true that it was introduced by a Labour Government at a time of crisis. The Labour party gave a higher priority to its abolition than was given to it by the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]* I will not be pushed from the point. We advocated its abolition, and if we had done it, we would have made sure that local authorities had the benefit as well as privately owned industry, in order to avoid low-paid people paying higher rates. *[Interruption.]*

However, we must look not only at the taxes on the low-paid. To get the full flavour of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's tax policy, we must look at his policy for someone who has higher than two thirds average earnings. Let us consider the position of a single person with five times average earnings. In the last year of the Labour Government, that person would have paid 53 per cent. of his income in tax. He now pays 45 per cent.

The right hon. Member for Hertsmere also claimed that the problem with the British economy is not shortage of demand. He told us about his visit to a motor manufacturer in Japan. He said that it was clear from his experience that our problems were due not to lack of demand but to trade unions and the strikers in our companies.

Mr. Parkinson *rose——*

Mr. Davis: I shall not give way again. That was what the right hon. Gentleman said, and he is out of date. Obviously, he does not know that when the Rover factory at Solihull closed, under this Government, British Leyland management itself—through Sir Michael Edwardes, no less—said that it was not because of industrial relations but because of lack of demand. When men were laid off for the third time running at Metro-Cammell in Birmingham this year, it was not because of bad labour relations. There had never been a strike there. It was because of lack of demand, as a result of this Government's policies.

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Gentleman has spent half his speech misquoting me. I do not complain about that, but perhaps he will now comment on what I actually said. I pointed out that retail demand alone had risen by nearly £6 billion. I drew attention to the huge growth in world trade and the possibilities for the sale of British goods. I also mentioned that the Japanese company that I visited, which had grown by nearly 25 per cent. during the recession, had not lost a day through strike action in 33 years, whereas every motor manufacturer in this country —and there is no shortage of demand in the motor vehicles sector of the economy—has had strike action in the past two months. That is the contrast that I emphasised and which the hon. Gentleman is trying to avoid.

Mr. Davis: We are not going to have a debate about the motor industry now, and I intend to claim injury time from the Chief Secretary's winding-up speech. One reason why there are strikes in motor car factories now is that all those factories which never had strikes have been closed under this Government. That is what they got for not being militant.

A Labour Government would increase demand by increasing public expenditure because we believe that that would increase the number of jobs, both directly by employing people in the public service—in the social services and in the Health Service, to cite just two examples—and indirectly by producing more employment in private industry by increasing demand in the economy generally.

The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) disagreed and drew attention to certain economic studies which I have not seen. He said that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook did not represent the complete spread of economic thinking. That is not surprising, as there is as much disagreement among economists as there is between our parties. The answer to the right hon. Member for Guildford was given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne who pointed out that four years of policies of cutting income tax had not succeeded in reducing unemployment. In any case, the right hon. Member for Guildford spoiled his own case by arguing both for tax cuts and for an increase in capital expenditure, so at least we agree on something, as a Labour Government would indeed increase public expenditure.

In real terms, public expenditure this year will be less. The £132 billion is the same as this year's plan for £126·3 billion after adjusting for inflation, but the Government will actually be spending £128 billion, so there will be a reduction next year. The same total is to be spent next year as was spent in 1983-84. For two years running there will have been no real increase. That is a source of satisfaction to the Chancellor, but to the Labour party it is a confession of failure.

We must examine not just the total but the pattern of public expenditure. Within the total, compared with this year and not with the previous plans for next year, in

percentage terms the budget for the EEC, albeit a small amount in absolute terms, has been doubled. The biggest increases are £2·8 billion on social security, £1 billion on the Health Service and £1 billion on defence.

The increase in social security expenditure is not due to any improvement in the standard of living for pensioners or people on social security benefits, who are protected only against inflation as determined in May. The 3 per cent. increase in real terms is due to the increased number of pensioners and, as the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) pointed out, the increased number of unemployed. That is the secret behind the autumn statement.

The £1 billion increase for the Health Service is a real increase of only 1 per cent. Anyone who has ever studied the Health Service knows that it needs more than that to stand still, given the effect of the increased number of pensioners and of technological improvements in medicine.

The £1 billion increase for defence, however, is a real increase of 3 per cent. For the Conservatives, defence is more important than the Health Service.

The Chancellor reminded us today that, if total public expenditure is kept constant, more money for one heading must mean less for another. The consequence of increased expenditure on social security due to increased unemployment, on the Health Service due to the increased number of pensioners and on defence due to Government policies and priorities must therefore mean that other services will suffer, and that is what will happen.

There is a reduction in real terms for education, for transport, for trade and industry and for employment. The biggest cut of all is in housing. There will be a cut of £200 million in cash when the allocation should have increased by £100 million merely to stay the same in real terms, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer originally planned. Therefore, the real reduction will be £200 million, which is a cut of 12 per cent. That cut is concentrated on capital expenditure where the real cut will be £400 million, and people in the building industry tell us that the reduction will be 25 per cent.

That is the cruellest cut of all. At present there is a terrible shortage of council houses in all our cities, and no doubt also in rural areas. In the areas where the shortage is worst, there is a major problem for owner-occupiers because houses are decaying around them. Yet the Government plan to spend not more, but less, on improvement grants. At the same time there is record unemployment in the building industry. That results from the Chancellor's insistence on an inflexible limit of £132 billion for public expenditure. It means that essential services such as housing, health, education and transport will be cut to pay for the inevitable consequences of an aging population and rising unemployment.

The position is worse than that. We have not yet been given the detailed figures for each departmental budget. I presume that they will be published in February. Already we can see what is happening. There is a clear and deliberate Government policy, for which every Cabinet member must share responsibility, to transfer the cost of a service to the person who needs it.

It has been the Government's policy towards the Health Service ever since they were elected. That is why they have increased prescription charges from 20p to £1·60. They will increase prescription charges by a further 20p next year. At a time of 4·5 per cent. inflation, prescription charges will increase by 12·5 per cent. The Government are transferring the cost of the Health Service from the healthy to the sick.

This summer the Secretary of State for Social Services took £1 a week from thousands of the poorest pensioners to pay for the increased cost of social security as a result of rising unemployment. Only a fortnight ago the Foreign Secretary robbed Peter to pay Paul. This week the Secretary of State for Education and Science tried to make students and their parents pay for scientific research. In exactly the same way, the Secretary of State for Employment plans to provide for a higher level of redundancy payments by closing 29 skillcentres. The Secretary of State for Transport is planning God knows what by taking away bus passes from pensioners.

That goes on in every department. Just as the Chancellor is not alone in his responsbility for public expenditure cuts, so he is not alone in his responsibility for unemployment. His right hon. and hon. Friends share the responsibility. This week they showed what they could do. They managed to make the Government Front Bench climb down over student grants. Conservative Members should help the Chancellor, just as they helped the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) pointed out, 3 million unemployed people and their families wait to see whether Tory Members care as much about the unemployed as they do about parents with above average incomes and children at university.

Public expenditure and the public sector borrowing requirement will be £1·5 billion extra this year because of the cost of the miners' strike, yet the Government refuse to spend £1·5 billion next year to create jobs. The Chancellor has the money, but he will use it to cut income tax. We know that he will not cut taxes, because he is considering the introduction of new taxes. He plans to extend VAT to tea, biscuits, books, newspapers and children's shoes, none of which has ever been taxed before. What will he do with the extra money? Will he use it to help the needy, house the homeless, treat the sick, educate our children, provide warmth for the elderly, train the unemployed or create jobs? No, this Tory Chancellor, this Tory Government and these Tory Members will use it in the only way they know how: to cut income tax for those who still have jobs and to cut it most for the people who have most.

The autumn statement shows that the Government prefer to cut taxes for people of above average earnings instead of reducing unemployment; and prefer to use the money to cut taxes rather than increase spending on essential public services. The autumn statement is a smokescreen for a deliberate and direct attack on the idea of the social compact that we all have with one another, an agreement that we will make effective provision for our common needs—education and old age—and for those human misfortunes of sickness and unemployment.

The autumn statement is a charter for selfishness. it is the financial equivalent of "stand on your own feet", and "on your bike". It shows that the Government have turned their backs on the belief that "no man is an island". It is a rejection of the idea of fraternity, and it should itself be rejected by the House tonight.

9.30 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Rees): This has been an interesting and stimulating debate, and we have had a speech full of verve from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), but that is not surprising as the questions at issue lie at the heart of this and, indeed, any Government's responsibilities.

If government is about choice, as Aneurin Bevan reminded us — essentially, public expenditure is about choice — the aggregate of public expenditure is the reconciliation of the myriad of choices, some great and some small; but the ultimate luxury of political debate is to detach one choice from all the others that must be made and assume that somehow that aggregate can remain unaffected.

It is against that background, and against the experience that I have gained — sometimes painfully, I admit, through two public expenditure rounds—that I come to the notable contributions to the debate.

I am sure that the House is indebted to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service for a thoughtful critique of the autumn statement, which has been reinforced by a powerful contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). The House may not be surprised to hear that I do not accept its conclusions in their entirety, but I recognise that I am right to pay tribute to it as a valuable contribution to our debate. We have been fortunate in having contributions from two former Financial Secretaries—my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). I am sure that we were all grateful to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne for his candid admission of what it was to be a Treasury Minister under a Labour Government.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): While the right hon. and learned Gentleman was advocating all the fiddles.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman can apply his forensic talents to the problems of housing. If he wishes to intervene in those debates, I am sure that he will listen with respect. He can carry his obsessions to other matters.

We were touched by the candid admission of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne that the problem that he faced was that all the Labour Government's plans were predicated on the basis of a growth in resources which just did not occur. That is a trap which I am sure my right hon. Friend and the other members of the Treasury Front Bench do no wish to repeat in this Parliament.

Ms. Short: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is certainly ensuring that there is no growth.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Lady has made her contribution, and I hope that I may come to it in due course. She fails to observe that over the past four years the country has managed to increase its gross domestic product by 2·5 per cent. on average. I am aware that the hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) find it hard to accept those facts, but I hope that we can at least debate those issues on some common ground. *[Interruption.]*

The Committee's report is perhaps more interesting than the contributions of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who did not take part in the debate. I do not blame him for that because I know that he has other responsibilities. The Committee's report is critical of the mechanism by which decisions in the public expenditure round are taken and calls for a reversal of the methods by which public expenditure priorities are determined. It suggests that priorities are determined somewhat arbitrarily at bilateral meetings between the Chief Secretary and his spending colleagues. I suspect that it faced the Chief Secretary with a somewhat awesome role, to which this Chief Secretary certainly does not lay claim. The reality is somewhat different.

First, negotiation takes place against the background of manifesto commitments, of individual decisions over previous years, of known governmental priorities and of the Green Paper on long-term public expenditure trends which we, the first Government to do so, published last year. Secondly, aggregate spending for next year is determined collectively by Cabinet in July. The final outcome is the subject of collective review by Cabinet. Thirdly, the process of determination is subject to inputs from many sources. The more sensitive the political issue the less likely it is that it will be determined, even in the first instance, by just two Ministers.

At the end of the day the conclusions of Government are submitted to the House of Commons whose decision must be paramount, as the Government are the first to recognise. It is tempting to suggest that the whole process should be put into commission. A moment's reflection, however, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, with his experience of government, will show that this is hardly a practicable way of determining the hundreds of issues, many of great detail and complexity, which have to be determined in the course of a public expenditure round. I understand that the Japanese Cabinet goes into continuous session, which often lasts for two days, to determine these issues. Whether that suits the Japanese temperament and system is not for me to say. I am not certain whether the outcome, in British terms, would be more successful than that which we have achieved.

There were questions from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and others about what happened during the course of this public expenditure round. They must contain their curiosity until such memoirs as are going to be published are published. We have a wealth of knowledge and experience of what happened under previous Labour Administrations. I suspect that a little more discrimination will be shown by the members of the present Administration.

Mr. Wainwright: Since the right hon. and learned Gentleman is claiming so much for the present system of allocating public expenditure, we do not to have to wait for memoirs for him to tell us whether the original decision of the Secretary of State for Education and Science about student grants was specifically and explicitly endorsed by the Cabinet. Or did it never go to them?

Mr. Rees: The House will understand that I do not intend to gratify the curiosity of the hon. Gentleman on this point. I subscribe, as do all my colleagues, to the doctrine of collective responsibility.

Mr. Straw: Except to the lobby.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Member for Blackburn may leak all his innermost thoughts to the lobby, but his example is not followed by this Administration.

The next substantial criticism in the report is that the true underlying level of public expenditure is significantly understated. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and also by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). It is a serious charge, with which I shall attempt to deal.

The report draws attention to the figures for increased asset sales, the treatment of the abolition of the national insurance surcharge, and the treatment of debt interest. This is a criticism of both form and substance. As regards form, so long as the accounting conventions are consistent — the accounting conventions which we follow are adopted internationally and were adopted by the previous Labour Administration — clearly understood and transparent, I see no harm in the treatment afforded to them in the autumn statement and in previous public expenditure White Papers.

As regards substance, there has been no shortfall in the previous years of this Administration in the figures for asset sales. The point has been made in this debate, as it has been made in previous debates, that asset sales should be treated in a different way. It has been said that they should be treated as a means of financing public expenditure. I throw back this question. I am bound to say that I did not receive a satisfactory answer in last year's debates and I do not anticipate that I shall receive a satisfactory answer in this debate. If that is so, it follows that the acquisition of assets should be treated in a separate way.

After the success of the BT issue, I have modest optimism about future privatisation ventures. Therefore, the figures in the autumn statement are relatively modest; they show an increase of only £500 million on the figure in the public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Fisher: How does the Chief Secretary explain the increase in asset sales of £500 million?

Mr. Rees: That would be a matter of commercial confidentiality. I would not declare to the House the exact figures that we hoped to achieve in any privatisation venture. The hon. Gentleman, with his deep understanding of these matters, will readily appreciate that such action by me could prejudice the market. I am sure that the Opposition would say that I was giving my friends outside the House the chance to make a big killing. Such charges come all too readily from Labour Members.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook suggested that the figures for council house sales were illusory, but the House will recall that interest rates have come down, there have been changes in house prices and the Housing and Building Control Act has put the opportunity of buying their own homes within the reach of many more of our fellow countrymen. The appetite of the British people to own their own homes, even when those homes were generated by the public sector, is still unsatisfied.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Rees: No. I hope that I have dealt fairly with the points made by the hon. Gentleman and I have many more to answer.

It is true that there has been no adjustment to the totals, in spite of the abolition of the national insurance surcharge. However, it is the convention that, with cash planning, not every such change calls for an adjustment of the planning totals. Otherwise, changes in, for example, corporation tax and VAT, which might work the other way, would have to be reflected in the totals.

Debt interest was the subject of another charge made by the Select Committee. Since 1979-80, debt interest has not formed part of the planning totals, because the amount of interest is too volatile for it sensibly to form part of a control total. However, it is, of course, taken into account in the overall strategy of the Government.

The third substantial criticism made by the Select Committee is that the Government are unlikely to keep their expenditure within the 1985-86 planning totals. I remind the House that this is the fourth year in which Government Departments have been planning in cash. In each year since March 1982, with the exception of the current year, the outturn has been within the White Paper totals. That is not a bad record. However, I candidly admit that the overshoot for the current year is likely to be about £1·5 billion.

Naturally, that is a matter of profound regret to me, but let me identify two of the main causes of the overshoot. The first is the miners' strike. I do not think that, on any fair view, that industrial encounter could or should have been foreseen when last year's autumn statement was prepared and debated. Nor do I believe that the miners' strike should be regarded as a precedent for future years. If Labour Members encourage their friends in the trade union movement to repeat that sort of encounter, the country will be able to judge their dedication to the welfare of their fellow countrymen.

The second item is the likely current overspend by local authorities, which could total as much as £1·2 billion this year. We have taken stern measures to ensure that such an overspend should not be repeated next year. First, an extra £900 million has been allocated for local authority current expenditure, a tougher holdback regime will be instituted and the 18 local authorities that, together, account for 80 per cent. of the overspend will be rate-capped. That demonstrates the purpose behind that measure.

Beyond that, we shall have a contingency reserve of £3 billion. Some have criticised us for reducing that sum from the £3·75 billion which appeared in the public expenditure White Paper. It is reasonable to have a larger reserve for later years—the greater the distance in time, the greater the uncertainties—but, beyond that, we have allocated an extra £2 billion to certain demand-led programmes—the intervention board's purchases, the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the social security programme.

I turn with less relish to the rather bombastic intervention of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. As we know that he is a kindly person, we were sorry indeed that he should have traduced my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the way that he did. I hope that we shall be able to maintain the courtesies of debate. I am sorry that such a genial figure as the right hon. Gentleman should try to project himself in a cold, cutting role.

The right hon. Gentleman identified unemployment as the crucial issue, but he posed a wholly bogus dilemma between cutting taxation and cutting unemployment. That is not a dilemma that I recognise. It is possible, and over the course of time the Government's policy will demonstrate, that both taxation and unemployment can be cut.

Mr. Hattersley: Ministers have been saying for five years that over the course of time their policies will cut unemployment. When will the promise be kept?

Mr. Rees: The right hon. Gentleman must contain himself with patience. Let me remind him — *[Interruption.]* Allow me to make the relevant point. The right hon. Gentleman was a member of several Administrations over about 20 years up to 1980 under which public expenditure, taxes and unemployment rose. Was he happy with the record of the Administration of which he was a distinguished member? This Government states that there is not the facile correlation which he asserts between cutting taxes and cutting unemployment.

The implication in the right hon. Gentleman's proposition is that our tax cuts have been directed primarily to the better-off. Let us look at the facts. The threshold for a married man or a single man has more than doubled since 1979. Let the right hon. Gentleman ponder that simple proposition.

Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman and the House that, over and above the indexation of the thresholds, our policies have taken 850,000 of our fellow countrymen out of tax. That is a record of which we can be proud.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Rees: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman took no part in our debate. He will have other opportunities. I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook made a range of spurious points. He turned, predictably, to gas and electricity prices. He cannot have heard the evidence given recently to the Select Committee by Sir Denis Rooke and Mr. Philip Jones who both suggested that there would probably be no increase in real terms. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman and the House that under the Administration of which he was a distinguished ornament —he can move uneasily on the Bench, because the facts should be known and repeated—electricity prices, for example, went up by 170 per cent. — 2 per cent. for every five weeks of that Administration. Under this Government it has been 2 per cent. every two years. Did he regard that as taxation in those days?

We know, because we have all read the noble Lord Barnett's admirable work, that the right hon. Gentleman voted without conviction for those measures. The only conviction that the right hon. Gentleman shows is the conviction that he shows in these debates now. The role of the passionate compassionate defender of the less well-off members of our society befits him ill. The Franciscan habit does not sit easily on his shoulders.

Mr. Rooker: Hark who is talking.

Mr. Rees: I have never made the assertions that the right hon. Gentleman has. I know my limitations. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]

However, there was one great omission from the speech of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. After every intervention, we were told that he would turn in due course to the policies that he would propose to the country if he were Chancellor of the Exchequer. It may be that I dozed off, but none of my hon. Friends can tell me what exactly those policies were. I will very readily give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he will tell me just one thing. By how much, if he were Chancellor, would he increase the planning total? [HON. MEMBERS: "Stand up."] If, as I suppose, the implication is that they would be increased by a sizeable amount, what would be the consequences for interest rates, and how would he finance them? By borrowing, or by taxation?

I see that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright), who spoke for the Liberals, has been joined by powerful reinforcements in the form of the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins). As I often do, I shall pay unsolicited tribute to the right hon. Gentleman, who was one of the few Chancellors who has ever managed to produce a balanced budget.

At least the spokesman for the Liberal party was candid and precise, and gave a figure. That figure does not bear close examination and I do not believe that it would make a substantial contribution towards solving the problem of unemployment, but at least the hon. Gentleman shared his thoughts with the House.

Mr. Rooker: When shall we see a balanced Tory Budget?

Mr. Rees: I have said that in due course we hope to move to zero inflation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Next year?"] No, not next year.

I turn to a point that has exercised the minds of various right hon. and hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, the hon. Member for Colne Valley and my hon. Friends the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey). This is the question of the infrastructure and capital investment. The facts should be more generally known. Since 1979—net of sales, which is what often confuses the right hon. Gentleman — we have been spending £9 billion in cash every year. In other words, if one takes away the figure for sales against which that figure has been netted off, that means a gross figure of £22 billion per annum. That figure disregards the current spending. The hon. Member for Colne Valley is worried about the deterioration of the infrastructure, but the best estimate of the Department of the Environment alone—leaving aside nationalised industries, for instance — is that £5 billion is spent on repairs every year.

Beyond that, private investment has increased considerably. Taken together in 1984-85, private and public investment is likely to be of the order of £45·5 billion. It is true that one could have a sensible debate about whether the figure should be increased still further. I believe that the supposition that every form of infrastructure investment is necessarily for the good of the country and generates jobs is fallacious, but those who assume that nothing is being done are wildly wide of the mark. The emphasis is always on movement towards the private sector, because that is the philosophy that underlines the present Government's policies.

Mr. Fisher: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman deal with oil revenues and the exchange rate?

Mr. Rees: Yes, those are matters of importance. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred to statements attributed to the Minister without portfolio, Lord Young. Lord Young did not suggest that those aged 16 and 17 should be deprived of supplementary benefits. He said that it is much better to provide them with a job or with training. That must be a better way to start off than supplementary benefit. I am sure that the House

appreciates the fact that he was prepared to share his thoughts so openly. That is how we should debate these matters.

Perhaps I might now return to the main theme of the Government's overall public expenditure policy as reflected in the autumn statement. It is to hold public expenditure broadly stable in real terms. That is the basis for the figure of £132 billion in the autumn statement. It reflects the figure in the last public expenditure White Paper. It also reflects the figure in the public expenditure White Paper before that and it was the figure on which we fought the last general election — no secret manifesto there.

I do not think that I need emphasise to the House that this is not an easy objective. It was recognised by those who have had a taste of government and by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon). I have been and no doubt will continue to be assailed by some who say that the figure is too high and that our budgetary aims and methods are too lax and by others who say that it is too low, that the target is too stringent and too insensitive. I must say that I take some comfort from the balancing nature of these criticisms.

I take some comfort from those who argue for a higher total because, like the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, they are usually evasive about what it should be, how it should be financed, the consequences for interest rates or inflation, and why the consequences of such a course should be different from those experienced by Administrations emancipated from Professor Hayek and the kitchen sink. There will always be siren voices that tell us that all our problems can be resolved by larger and larger infusions of public money.

To those who argue for a lower total, I listen with more respect, but I ask them to tell the House where and how they would look for the economies that would be needed, and how far they would be prepared to back such decisions when the going got rough. The course that we have adopted is in fact a tough one. That I will not deny. Contrary to popular mythology, it does not involve and has not involved a regime of savage cuts. For real cuts one has to look back to the last Labour Government who were lured by the IMF, to France and, it seems likely, to the United States, but our policies mean that the inevitable and necessary increases in various programmes should be offset by economies in others and that priorities should be reviewed from time to time.

However, if ours is a tough policy it offers three incomparable advantages. First, the advantage of stability. Those outside Government who have to chart their course with a wary eye on Government and have to decide whether to invest and whether to take on extra employees have the assurance of a stable framework within which to cast their plans. They have the assurance that there will not be 17 or 18 Budgets during the lifetime of this Parliament. The second advantage is that, as the economy grows—in spite of the gloomy fulminations of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, the economy has grown and is continuing to grow — the share of the country's resources taken by the state will go on falling from 43·5 per cent. in 1981-82 to 41 per cent. in 1985-86. The third advantage is that Government will have the scope to take rational decisions about the structure and rate of taxation. The figure of £1·5 billion quoted by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for next year's fiscal adjustment may be hedged around with many qualifications, but it suggests that there should be scope for further reductions in the burden of taxation.

This is a policy of which our fellow countrymen approve, because it will take more of them out of tax altogether. It is often overlooked that demand can be created through higher net incomes just as surely as by higher Government spending. Wage negotiators are not entirely unaware of the impact of direct taxation. It is therefore right to stress that jobs, too, can be created by tax cuts—indeed, some might say more effectively in the longer term than by increased Government expenditure. The decision that we take tonight is therefore about jobs. Irrespective of whether the fiscal adjustment is used in that way, it is important that a Government's capacity to take decisions should not be frittered away by the slow remorseless drift of public expenditure.

I commend this autumn statement to the House on the basis that it is the prospectus on which my right hon. and hon. Friends fought the last two elections. That is the prospectus which was overwhelmingly endorsed by our fellow countrymen. That prospectus is as sound today as it was when it was devised. It is the prospectus that I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to support in the Division Lobby tonight.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 199, Noes 346.

Division No.38] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*

Hone Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Jon, Brynmor
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James A.
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Laimond, James
Ledbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCrea, Rev William
Mcdonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Mcnamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Mcwilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maik, Dr John
Malhall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marlon, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Mecher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Micie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Millr, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Molls, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Molls, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Ben, William
O'Nill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parl George
Parr, Robert
Pathett, Terry
Pavt, Laurie
Perry, Tom
Pike Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Adly, Robert
Aitkn, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alisn, Rt Hon Michael
Amry, Rt Hon Julian
Amss, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnld, Tom
Ashy, David
Aspnwall, Jack
Atkis, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkis, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkison, David *(B'm'th E)*
Bakr, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baky, Tony
Bans, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellngham, Henry
Benett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benon, William
Bes Keith
Bevn, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David

Marchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal (B'grove)
Mills, Iain (Meriden)
Mills, Sir Peter (West Devon)
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David (NW Hants)
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. (Devizes)
Morrison, Hon P. (Chester)
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John (Harrow W)
Page, Richard (Herts SW)
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher (Bath)
Patten, John (Oxford)
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. (S Down)
Powell, William (Corby)
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter (Dover)
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn (Conwy)
Robinson, Mark (N'port W)
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. (Londonderry)
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael (Scarb')
Shelton, William (Streatham)
Shepherd, Colin (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard (Aldridge)
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley (Warwick)
Smith, Tim (Beaconsfield)
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim (W Dorset)
Spicer, Michael (S Worcs)
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis (Nuneaton)
Stevens, Martin (Fulham)
Stewart, Allan (Eastwood)
Stewart, Andrew (Sherwood)
Stewart, Ian (N Hartl'dshire)
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John (Solihull)
Taylor, Teddy (S'end E)
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald (Calder V)
Thorne, Neil (Ilford S)
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John (Bridlington)
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil (Belfast N)
Walker, Bill (T'side N)
Walker, Rt Hon P. (W'caster)
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. (Bexhill)
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John (Maidstone)
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George (Acton)
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 343, Noes 198.

Division No. 38] [10.13 pm

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Ancess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert (South Ribble)
Atkinson, David (B'm'th E)
Baker, Nicholas (N Dorset)
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert (Harrogate)
Bagge, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Sir Frederic (T'bay)
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. (Brighton K'to'n)
Bowden, Gerald (Dulwich)
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Britten, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. (Brigg & Cl'thpes)
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John (N Luton)
Carlisle, Kenneth (Lincoln)
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. (W'ton S)
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. (Plym'th S'n)
Clark, Dr Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Sir W. (Croydon S)
Clarke, Rt Hon K. (Rushcliffe)
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (S Antrim)
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter (Angus East)
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George (Reigate)
Gardner, Sir Edward (Fylde)
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. (B'y St Edm'ds)
Griffiths, Peter (Portsm'th N)
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. (Epsom)
Hamilton, Neil (Tatton)
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. (High Peak)
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas (Gr'th'm)
Holland, Sir Philip (Gedling)
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan (Strat'd-on-A)
Howarth, Gerald (Cannock)
Howell, Rt Hon D. (G'ilford)
Howell, Ralph (N Norfolk)
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David (Wirral)
Hunt, John (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym (Cardiff N)
Jones, Robert (W Herts)
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine

Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James A.
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCrea, Rev William
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John

Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Maxton and
Mr. Robin Corbett.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 12th November; welcomes the prospect of continuing low inflation and steady growth as the basis for maintaining the trend of rising employment; and congratulates Her Majesty's Government on keeping the public expenditure planning total for 1985-86 within the figure published in the 1984 Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9143).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Lang.]*

Orders of the Day

Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill

As amended, considered.

New Clause 1

DURATION AND EXPIRY

'This Act shall cease to have effect at the end of the period of three years beginning with the date on which it is passed.'. —*[Mr. J. Enoch Powell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

10.28 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

At every stage of the Bill so far, the Government have been at pains to emphasise its experimental and tentative nature. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is now seated at the Dispatch Box, has referred to the Government, in piloting this legislation, as sailing uncharted waters. Both he and his right hon. Friend have been very specific. For example, in Committee the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said:

"We now have this new scheme, and we are right to test that."

It is essentially an experimental operation. Later he said:

"This is new territory."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 1022-6.]

10.30 pm

The Secretary of State himself was very specific in acknowledging the readiness of the Department and the Government to reconsider the provisions of the Bill in the light of the experience of its working. I remind the House of the words that he used. He said:

"We believe . . . that the scheme in the Bill is the soundest one that can be put before the Committee at this stage. If, in the light of later experience, it proves to need change, it should be changed. All hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies will be alert to that need and to that experience."

With reference to the amendment then before the Committee, he continued:

"However, we believe now, having listened to all the arguments with care, that the scheme in the Bill is preferable to the one in the amendment."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 992.]

I emphasise the undertaking—for such it is—of the Secretary of State that if, in the light of later experience, the measure now before us proves to need change it should be changed. I cast no doubt or aspersion whatever on the candour of the Secretary of State and his colleague when they made those statements. I am sure that they are entirely sincere in saying that if, after a test of one, two or three elections, the legislation in its present form is found to be defective it will be changed.

It is one thing, however, for the Secretary of State to make that assertion in all good faith in the House in 1984, but it is quite a different thing for the same Secretary of State or perhaps another—one never knows, once the regular two years have elapsed it may well be a different Secretary of State—to say to his colleagues in 1986, "I am sorry to have to admit to you that we made rather a mess of that legislation in 1984", to explain that there were serious defects that had caused grave embarrassment to the Government in the working of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Act 1984 and to ask for the Cabinet's assent and

the assistance of the legislation committee of Cabinet to bring forward an Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Bill. I do not know what kind of reception he will get from the Leader of the House at that time or what kind of handling he will get in the legislation committee, but it is not the kind of experience for which Ministers readily volunteer — to go back to their colleagues, admit to having made a number of bosh shots and to ask for a further legislative slot in the next Session to put things right.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I wish to save the Secretary of State from any such embarrassment. Our desire to do so is the more lively in that our perception of the defects of the Bill has been more realistic and acute than that of Ministers. Those of us who have been in the Province since the Bill was last considered in Committee have been asked about its provisions and have discussed them with our constituents. Our explanations have been greeted with hoots of laughter—not at our expense, but at the expense of the Government — at the idea that anyone could imagine that such a system could prove workable in practice. Usually our constituents were still laughing when we left them.

The Secretary of State will not find it so agreeable, however, when our predictions are proved true at the next election and it turns out that the provisions of the Bill have been the means of denying many thousands of electors in Northern Ireland the opportunity to exercise the franchise to which they had every reason to believe that they were entitled.

Therefore, we invite the Secretary of State to accept the assistance which we proffer in the new clause. Since the Bill is, on his own showing, experimental and a test, since he has determined that it shall be changed if change is needed, and it will be readily acknowledged that there are precedents in Northern Ireland legislation for an Act coming to a determinate conclusion—indeed, I got the working of the new clause from another Northern Ireland Act—let the Secretary of State acknowledge this. After that he will be fully within his rights in introducing a new Bill, if he wants one at all—that is extremely doubtful —which will be free from the defects of the present Bill. The only safeguard that the House can have is that the Secretary of State will be in a position to carry out the undertaking he has given. It is also the only safeguard, as we have reached this stage in the Bill, that those whom we represent can have that they will be liberated in a measurable time from the inconveniences that the provisions will impose on them.

It may be thought and it may be a criticism—if so, we may be vulnerable to it—that we have allowed this legislation too long a life in our new clause. We have allowed it three years, where it may fairly be argued that the experience of one election—that which will occur in May 1985 — would be sufficient to throw into sharp relief the defects of the Act. Nevertheless, to show a desire to meet the Secretary of State, to show that we are not using the new clause simply as an alternative means of defeating his legislation, it seemed right to proffer a period of three years, since in that period there may well be both a parliamentary and a local government election. The two forms of election can be tested under the provisions of the Bill. That is the reason for the term of three years, which my right hon. Friends and I sought fit to suggest in the new clause.

If, when the Minister replies, he makes it clear that, although he wants either a shorter or, though I hope not, a longer period, he accepts the principle that since this is experimental it should be an experimental Bill, naturally we would be prepared to consider it. He will be on weak ground if he argues against making this a Bill of temporary duration. He will be on extremely weak ground in doing so for we shall remind him that the Province is at present governed by an Act that is renewed annually. Let him not, therefore, say that this comparatively minor piece of legislation should go on the statute book en permanence, failing such recantation or second thoughts that he or subsequent Ministers may have. Let him admit that if it is experimental, it should take its place among experimental Acts of definite duration so that the House will have the opportunity of reconsidering the position in three years' time from the passing of the Act.

It is only fair to the one part of the United Kingdom on which the experiment is being conducted that the House should be not merely given the promise that changes will be considered if necessary, but that the House will survey the experience in the working of the legislation. As the House will be aware, it is part of our grievance that the experiment is not being performed upon the body corporate of the whole nation, but only upon a part— the Province. I hope that the old latin tag

"experimentum in vili corpore"

is not in the mind of the Government. They thought it a cheap means of carrying out an experiment to try it on Northern Ireland. If the House of Commons insists on trying this on Northern Ireland, at least it should say that after the trial the House will reconsider the experience which has been gained, an experience to which my right hon. and hon. Friends and I look forward with no joyous anticipation. I hope that we shall find the Minister susceptible to the arguments for the new clause.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The objections that we have voiced throughout the passage of the legislation remain and will remain even after it is passed into law, because we think that it is defective. We believe that it will not do the job that the Minister hopes that it will do. The main defect is that there is no positive identification of individuals who are standing before the officers in the polling station. There are no photographs and no system of a single card which ties the individual to the name on the register. We believe, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has said, that a measure as experimental as this should not have an unduly long life before the Minister has to return to the House and give an account of the workings of the Act, and explain why he believes that the ill that occurred did occur.

We are faced not just with the difficulty of stopping the personation that Sinn Fein attempts We are also faced with the problem of ensuring that all legitimate electors can cast their vote.

As one talks to those in the constituencies who are involved in these matters—those who organise for the party of which we, at least, are members — one discovers that they share the misgivings that have been expressed so clearly from this Bench.

There is anxiety that the legislation will not just fail in its stated objective but that the other edge of this two-edged sword will inhibit the legitimate elector from casting his vote.

[Mr. William Ross]

We believe that those who framed the legislation have greatly underestimated the ruthlessness of those who will seek to bypass it—the IRA and the fellow travellers. One has only to consider the activities displayed by those vicious people in Northern Ireland to realise that. In the city of Londonderry, where of course personation is rife on the west bank, there was a punishment shooting only a week or two ago of four individuals whom the IRA decided were guilty of stepping out of line, in the opinion of Sinn Fein or the IRA. That is the type of threat that is held over the inhabitants of that part of the United Kingdom; that is the type of punishment and trial that people can expect.

When that anarchy and ruthlessness is carried into the militaristic personation that we have seen in Northern Ireland one wonders why this weak Bill was presented at all. It is a sop to those who are calling for something to be done.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) is not here.

Mr. Ross: He rarely is. The Government have failed to seize the nettle of demanding that everyone in Northern Ireland carries a proper identity card at all times.

I find annoying the inherent belief that people who are members of political parties, and who thereby make a target of themselves in Northern Ireland, are unwilling to stand up against the gunmen. That is not true. We were told by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), during one of his rare visits at the very beginning of the passage of this legislation, that on the first morning of an election 50 out of 700 electors on the roll were turned away for attempted personation. That reflects very great credit on the party of the hon. Member for Foyle. It reflects great credit on the capabilities and courage of his party workers, some of whom suffered afterwards, as he explained to us. It is also a denial of the belief that the people who fight and work for political parties in Northern Ireland are willing to stand up against the gunmen and the killers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that the new clause deals with the duration of the legislation. The hon. Gentleman is now going some way away from that point.

10.45 pm

Mr. Ross: You will appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the fears we have expressed about trying to shorten the life of the Bill through the new clause arises out of the events that I have attempted to describe to the House. Some hon. Members were not present during our previous discussions and I should not wish there to be a Division on this matter without those hon. Members being made fully aware of the background and of the fears which we all share. It was for that reason that I digressed from the narrow point expressed in the new clause. If the people of Northern Ireland vote under this legislation without a time limit being imposed, they will find that they are saddled for ever with an ineffective instrument of law. Great reluctance is shown by any Government or Minister to admit that they have got it wrong, even when it is apparent to all involved in the execution of the legislation that they have got it widely wrong. Since the legislation applies only to Northern Ireland you will appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the majority of hon. Members in this House who never visit Northern Ireland during elections will not have detailed, first hand knowledge of the practical working of the legislation. I said at an earlier stage that a good sermon is always worth repeating two, three or four times, especially when there is a fresh audience—as, in some measure, we have this evening.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): There are plenty of sinners here.

Mr. Ross: The right hon. Member for Antrim, North refers to sinners, but he will forgive me if I leave conversion to him and to his colleagues. They have taken on board the task of converting the sinners of this world. They have not yet been very successful with Sinn Fein, but one always lives in hope. The problems which will be encountered in trying to stop personation will not change. Although the Bill relates only to Westminster elections, we are very well aware that the first test will be at the local government elections in May 1985, to be followed 18 months later by elections to the Stormont Assembly. Only after that, apart from a strange mischance, will the matter be tested in a simple majority Westminster election.

One has to question whether by introducing this measure in an attempt to cut down the apparent support for Sinn Fein the Government have got it wrong. I believe that they have. If we make dead sure that after three years they must come back to the House with another Bill they will be able to say that the past is over and done with and will escape the strictures of the House for having got it wrong the first time. They can then introduce a Bill, should this be necessary, which will be effective and do the job. They will find that the learning process which will take place over this period of three years will reveal what past statistics have already revealed.

Those who run in terror from an apparent increase in the Sinn Fein vote run from a myth, a will o' the wisp that does not exist. That electoral support has fluctuated over the past three decades. The true Sinn Fein vote in Northern Ireland is between 70,000 and 120,000. It has not changed, and I see no reason to expect a massive change, unless the SDLP collapses, in which case one would expect the Sinn Fein to increase to its potential maximum of 150,000 or 160,000. But that would happen whether or not we had passed the Bill.

The Sinn Fein vote does not depend only on personation. We are told that one fifth of the Sinn Fein votes were personated votes. I believe that the proportion was much less, but I believe that the hard core Sinn Fein vote will remain and will fluctuate only according to the candidate or issues and the feeling in the country at election time.

We say that three years is long enough for an experimental period. Indeed, it may be too long for some of us folk who will have to bear the brunt of the experiment, but we are prepared to give it three years, in the hope that after that time the Government will take careful note of what has happened and will carry out a review and introduce effective legislation.

I do not doubt that the experience will teach us a few lessons, but the Government have much more to learn than we have. I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will ensure that he and his officials are assiduous in the learning process.

The Bill was produced by people who thought that they knew about personation, but they have never learnt about

it at first hand. They have to go through a learning process, absorb lessons and translate them into effective legislation. I hope that after the local government, Assembly and parliamentary elections, the Government will look at what has been said in the debate. We cannot afford to have ineffective legislation. We must have a law to stop the massive personation that has taken place.

Even if personation produced not one fifth, but only one tenth of Sinn Fein's votes, which is probably closer to the mark, it is still massive personation. It proves what tremendous and willing support Sinn Fein receives. If it did not have that support, the terrorism would not succeed. The terrorism, the violence and the kneecapping——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. the hon. Gentleman is straying from the new clause again. I hope that he will address his remarks to the time factor, which is what the debate is about.

Mr. Ross: I was trying to draw attention to the fact that the Government will go through a learning process during the three years. I hope that the lessons will be learnt so that when officials put legislation before Ministers next time, not only will they have framed it better, but the Ministers will cast a more critical eye over it.

I am worried. The legislation will cause great difficulties for the honest and some difficulties, but not sufficient, for the wicked. The period of three years is more than enough to assess the Bill's shortcomings in full and to ensure that that which follows is effective, workable and practical and will be praised instead of condemned, not only by my hon. Friends but by those who will have to live and operate within that framework of the law in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): We seem to have rehearsed most of the arguments during the debates that have taken place in the House on this subject. Therefore, I address myself briefly to the new clause which was moved by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell).

The clause certainly has reason on its side. Some of us might consider it to be over-generous, in that our conviction throughout the debates has been that the Bill, which started slowly in the Government's mind some two years ago, almost seemed to be forgotten, and then was suddenly rushed upon us and had to be put through the House post haste. The unnecessary rush on the part of the Government brought with it some unfortunate wording which the Government have felt unable to change. The consequence of that is that we shall have, at the end of the day, an Act which will not work.

The Act will not work, because the fear that causes presiding officers to ignore personation will be the same when the Bill is on the statute book. Those presiding officers are aware of personation. They know that it is taking place under the existing law in Northern Ireland. The prescribed documents suggested by the Minister in the Bill will not provide them with evidence that they did not have before. Those officers see the faces before them. The problem has always been that they are afraid to act. Therefore, the Act will fail to curb the personation and vote-stealing of Sinn Fein.

I do not doubt for one moment the Government's purpose, motivation and intent. They wish to curb personation, and everyone in the House would wish to curb personation. But the Bill will not do that. The need will still arise. After the May local government elections, we shall find that personation is still taking place. But we shall find out much more than that. We shall find out that many hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Ireland, who normally come out rightly and genuinely and sincerely to cast their vote, will have been disenfranchised.

That being the case, I know that the Minister, who is a fair-minded man, will realise at once that this Bill was hasty, ill-prepared and must be removed from the statute book and replaced, if necessary, by some other form of legislation.

Having recognised that a lower poll is caused by the Bill, the Minister will also hear the calls of discrimination that will come from one end of the Province to the other from people who have not been allowed to vote and who believe that they were entitled to do so. That will cast aspersions on the authorities who have been conducting the election and it will cast doubt on the result of the election.

The third thing that the Minister may see—I hope he does not, but knowing the temper in some areas of Northern Ireland I fear that he may — is that the legislation will cause some sort of unrest, perhaps disorder.

Taking those three consequences of the legislation together, I believe that the Minister will be forced, after just the first election, to think again. The May election will be held under the obnoxious single transferable vote system, under which people may have to list candidates from first to twelfth in order of preference. The Minister may think that that is the cause of the discontent. He may want to try again. I hope that he will not, but, if he does, the new clause gives him the opportunity to do so.

11 pm

I have no reluctance in supporting the new clause. I trust that the Minister will scrutinise closely what happens on 15 May 1985 and will then not be reluctant to admit that the legislation was wrong. Being the man that he is, I know that he will be prepared to admit it. By then, the case will have been proved.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): I hope—admittedly without much faith—that the Government will be sympathetic towards the new clause. In about three minutes I should like to adduce three advantages that would flow from accepting it.

First, if it be true — as has been said by hon. Gentlemen representing Northern Ireland constituencies —that the measure will not work, a time limit upon it will be of value because it would then expire and something else could replace it.

Secondly, a limit upon the duration of the measure will give time for a single identity document to be produced for all the inhabitants of the United Kingdom. I shall not repeat the arguments that I presented at an earlier stage of the passage of the Bill, I said that such a document would not be available overnight, but a single identity document for all the inhabitants of this country could certainly be made available within a period of three years to replace —if the measure were to be retained—the array of documents now listed in amendment No. 5.

Thirdly, if it be found after three years that the measure is not necessary or that a different measure is required,

[Sir John Biggs-Davison]

such legislation could be incorporated in amendments to the Representation of the People Act, and applied to the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): With my Ulster Unionist colleagues, I trust that it will be possible to include new clause 1 in the Bill. It is widely accepted that massive personation is practised by Sinn Fein and has distorted election results in the past. To permit that dishonest practice to continue to influence future results could threaten and bring into disrepute the whole democratic process in Northern Ireland.

I do not believe that the Bill will have much effect in preventing Sinn Fein from attempting to personate in the future. As has been clearly established, personation is widely practised in the nationalist and republican areas of Northern Ireland. The same political activists will test the new legislation. There is no doubt about that. That is why the Bill in its present form should not be permitted to last for more than three years. We hope that changes that we have advised will be made then.

The Bill is an attempt to correct public impressions nationally and internationally which have been created by the large numbers of votes that have been cast for Sinn Fein. It can also be seen as an attempt to identify more clearly in future elections the true number of voters who, by supporting Sinn Fein, encourage the murder and maiming of members of our security forces, and as an attempt to ensure that all possible votes can be cast for the SDLP rather than stolen and cast for Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein voters do not have to pull a trigger or detonate a land mine. Their votes approve past murders and bombings, encourage future murders of innocent Protestant farmers and innocent Protestants in their place of worship and contribute to higher unemployment by the bombing of economic targets.

To ensure a fair opportunity for legitimate voters to cast their votes in elections, it is sad that Northern Ireland is being treated differently from the rest of the United Kingdom, despite the fact that attention has been drawn to suspected personation in Great Britain by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels). We Ulster Unionists have nothing to gain from the Bill. Indeed, some of us could lose as a result of voters being required to present evidence for qualification to vote. It is quite likely that that will deter many from voting.

It is reasonable and sensible that the Act should cease to have effect three years after it takes effect. That time will allow it to be applied to future district council elections and possibly future Westminster elections. The results of those elections should provide adequate information for analysis. In the interests of maintaining a fair democratic process, there should be a review after no more than three years. Such a review would permit the Government to include the advice already given by Ulster Unionists, which has not been included in the Bill. As usual, time will prove us and our advice right. That has often happened before. I do not doubt that, if a review is granted, the advice that we have offered today will be included and applied to the United Kingdom as a whole. I support new clause 1 and regret that an identity card with a photograph is not listed as a prescribed document.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): There have been clear expressions of dissatisfaction with the Bill. Clear misgivings have been expressed by right hon. and hon. Members and many commentators. They do not believe that it is practical or that it will work as desired. I have listened carefully to the arguments in favour of the Bill that have been presented by the Secretary of State and Ministers, and I shall continue to do so until the House divides. I fear that they are the only people who believe that this legislation will be a suitable way to stop vote-stealing. Few hon. Members who have spoken have expressed satisfaction with the legislation. Those hon. Members who have listened to the debate perceive that there are many defects in it.

It is only proper that we state once again that the purpose of the Bill is honourable. I have no doubt about the sincerity of the Secretary of State and his Ministers who are suggesting legislation to deal with personation or vote-stealing. All have clearly stated that the purpose of the Bill is to stop vote-stealing, but, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have said on several occasions, the very opposite could be the result when, at the end of the day, the votes have been cast. Honest, decent citizens may be hindered in the free exercise of their vote, and the result of the election may be adversely affected. Rather than stopping Sinn Fein from getting its results in the election, it may be found by one party that the new legislation will work in Sinn Fein's favour, and many honest, decent citizens will have had further impediments put in their way.

Sinn Fein is a very committed group of people. As has been said, they are prepared to spend 20 years in a prison cell for committing murder. What is to stop them from trying to steal votes next election day? However, other parties, which seek an honourable and decent way to encourage people to exercise their vote, may find that people who remember facing an election every year in Northern Ireland, will become fed up with the measures in the legislation that will probably be voted through this evening.

The legislation will be voted through even though most of those who will vote for it will not have listened to any argument from the Ulster Unionists or the Democratic Unionists, because they were not here to listen to them.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) is not here.

Rev. William McCrea: The hon. Gentleman is correct.

Therefore, hon. Members cannot vote with a clear conscience and say that they have listened to the arguments and, with a free and open mind, made a decision. This legislation has been decided by the Government for good or ill, for the people of Northern Ireland, whether or not it is the proper way to carry out the legislative process in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. I do not believe that it is.

What voice is the Minister listening to? He has listened to what has been said, but not to many of his right hon. and hon. Friends, because only a few of them are here or have spoken through the passage of the Bill. He has not listened to many of the Liberal or SDP Members, because their Benches are completely empty. As to listening to any argument on the matter from Her Majesty's Opposition, the lonely figure sitting on his own on the Opposition Front Bench proves the interest that they have in whether the proper exercise of the vote in Northern Ireland will be

hindered by the legislation. The absence of Opposition Members demonstrates clearly that they could not care less.

11.15 pm

So I ask the simple question: to whom is the Minister listening? Of course, we are told that one of the parties that the legislation is designed to help is the SDLP. If that was really felt to be so—because certainly it was not in the interests of the Unionist parties that the legislation was introduced—one would have expected to see the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) in his place. However, on the numerous occasions that we have discussed these matters he has not found it interesting enough to be here. But, of course, the hon. Gentleman appreciates that there is no need for him to be here, because the legislation will be put through the House in any event, to save his neck, so he can go somewhere else to do something else and not bother to be here to listen to our debates.

Mr. Beggs *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) is about to say why he feels that the legislation should cease to have effect after three years.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank you for drawing that to my attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One reason is that no one is interested in it. That, as I have pointed out, is demonstrated by the absence of right hon. and hon. Members from the debate. Indeed, it is one reason why the legislation should not be passed at all. In my view, three years is too long. I should be delighted, as, I am sure, would other hon. Members of the Unionist family, if the Minister said that, having listened to the argument and the complete dissatisfaction expressed by a majority of the right hon. and hon. Members present, he had had second thoughts and no longer wanted to push through the legislation. However, that is too much to ask.

The proposed new clause is a reasonable one if the Minister is going ahead with the legislation because, if it is seen not to be working, it will have to be changed. The amendment will give the Minister a way out, and he will need it. The legislation will prove to have been a folly and an embarrassment to the occupant of his office possibly at the end of one year, let alone three.

For all those reasons, I support the new clause.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I have considered this matter carefully. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have attended all these debates in Committee. I have always been troubled by personation, because it has occurred in Leicester, East.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison), I am tempted by the new clause. It proposes rather a short life for the legislation, but it is still long enough for hon. Members to study the results of the local government elections coming up in May, the results of any Stormont elections and, as the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) pointed out, the results, possibly, of a general election. We could all then get round a table and decide whether the legislation had cut out personation. My opinion is that it will cut out personation at a stroke. I appreciate that some hon. Members, especially those representing the Official Unionist party, have said that they see many people being denied the right to vote. That remains to be seen. It has been recommended that the official poll card should have set out upon it all the requirements, including documents that should be taken to the polling station. If electors adhered to the requirements, I am certain that the right people would come forward to vote. That could be assessed after three years had passed, and I think that that period would be a satisfactory one in which to determine whether the number of votes cast had declined. I hope that there is a decline in certain votes in Leicester, East but that does not include my own.

The electors need to know what is required when they go to the polling stations and thee should be one voting requirement. This is vital. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) talked about the single transferable vote, which, thank goodness, we do not have in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The best requirement is an identity card. The entire United Kingdom should have one form of identity card. That would cut out a great deal of personation. When three years have passed, I hope that those who represent constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales will be able to persuade the Government that the issuing of identity cards should be considered carefully. If they were issued, we could end personation, which is countrywide, at a stroke. Much of what we have learnt in discussing the Bill can be incorporated in the Representation of the People Bill, which will come before us on Monday. I regret that that Bill did not precede this one.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is always a great pleasure to be able to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels). As the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) has said, it is a pity that more hon. Members are not in their places to listen to an interesting and deep debate on an extremely important subject. Its importance lies in the constitutional issues that are raised by the new clause. The constitutional implications will not have escaped the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) or the Minister. Parliament is sovereign and no Parliament can bind its successor. Therefore, it is not necessary to have a three-year limitation clause in a measure of this nature. If the serious consequences which have been mentioned were to come about, Parliament could introduce new legislation. I am not entirely sure whether the comments of the right hon. Member for South Down reflected upon the competence of the Government, or that of a future Government, to alter this legislation, when enacted, if there were the consequences to which hon. Members have alluded.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Is it the Opposition's position that the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 should have been a permanent Act with no terminal date?

Mr. Bell: I anticipated that the right hon. Gentleman would mention that Act, which touches upon civil rights.

Mr. Powell: Does this Bill not do so?

Mr. Bell: The Bill touches on civil rights, but it cannot be equated with the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 or the Act, which will have to be reviewed shortly, on the use of the Diplock courts. The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 and the legislation that provides the Diplock courts relate to fundamental human rights, and while the Bill touches

[Mr. Bell]

on human rights I am not entirely sure that it does so to such an extent that a three-year limitation should be written into the Bill.

The Bill should stay as it is and should not be amended by the new clause. There will be district elections next May in Northern Ireland and eventually there will be a general election. I cannot anticipate that a general election will take place before three years have passed. Those two elections may involve too short a period to test fully the purposes behind the Bill and the reasons why identity must be established before one can vote in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) has demonstrated his knowledge of voting in Northern Ireland, and of election registers and how they are kept. He mentioned a point raised by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) that the Sinn Fein vote, if one goes back to 1921, rises and falls within bands and that the vote at the last election was not unusual. He used that argument to show that the Bill might be ill-conceived and unnecessary. The Opposition take a different view. We believe that if we oppose personation we must support the Bill. That is why we do not support the new clause.

The right hon. Member for South Down reminded me of a short story by Anton Chekhov called "The Three Years" which end with the phrase:

"In search of truth, a man makes two steps forward and one step back. Suffering mistakes and the weariness of life thrusts him back, but the search for truth drives him on and on."

We shall always seek the truth in this House, and in relation to the three years the Bill is better as it stands.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am amazed that those who know nothing, practically, about elections in Northern Ireland, who have never stood at an election in Northern Ireland and who do not know the conditions of electioneering there, seem to know more about how elections should be organised than those who have practical experience.

The House should be interested in giving every possible legitimate voter the right to cast a vote. If democracy is to be maintained in the face of the vicious terrorist attacks by the IRA we must ensure that the people believe in the democratic system. There is only one way to exercise that democratic system — by the vote. I am amazed that some do not regard the right to vote as a basic human right. It is one of the most basic fundamentals of democracy. My right to vote as a legitimate voter should be safeguarded. But some put that right on a different level.

If the House were passing legislation tonight to do for the whole of the United Kingdom what it is doing for Northern Ireland, the Chamber would be packed. Hon. Members on all sides would say that we were trying to hinder or stop people from voting. They would say that we were denying the right of people to vote. But since we are legislating for Northern Ireland it does not matter and hon. Members are not concerned.

We have an assurance from the Minister that he will give the people time to operate the system. Shall we have the same restricted hours in Northern Ireland for our elections? Shall we have the time to lengthen the voting procedure?

It is amazing that the Minister thinks that the current regulations are operated in the polling booths. I understand that the presiding officer has the duty, according to the law, to ask for the name and address of the person who approaches the officials to get a voting slip. Anyone who knows anything about electioneering in Northern Ireland knows that people come to vote with a polling card. That polling card is taken, and the name is looked up on the polling list and marked off. That is done hundreds and hundreds of times on polling day, and everyone knows that. I wonder how many hon. Members representing Northern Ireland were ever asked their name at a polling booth.

11.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member will address himself to the new clause we are discussing. The hon. Member is having another go at making a Second Reading speech.

Rev. Ian Paisley: With due respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is amazing. We have had a wide debate, and I have listened with great care to other hon. Members make the points that I am now making. Is there, with respect, some restriction tonight preventing me from taking part in this debate while other hon. Members can make their speeches without any interjection from the Chair?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I invite the hon. Member, as I have invited a number of hon. Members who have taken part in this debate, to address himself to the new clause that is before us, which deals with the duration of this legislation. I am sure that the hon. Member will address himself to that subject.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am seeking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to build up a case for why the new clause should be accepted by the House. I am trying to point out to the House, as best I can, what happens in Northern Ireland elections. We shall have a complete change of procedure. Those who come to the polling booth will have to come armed with a particular document. I still do not understand what happens to that document in the polling booth. The Secretary of State has made many statements about what will happen. I do not know whether that document will be the decisive document, whether the presiding officer will still make his decision without reference to the document or whether the address of the document really matters. I do know that the whole voting procedure will be seriously delayed and that many legitimate voters who come to vote will be dismayed by the fact that obstacles will be set in their way.

It is no use hon. Members thinking that that will not happen. Do hon. Members really think that Northern Ireland voters are different from anyone else in the rest of the United Kingdom? When the Northern Ireland people come to the polling booth, they come to vote. After this Bill is passed in this House, receives approval in the other place and is given the Royal Assent, this legislation will be forgotten until election day. Then there will be the furore of questions: Do I have the documents? Where are they?

New clause 1 contains a reasonable proposal. We talk about the legislation applying immediately after it is passed. Why not say that in three years it should be completely reconsidered? We have been told that we are in uncharted waters. Surely, having floated over those waters, we will be better able to chart them properly. Various hon. Members proposed what the Minister said were good ideas. Those good ideas are now lost. Will

those proposals be written into the legislation at some future time? In three years, will we redraft the whole of this legislation?

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who has just joined us—there were some remarks about why he was not present—proposed that, in future, instead of the head of the house signing the document for all in the house so that their names could be put on the register, everybody should sign his name and write his date of birth. That would be done in duplicate. The presiding officer would have a copy. A person would be asked, "What is your name? What is your date of birth?" and told to sign his name. The presiding officer would know then who that person was. But that would all be forgotten. People would not come back and do that.

No one has stood up in this House and said that he wants to see personation. We are all against it. Everyone in the House believes in the principle of the Bill, but we do not believe that the Bill will achieve the desired result. If I thought that the Bill would achieve it, I would not be taking part in the debate; I would be happy to let it go through. The Bill will do grave damage to legitimate voters wanting to vote in Northern Ireland. It is the hon. Members in this House and our council colleagues who will bear the burden and heat of the day when the election day comes.

We are asking the Government to meet us and agree that after three years the whole procedure will be redrafted, with the benefit of experience and added wisdom. Is that an unfair request to make? The majority of hon. Members from Northern Ireland are asking that tonight. It is reasonable and fair that the Minister and the Government should meet us on the matter.

What worries me is that the Government, by presenting the Bill in its present form, have apparently not made themselves acquainted with the practicalities of carrying out the law on polling day. I hope that the Minister will bring us good news tonight. I hope that he will tell us that the hours are to be lengthened, and that the Government will give us the same hours for the local elections in Northern Ireland as we have for elections to this House. I hope that he will say that there will be no curtailment of the hours, and that people may have adequate time.

There are many matters in the Bill that will not be helpful, and I ask the Government to agree to look at the legislation after three years. We have renewals in regard to many other important matters of law in Northern Ireland. Why can we not have a new Bill presented which will embody the proposals which have been made in this House? I plead with the Minister to meet the representations which have been made to him by the people on the ground who will have to work the legislation if it is passed by this House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I have listened very carefully to the arguments on the new clause. Having considered them, it is now my duty to explain why the Government do not feel able to accept the new clause.

In no sense can the Government be accused, as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) suggested, of engaging in hasty or ill-considered legislation on this matter. As he knows, as the House knows, and as every constitutional party in Northern Ireland knows, these proposals have been under consideration since the beginning of 1982, there have been representations about them from the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, and the Government very carefully considered the principles on which the legislation should be based before introducing it to the House.

Before turning to the three main reasons why I feel that the Government cannot accept the new clause, perhaps I may rebut the point, made by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), that this is in any sense an inexpensive, or a cheap, trial in Northern Ireland of something that is to be applied more widely in the United Kingdom in due course.

Northern Ireland is where the problem of personation exists. It exists in a very serious way, as was borne in on the Government by representations from all the constitutional parties there. During the progress of the Bill through the House I have said how much I regret the necessity for treating Northern Ireland differently from the rest of the United Kingdom, but that is where the problem exists and where action has to be taken to preserve the integrity of the electoral process.

The right hon. Gentleman gave as his reason for introducing the new clause that it would make it easier for the Secretary of State to make amendments if that proved necessary or desirable in the light of experience. It is clear from the approach of the right hon. Gentleman and others that they had substantial amendments in mind which would alter the basis of the legislation. I shall outline to the House three reasons why I should be very reluctant indeed to go down that road.

As a matter of principle, I do not believe that the House would or should agree to frame or enact legislation on the assumption that it may well fail to achieve its intended objective. When I spoke in earlier debates on the Bill about going into uncharted waters or unknown territory, I was talking about the effects of the Bill on polling station procedures as we have known them. I have, however, no doubt whatsoever about the effect of the Bill on personation. In my view, which has remained unchanged throughout the passage of the Bill, the combined effects of clauses 1 and 3 provide the most effective deterrent against widespread organised personation that it is possible to devise in the circumstances facing us and within the time scale that we have if we are to deal with this before the local government elections in May next year.

Mr. William Ross: Is the Minister implying that if the time scale were longer he would take a different view? If not, what is he implying?

Mr. Scott: I am not saying that at all. I am saying that if, in addition to the circumstances facing us, there was another constraint that the Government had to bear in mind it was the necessity to take action by May 1985.

I acknowledge, of course—I thought that this point was dealt with very well by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) — that two of the most important pieces of legislation applying in Northern Ireland—the Northern Ireland Act, which provides for the system of direct rule, and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act—are temporary in nature, as indeed is the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act which applies throughout the kingdom. In all those cases, however, because of the exceptional nature of the legislation and the impact on human rights, Parliament decided that the legislation should be subject to regular renewal in the hope that the circumstances

[Mr. Scott]

which made it necessary would go away. But that is a very different matter from enshrining in statute, by implication, the sentiment that a particular measure is probably flawed in principle and that provision must therefore be made for improvement in subsequent legislation.

Thirdly, on a purely practical note, the aspect of the Bill which it has become clear from our discussions is most likely to require examination as it works out in practice is the list of prescribed documents. If, through experience and reflection, it appears that certain documents should be added to or substracted from the list, or if in due course it is decided to go for a single document, the Bill provides that that can be achieved by means of statutory instruments. Indeed, that was one of the ideas put forward by the right hon. Member for South Down in Committee.

I cannot accept, however, that the principles and purposes of the Bill are unsound or likely to be rendered obsolete within the kind of time scale envisaged by the new clause. I therefore recommend that the House reject the new clause.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The Minister took exception to the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) that the Bill had been drafted in haste and that the Government had acted in haste and without consultation. He will know, however, that although consultations began early in 1982 they came to a sticky end long before the elections.

On the not inappropriate date of 12 July 1982 the former Secretary of State wrote to me:

"I therefore intend to leave matters as they are at present".

And so they remained until the Gracious Speech announced that this Bill was to be bounced upon us. I am sure that the Minister did not intend to mislead the House, but it is clearly wrong to suggest that consultation had been continuous when, in fact, there was consultation for a few months and then nothing further until the Gracious Speech and the introduction of the Bill.

Mr. Scott: That is not true. Apart from having had representations from the Ulster Unionist party after the general election in 1983, it was made clear on other occasions that consultations were continuing. I answered a parliamentary question on the matter earlier this year and made it clear that the Government were still considering which measures they might take to counter personation, including the introduction of a Bill.

11.45 pm

Mr. Molyneaux: I agree that ideas were exchanged occasionally. There was a further letter from the former Secretary of State on 10 March 1983, but it did not take us far because he proceeded to list mainly the objections and difficulties in proceeding as he originally intended. That does not mean consultation within my meaning of the term.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that consultations effectively stopped in 1982?

Mr. Molyneaux: That was the point that I attempted to make. Apart from the occasional mention of the problem, there was no consultation in the sense that ideas were put to parties or a consultative process was engaged in in a meaningful way in the interval.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) referred to other items of legislation with a terminal date, and sought to show that they were different because they affected human rights. It is true that they affect the human rights of some people, but the Bill affects the basic human rights of all. Like the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) I cannot accept that the right to vote unhindered is not one of the most basic human rights of all.

To be fair to the Government, they never concealed their doubts about the measure. The Minister has shown that he is aware of its difficulties and weaknesses. During previous debates he has made it clear that he is willing to reconsider and re-examine the legislation. It does not, therefore, seem unreasonable to hope even at this late hour —both chronologically and in our discussions—that the Minister will listen to our pleas and welcome the assistance that we are attempting to offer him by providing a way out in the new clause.

Three years is a reasonable period. It will take some time after the elections in May 1985 to evaluate the results and the voting patterns. That is important. If the Government feel that it could be done in a shorter period, we would offer no objections. Another time factor is involved with the drafting and processing of the Bill. It has emerged in previous debates that similar problems of vote-stealing have occurred in England. We have evidence that that has appeared fairly significantly in England. The Minister, and other Ministers, have said that they do not believe that because the Home Office does not know about it. Unless my calculations are far out, in the light of what many hon. Members who represent English constituencies have said, I shall be surprised if the Home Office is not made aware of those difficulties within the next three years.

Therefore, I would have thought that three years would be an appropriate period. That also raises the question of who urged the Northern Ireland Office to make haste and to take such speedy action in Northern Ireland. It is true that many Northern Ireland parties were aware of the vote-stealing activities of Sinn Fein, but we did not lose our heads over it. We had been through the problems before and managed to contain it.

One asks what were the sources of the pressure that forced or persuaded the Government into a Bill with such haste. Like the Government, those sources felt that they needed more time because they have not been enthusiastic in helping the rest of us make the Bill a little more workable.

We have listed the defects, and this is not the occasion to restate them. The Government admit that they are sailing in uncharted waters. We have put down numerous marker buoys to assist the Government and we trust that they will make use of those devices.

We hope that the Government and those who have to implement the legislation and try to make the mechanism work will, in due course, be able to report their conclusions to us. Even at this late stage we are offering the Government a way out. Like them, we shall be watching the working of all the devices.

I make the Minister a genuine and sincere offer—we are prepared to assist him in monitoring all this legislation for the next three years, and then to return and co-operate with him or his successor in framing a new Bill if that proves necessary. If the Minister maintains that he cannot concede and accept our amendment, I have no option but to urge all hon. Members to support the new clause one.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 12, Noes 124.

Division No. 40] **[11.51 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
McCrea, Rev William
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. William Ross and
Mr. A. Cecil Walker.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Bell, Stuart
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

VOTERS TO PRODUCE PRESCRIBED DOCUMENTS

Mr. Scott: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 12, leave out 'prescribed' and insert 'specified'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 2 to 7.

Mr. Scott: In Committee on 28 November, I undertook, in reply to an amendment moved by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), to bring forward on Report a group of amendments to incorporate in the body of the Bill the spirit of the right hon. Gentleman's amendment, setting out the list of documents from which a voter will be required to produce one to obtain a ballot paper from a presiding officer or clerk.

The amendments seek to fulfil that undertaking, and I will explain why the Government believe that the list should consist of the documents set out in amendment No. 5.

We have looked closely at the reservations expressed in the House by a number of right hon. and hon. Members about the documents included in the list. I accept, as I must, the criticism of the right hon. Member for South Down that there is no document in the list which every person must by law have in his possession; there is no such document in the United Kingdom. I accept that each of the documents listed is not wholly satisfactory for the purpose of relating the person producing the document to the person described in the electoral register.

We have made it clear to the House from the outset that any list cannot be foolproof, but, bearing in mind the criteria that the documents should all be official documents issued by the Government or Government agencies, and that the list should not be drawn so tightly that any group of qualified electors is effectively disfranchised, or so widely that it would be simple for large numbers of documents to be obtained easily or be easily forged, I remain of the view that at least until we have the benefit of practical experience, the list of documents specified in the amendment is right. If any difficulties subsequently arise in connection with any particular document, the new paragraph of rule 37 will permit the list to be varied as appropriate.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) said that the medical card alone could suffice as the specified document, because it is the only document on the list to which every elector is entitled and which can be obtained free of charge. I considered that idea carefully, because it has some attractions, but the essence of the Government's approach is that there should be the option to produce one of a range of documents, to make it easier for legitimate electors to have one of the documents easily available for production to the clerk or presiding officer.

Furthermore, if only one document were specified the opportunity would be removed for a voter to produce and for the presiding officer to consider another specified document in those cases where the first document

[Mr. Scott]

produced a reasonable doubt in the mind of the presiding officer that the voter was the person on the electoral roll who he claimed to be.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) has made a particular point about the inclusion of a certified copy or extract of an entry of marriage. In view of the concern that he has expressed I should explain why we have nevertheless decided to include it in the form now before the House.

The document has been included to provide for the case of a woman who has registered in her maiden name and who subsequently married and, as a result of her marriage, no longer possesses any of the other specified documents in her maiden name. The provision has been drafted so that it includes women who might marry at any time during the period of registration—July to mid-September—and so that it continues to apply until the latest possible date in the life of the register bearing the woman's maiden name. The hon. Member for Upper Bann raised that point. That date will be 15 February in the year two years on from the year of the compilation of the register. That is why th provision applies to women married within two years ending with the day of the poll concerned.

The amendment incorporates in the Bill an amendable list of specified documents as a result of an undertaking that I gave. We have sought to keep the balance between disfranchising genuine electors and yet inhibiting and deterring those who would corrupt the electoral process. We have listened carefully to the views and concerns expressed by right hon. and hon. Members and have taken them into account in drafting the amendment. I urge the House to accept it.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The Bill will certainly leave the House the better for the insertion in it of the crucial documents in proper terms instead of by a sidelong reference, as was the original form of the Bill, to documents that would be prescribed in regulations which the House had not yet seen. Certainly the necessity of throwing into proper legislative form the documents referred to in the notes on clauses which were available to hon. Members has resulted in a considerable tightening and improvement of the definitions.

I welcome the fact that the visitor's passport appears to have disappeared, having made a fleeting apparition in the notes on clauses. There is also undoubtedly an improvement, to which the Minister has just referred, in the opportunity for a married woman validly to produce as a specified document her marriage certificate. That reminds me that the description of the certificate is, at any rate, more comprehensive and accurate than it was in the form in which we were previously considering it.

However, two points in the clause as drawn may raise a query. Perhaps the Minister will be able to refer to them when he intervenes. Paragraph *(a)* deals with the driving licence. In the case of a Great Britain driving licence, the provisional licence appears to be excluded. Perhaps, by some other means, the provisional licence is excluded in the case of the Northern Ireland driving licence. But that does not appear on the face of the amendment. Will the Minister confirm that the provisional driving licence is also excluded, as it should be, in the case of the Northern Ireland driving licence?

I should be grateful too if the Minister will refer to the last words of his amendment:

"varying any description of document".

That appears to be an ambiguous phrase. It might appear to mean varying the description given in this amendment of the identical document. That is, it would be the same document but differently described from the way in which it is described here. That seems a rather curious provision to make. One would have supposed that we would ensure that we had the definition right in inserting the documents in the Bill as we are doing now. On the other hand, if it means varying the description of documents that can be used for this purpose, that point is surely covered already by the words "adding or deleting documents". I hope that when the Minister replies he may be able to clear up those two minor points of explanation.

The Bill, however, is certainly more satisfactory for carrying upon the face of it, for those who will use it and interpret it, the documents that for the present are to be those the production of at least one of which is to be a condition of exercising the franchise in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the two concessions that the Government have made within the scope of the amendment. I hope that I may take the opportunity to refer to the patience with which the Minister has, throughout the proceedings on the Bill, listened to the arguments that have been put. Even if that patience sometimes appeared to be linked with obduracy, nevertheless it was a patience that the Committee and the House appreciated.

Mr. Scott: I should like to deal with the three points raised by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). First, contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman seemed to understand, the amendment includes a United Kingdom visitor's passport. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman raised the question of the driving licence and the exclusion of the Northern Ireland provisional licence from the amendment. It is excluded because under article 12 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 only full licences can be issued. The need to include a power to vary the description of documents is very much a longstop provision. It was included in case the law under which the document was issued were to be amended, in which case the description might have to be altered.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 2, in page 1, line 14, leave out 'prescribed' and insert 'specified'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 20, leave out 'prescribed' and insert 'specified'.

No. 4, in page 2, line 1, leave out 'prescribed' and insert 'specified'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 5, in page 2, line 5, at end insert—

'(1DA) For the purposes of this rule a specified document is one which for the time being falls within the following list:—

(a) a current licence to drive a motor vehicle granted under Part III of the Road Traffic Act 1972 (excluding a provisional licence), or under Article 12 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 or any corresponding enactment for the time being in force;

(b) a current passport issued by the Government of the United Kingdom or by the Government of the Republic of Ireland;

(c) a current book for the payment of allowances, benefits or pensions issued by the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland;

(d) a medical card issued by the Northern Ireland Central Services Agency for the Health and Social Services;

(e) a certified copy, or extract, of an entry of marriage issued by a Registrar General, where the voter producing the copy or extract is a woman married within the period of two years ending with the day of the poll concerned.

In sub-paragraph *(e)* above "a Registrar General" means the Registrar General for England and Wales, the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages for Scotland or the Registrar General for Northern Ireland.

(1DB) Regulations may make provision varying the list in paragraph (1DA) above (whether by adding or deleting documents or varying any description of document).'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 108, Noes 4.

Division No. 41] **[12.14 am**

AYES

Amess, David
Bell, Stuart
Best, Keith
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Favell, Anthony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Robinson and
Mr. William McCrea.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3

OFFENCES RELATING TO PRESCRIBED DOCUMENTS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 4, line 2 leave out 'document prescribed for the purposes of rules 37 to 40', and insert 'specified document within the meaning of rule 37'.

No. 7, in page 4, line 6 leave out from 'a' to 'that' in line 8 and insert 'specified document within the meaning of that rule which either falsely bears the name of the person in possession or does not bear'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

12.23 am

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Over recent weeks, a considerable amount of parliamentary time has been devoted to this important Bill. I welcome that, because it seeks to deal with a significant problem in Northern Ireland. During our debates, the House and the Committee have been united in support of the aims that underline the Bill. I believe that it is widely accepted both in the House and in Northern Ireland that in recent years personation has become a substantially greater problem. The objective of the Bill and of the Government is to protect the right to vote by diminishing as far as possible the opportunities for personation at elections in Northern Ireland.

I do not think that there is any dispute about the desirability of that aim. Experience in recent elections—and I have the general election in June 1983 especially in mind—has demonstrated that the existing legislation is inadequate to deal with the scale of the problem as it now confronts us. That legislation was never designed to withstand the pressures to which it is now subjected.

One of the fundamental principles in our electoral system in the United Kingdom to which the Government attach considerable weight is that it should be as easy as possible for the legitimate elector to cast his vote. That principle is continued in the Bill. In the debates on the Bill, a number of hon. Members, particularly the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) and for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), have drawn attention consistently to this important requirement. We want to encourage the legitimate voter and to discourage the vote stealer. The legitimate voter, no less that the democratic process as a whole, is entitled to protection from those bent on abuse.

A good deal of time in Committee was devoted to the presiding officers' discretion. I understand and listened carefully to the case for giving wide discretion and not making the production of documents mandatory. This is a matter of judgment, but, having considered it again, I am firmly of the view that it would be the wrong course. No system that we introduce will be perfect, but there is a much greater chance of uniformity of practice if presiding officers are given minimum discretion in this sensitive area. Although I accept that in many parts of Northern Ireland electoral abuse may not be a serious problem, I do not believe that the electorate as a whole could have confidence in a system which conferred wide discretion on presiding officers.

The House will not want me to go over the ground that we have just covered on Report about the list of the documents which may be produced to obtain a ballot

[Mr. Scott]

paper. But the House will wish to be reminded that the Government are determined to see the widest possible publicity given in the run–up to the elections in May next year to encourage electors to understand that they will have to produce one of these documents to be able to vote. The documents will, as I undertook at an earlier stage, be clearly listed on the poll card for these elections. I appeal to and urge the political parties to do all that they can to tell their supporters about the new arrangements.

Mr. William Ross: Will there be time between the issuing of poll cards and the election for an elector to get a medical card if he does not have one?

Mr. Scott: I cannot give that precise undertaking, but, once the publicity has started, it will be possible for anyone who needs a medical card to get it in good time for the May elections. I have to consider the date upon which it is proposed to issue the poll cards to establish whether it will be possible to do that within the time.

The political parties and the chief electoral officer and his staff jealously guard their independence, and rightly, at election time. But I hope that it will be possible, in coming up to these elections, for the Government, the chief electoral officer and the political parties all to work together to make this attempt to tackle personation in Northern Ireland as effective as possible.

At this stage, perhaps I might pay tribute to the chief electoral officer and his staff. We should not underestimate their difficult and testing job in Northern Ireland.

I draw attention to the importance of clause 3, which gives the police the powers that they need to apprehend those seeking to frustrate the key provisions of clause 1. We have sought to strike a balance between giving the police sufficient powers to be effective while keeping those powers in the sensitive and potentially controversial area of elections to the minimum.

As the House has noted, clauses 1 and 3 need to be read together. In my view, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

I am grateful for the constructive way in which the House and the Committee have tackled this difficult subject. I understand the concern that has been expressed by Northern Ireland Members and others as I understood the reasons which lay behind the amendments which we debated in Committee. I assure the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) that in showing patience and listening carefully there was a genuine effort to determine whether the new ideas which came forward could be incorporated into the Bill to improve it. Ihope that by accepting one of his amendments and introducing a Government amendment on Report in response to that, we have demonstrated that the Government have had an open mind and have treated the arguments on their merits. Having listened to the arguments advanced in debate, the Government remain of the view that, given Northern Ireland circumstances, the approach taken in the Bill is right. Accordingly, I commend it to the House.

12.30 am

Mr. Molyneaux: I confirm what the Minister has said about common ground between us on the Bill's objectives and aims. From the earliest stage of the consultations in July 1982, we made plain our views on the issue when we said to the former Secretary of State that our general approach was a wish to see electoral law preserved and enforced but with the minimum divergence of the law in Ulster from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. It would therefore be inaccurate to suggest that the Ulster Unionist party has at any time pressed for correction at all costs and at any price. In fairness, I do not think that the Minister has suggested that.

We agreed that the electoral law should be observed and enforced, and we stressed that there should be the minimum divergence of the law in Northern Ireland from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. Over the years we have been consistent in our demand both for uniformity in the making of laws and in their enforcement. For example, before the first elections for the European Assembly in 1979, we asserted that the method of voting should be the same throughout the United Kingdom. We were supported on that occasion by the then Conservative Opposition, who are now in government, when a Division took place. Unfortunately, they have slipped out of the undertaking to ensure uniformity of voting systems for the 1984 European Assembly elections.

I suspect that the Government—the Prime Minister has said that they are rock firm for the Union—do not have their heart in the Bill. However it is dressed up, it imposes a real handicap on Northern Ireland electors. The divergences and variations might be tolerable if the measures in the Bill as it stands were likely to achieve the purpose that the Government had in mind when they set out on this journey. In the view of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself, they will not be effective. They will fail and they will tend to penalise, for the first time this century, those who wish to influence through the ballot box, and only through the ballot box, the attitudes and policies of Parliament and the Government who result from any general election or, in the next local government elections, influence the choice of the men and women who in councils are closer to the electors than any other tier of elected representatives.

In recent weeks we have sought to improve the Bill. I have on other occasions paid tribute to the Minister and the Department for his and its willingness to discuss further and more significant changes. We have agreed some improvements but, from the start, we realised that the defects were so fundamental that, short of returning to the drawing board or the drafting table, it would be impossible to produce a measure which could deal effectively with the problem of vote stealing in certain constituencies.

If there had been more time to consider what was proposed between the point at which the former Secretary of State appeared to give up the struggle and the sudden appearance of the Bill, we could together have produced a workable measure. I regret as much as the Minister the fact we were unable to reach a wider measure of agreement. However, I think that he will accept and understand that the points of difference between us are so great that it makes it impossible for us to do otherwise than oppose the Bill on Third Reading.

12.35 am

Mr. Bell: The Official Opposition accept that personation happens in Northern Ireland. That was conceded by all sides and it was right for the Government to introduce the legislation. It was also right to seek to balance the right to vote, but it is not always possible to please every party.

The Government sought to improve the Bill in Committee. They have listened carefully to the arguments. No Bill is perfect and perhaps this Bill will be reviewed, as suggested tonight. The Bill attempts to eliminate personation in Northern Ireland. It is a step forward. We shall see at the district elections in May whether it is effective. We shall support the Government on the Bill.

12.36 am

Mr. William Ross: On more than one occasion the Minister has talked about sailing uncharted waters. He appears to have forgotten that, although the waters are uncharted to him and his officials, they are not to those of us who live in Northern Ireland. If we have not charted the exact waters, we have charted the adjacent waters in detail for many years. We have a fair idea of what the final charts will show. For that reason, we have been unremitting in our opposition to the measure.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), who spoke so briefly for the Opposition, said that we cannot expect to please every party. The Bill may please the Conservatives and others in Great Britain, but who does it please in Northern Ireland—that part of the United Kingdom which alone is affected by the Bill? It does not please the Unionists; it does not please the DU party, and I do not know whether it pleases the SDLP. We have not heard sufficient from them to know. No comment has been made by Sinn Fein, which in itself tells a story. Its members do not care two hoots about legislation passed here. They will attempt to carry on in their own merry way.

It is one thing if legislation does not please everyone, but when it displeases all responsible political opinion in the area affected, that is another matter. Hon. Members should reflect upon that.

The Bill's real objective is to cut Sinn Fein down to size —its real size—and to ensure that it is always defeated by the SDLP. If that is the intention the Bill is rubbish. In a Catholic area SDLP almost always defeats Sinn Fein. It would be wise for hon. Members to remember that after the last general election a Sinn Fein candidate was returned to this House. About one-third of the votes cast for anti-partition parties went to Sinn Fein. Only by a split vote in West Belfast did a Sinn Fein member win.

The objective of driving down the Sinn Fein vote is unnecessary and it is unlikely to succeed, because the real Sinn Fein vote is larger than some of us, especially on this side of the Irish sea, wish to admit.

The real objective should be to expose and isolate the extremists in Northern Ireland and to show the true face of Sinn Fein by having effective legislation. That objective requires us to do two things—first, to show Sinn Fein in its true colours, and, once that happens, the second objective of showing the true size of Sinn Fein will follow naturally. We would be gravely in error if we thought that the mass of the Northern Ireland people believe that terrorism has anything to offer them. If we get Sinn Fein down to its true size and get it to show its true face so that it can no longer hide in the mass of the people, more people will turn against Sinn Fein.

The Government clearly wish to reveal the true size of Sinn Fein, but their aim will be thwarted so long as there is legislation such as this and so long as they continue to use two differing electoral systems in Northern Ireland and, above all, so long as they continue to use the proportional representation—STV system. That system was brought into operation in Northern Ireland to help the so-called moderates such as the Alliance party, but the system helps not just one group but all groups to turn their minority vote into a quota. If that were not the case, Sinn Fein would not win elections, and the sooner the House and the Government face that reality, the better it will be. Once they face that reality, they will start to proceed down the road they should have taken long ago.

One can plainly see that this Chamber was not designed with fudged politics in mind. It is not designed with cross benches. It is designed to force people to make a decision —to face each other and argue out a case on the Floor of the House—whether angrily or calmly depends on the issue of the time or the time itself. This country's politics are built purely and simply on forcing people to decide on which side of the divide they stand.

I have seen many Northern Ireland politicians try to sit on the fence. Sometimes, when they sat down on that fence, they found that it was a great wide hedge. It was not long before the hedge was trampled down, and those politicians found that at its centre, there was a narrow, vicious strip of barbed wire. Usually, when one tries to sit in the middle, the people catch up with one. It is not pleasant whenever the electorate catches up with politicians.

Whenever we force people to make a real decision, we shall be moving in the right direction. We shall not do that so long as we allow them to fudge the issue in Northern Ireland by using the STV system or, for that matter, any other proportional representation system of election. Under such system, all groups and sub-groups can find a party that represents their own narrow view. That is not, in the long run, a recipe for calm consideration of the aspects that divide us. It is a recipe for bedlam, as the more, extreme elements always try, and often succeed, to drive out the less extreme.

If the Government really want to resolve the problem of Sinn Fein and to defeat Sinn Fein, they should go for the simple majority system that brought us all to this House, because, in the long run, that system gives more stability and sense to the elected body than the proportional representation system can ever do. The extremists in Ulster upon which the Sinn Fein——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. I remind the hon. Member that he must deal with what is in the Bill.

Mr. Ross: As before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to point out that the Bill will be extended by order to be applied to proportional representation elections at two levels in Northern Ireland — at local level and at Assembly level. Therefore, what we say about proportional representation — *[Interruption.]* And, of course, to the European election. I was forgetting about that. I dislike the European election so much that I rarely give it any consideration. *[Interruption.]* I was not standing in that election, as the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) knows.

The House should keep very clearly in mind that this Bill does not apply only to elections to this House; it applies to other elections in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that under the simple majority system, Sinn Fein and other extremist parties have invariably done badly in Northern Ireland.

There have been many references in the debate to the number of votes cast for Sinn Fein with figures ranging

[Mr. Ross]

from 70,000 to 120,000. If that is translated into the outcome in a PR election, whatever percentage that is of the total vote should be reflected more or less in the seats gained. The local government wards have an effect on that, as do the electoral areas. It was very interesting, whenever we went to the commissioner, at "the inquiry" into ward groupings in Magherafelt, to find that he had made it clear that, if he had known that he was to do the grouping of wards, he would have thought again. He said that the five-to-seven-wards rule in the electoral order in 1983 put him in a straitjacket. If the Minister was getting the same sort of advice on this Bill as he had in relation to the ward groupings—it probably came from the same quarter so he probably was—I can understand now why Sir Frank Harrison said what he did.

It does not take a substantial minority to get elected under PR; it takes one eighth of the electorate. We shall be back with this sort of legislation for wider areas of the United Kingdom if anything that has been said by English Members in the debate has any relevance to what is happening in this part of the United Kingdom. I view with very grave suspicion a turnout of 96 per cent. I have seen a turnout of 96 per cent. and 97 per cent. occasionally, but it should be realised that it does not happen very often. It can happen only in very favourable circumstances.

The circumstances are: good organisation, probably a small rural community, popular candidates, fear of the opposition, and a new electoral register. If any one of those items is missing, it is very difficult to get over 90 per cent., let alone 95 per cent. or 96 per cent.

It should be remembered that in March the register will be six months of age, because it is compiled with the date of 15 September in mind. At the end of its life it will be 18 months old. By that time at least 15 or 16 out of every 1,000 of the electorate will have died, and possibly over 20. That means that at an October election the register will be wildly out of date with very considerable variations from the original. It should be impossible to get 90 per cent. except under the most favourable conditions and the smallest populations.

The Government have fudged the issue, as they have fudged so many things in Northern Ireland. They are refusing to grasp the nettle and to provide proper means of identification and a proper system of election in Northen Ireland. Until they grasp the nettle and act upon it, we shall continue to have the sort of problem that we have been trying to deal with in the Bill, and which the Bill, despite the Minister's good hopes, will fail to meet.

12.49 am

Mr. Peter Robinson: I shall at once gain the support of the House when I say that I do not intend to speak at any length or to pad out my remarks.

The House is at least united on one thing — that personation is wrong, that it is cheating and stealing and that action must be taken. The House appears not to agree, however, on the best method of dealing with the problem.

In my view, the Government have shown a lack of resolve, first, in the fact that the Bill was introduced to assist the SDLP. Let there be no doubt about that. It was introduced to help the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and his party in the battle for the nationalist vote against Sinn Fein. The Minister should know that the best and perhaps the only way for the SDLP to ensure that it keeps its nose ahead of Sinn Fein is properly to enter the democratic process and to take part in democratic politics in Northern Ireland. It will otherwise be seen as a faint, similar product to Sinn Fein and when that product is on sale in Northern Ireland the voters will go for the original product and the SDLP will be left on the shelf.

Instead of telling the hon. Member for Foyle to stand on his own two feet and take on Sinn Fein, the Minister decided that he would have to do something for him. The Bill is the product of that thought. If the Minister had thought further, he would have realised that the best and most effective action would have been to proscribe Sinn Fein, but he turns away from that and allows the front men for the IRA gunmen to entertain the democratic process and to abuse democracy in Northern Ireland. They are an integral part of the Provisional IRA movement and as much a part of that movement as any IRA commanding officer. Members who care to go to the Library will find a book entitled "Beating the Terrorists?"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must remind the hon. Gentleman and the House that the Bill is about preventing personation in elections in Northern Ireland. We must not have such a wide debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has made it clear throughout the debates on the Bill that the aim of this measure is to deal with Sinn Fein. That is why the Bill was sponsored in the House. Surely in this final stage of the proceedings it is in order for an hon. Member to state his view of that proposition and to comment on what the Minister has said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We have had many debates—on Second Reading, on amendments, on new clauses, and so on. The Third Reading debate is concerned with what is in the Bill and my job is to preserve the proper procpedings of the House.

Mr. Robinson: I of course accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I merely point out that the purpose of the Bill is to make more difficult the task of those who would personate, and those whom the Minister recognises as most likely to do that are members of Sinn Fein, who are under the IRA command structure. The best way to achieve that aim is to proscribe them and to put them where they need to be—outside the democratic process —rather than allowing them to abuse it.

The second way in which the Minister showed his lack of resolve was in relation to the only real solution to the identification problem—purpose-made ID cards. He did not want to go down that road, because he thought that there might be an ulterior motive on the part of those proposing it. He told the House that some people might not want to go and have their ID cards prepared. Those people, of course, are the very people whom the Minister wishes to prevent from personating. But he prefers yet again to run away from the only effective way of dealing with the matter and to propose an unpalatable mish-mash of forms of identification which have little in common with one another and none of which has all the points required—photograph, name, address and, in our view, signature. The prescribed documents are thus a second-rate alternative.

The Minister again turns his back on the mayhem that will undoubtedly occur on 15 May and on subsequent election days when his plan is put into operation. He has

thought little about the danger in which he places presiding officers. Ordinary decent voters will bring them prescribed documents, but what will Sinn Fein bring to the ballot box?

In the past, presiding officers were aware that Sinn Fein members were personating, but were afraid to take the necessary action. It will be the same on 15 May when Sinn Fein members again demand other people's votes at the polling station. What will the presiding officer do? The Bill shows what he should do. It is easy for us to put into legislation what he should do, but he must live among those who are personating, and he and his family will be in danger.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that the presiding officer must do that whether there is a list of identification documents or not?

Mr. Robinson: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman intervened to make my point. The Bill has little value if the presiding officer is in fear, as he was before. It does not do anything about that. If he denies people a vote, mayhem will result. I hope that the Minister will join me in my constituency on 15 May to see the reaction of those who are denied a vote.

The Bill makes it no harder for Sinn Fein members to personate. It makes the task of the presiding officers more difficult because the necessary administrative measures will cause delays before votes can be cast. It makes the party workers' task more difficult because they must convey the Bill's requirements to the electorate and probably run people to the polling station twice because they will forget the prescribed documents. It makes the voters' task more difficult, and will probably confuse him. The candidate will probably come off worst, not only because fewer votes will be cast in the face of the confusion that will arise, but because he will be blamed for this, not the Minister, who will not be at the polling station to see the results.

In conclusion, the Bill is a dog's breakfast. The Minister may have taken some of the ingredients out and put others in, but it is still a dog's breakfast.

Mr. James Nicholson (Newry and Armagh): I rise for the first time to speak about the Bill, and so I am one of the few who can say that whatever I say, will not have been heard before. I was happy to leave the Bill in the hands of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but when I listened to the Minister I felt that I should intervene.

This is a poor and bad Bill. It will cause many and immense problems in the future, such as those outlined by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). In parts of my constituency there has always been personation. Personation has always existed and will continue to exist, despite the Bill. Those who want votes will continue to get them by threats, intimidation or whatever means will achieve them. The Bill places presiding officers in a more difficult position than ever before.

I am worried about the parts of the Bill which relate to presiding officers. More than half of my constituency does not have the problem of personation, but it has been tarred with the same brush by the Minister.

The Minister has referred to Northern Ireland as a whole as being involved in personation, but only small parts of constituencies—it is not every constituency—have that problem. I find that intolerable, unacceptable and most aggravating.

There are many thousands of electors who never have and never will abuse their right to vote. I am worried that there are some who will be disfranchised by the Government's action.

For many, the act of voting can be an ordeal. It is something they are not enthusiastic about. The documents that the Government are asking voters to produce will dissuade some from even going to the polling station. The Government may be doing harm by introducing the Bill. I hope that I may be proved wrong but I doubt it.

I have as much experience at grass roots level as any hon. Member. I have good grounds for believing that I have more experience than those involved in drawing up the Bill and bringing it to this stage.

I have sat in a polling station as a personation agent and I have acted as a sub-agent. I believe that the Bill will cause more problems for those involved in elections in Northern Ireland before polling day, on polling day and after polling day when people realise the effect of the Bill.

The Bill does not strike the right balance. The Government have panicked; the Bill is a panic measure and one that the Minister will live to regret.

1.2 am

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I shall refer in a few sentences to what is in the Bill, because it contains two grave elements. First, it makes a fundamental alteration in the franchise by attaching a new condition—hitherto non existent—to the right to exercise the vote. Secondly, it changes the franchise in one part only of the United Kingdom thus introducing a differentiation between the right to vote for membership, for instance, of this House between one part of the United Kingdom and the remainder.

My hon. Friends and I, and, indeed, virtually all who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland, are bound to resist the measure because on both counts it fails to meet the requirements.

The new condition which is attached to voting is a condition which cannot, by its very nature—the debates on the Bill have shown this—achieve the intended object.

The documentation will be inadequate to ensure that personation does not occur, so that the purpose behind the innovation in the franchise will not be reached by the Bill.

The circumstances in Northern Ireland are not to that degree unique, nor is the consequence of those circumstances to the electoral outcome in Northern Ireland so grave as to justify the extreme gravity of the step of legislating differentially on this crucial matter of the franchise for Northern Ireland as against the rest of the United Kingdom.

Those who represent Northern Ireland seats would be failing in their duty if they did not oppose this measure at this last stage.

Rev. Ian Paisley: At this early hour of the morning I know that many hon. Members wish to get away, but the people of Northern Ireland and the candidates at local government elections, Assembly elections, elections to this House and EEC elections will have to live with the Bill. It is all very well for Members of this House to say that the Bill ought to be given a trial. We have said that

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

the Bill ought to be given a trial for three years and that after three years it ought to be looked at again. But we have been told that the Bill must become law. Reasonable propositions have been ruled out. Ministers have said to me that the purpose of the Bill is to deal with the IRA threat and that the SDLP want the Bill.

Mr. Hume: I hope that the Minister will confirm that the request for the Bill did not come from the SDLP. The first request came from the former Secretary of State. He wrote to all parties in Northern Ireland and asked them to come and discuss the problems relating to vote stealing in Northern Ireland. On that occasion the SDLP opposed the introduction of such a measure as this. After subsequent elections, it became clear that the evils were so widespread that we ought to acquiesce. I have put before the House the only proposal which I believe is foolproof against vote-stealing in Northern Ireland. It relates to the moment of registration of voting. I said on Second Reading that the proposal was not perfect, but it is the only one which is before us now.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am very pleased that the House now knows that the SDLP do not want the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will express that view by the way he votes tonight.

Mr. Hume: That is not what I said. I shall acquiesce.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman says that he is going to acquiesce. Why acquiesce when the hon. Gentleman know that the Bill will not fulfil its task? In the past, this House has tried by legislation to prevent various aspects of Irish nationalism and republicanism and has failed utterly. Sinn Fein will not be defeated by the Bill, even when it becomes an Act. Anybody who believes that Sinn Fein will be defeated by the Bill ought to have his head examined. Everybody knows that those who intend to personate will steal as many votes as they can at the next election. If there is an increase in the Sinn Fein vote after the Bill becomes law, this House will be a laughing stock. Nobody will laugh more heartily at this House than Sinn Fein and the IRA. Therefore, the House needs to look very carefully at this legislation.

I am amazed by the Minister's explanation of the registrar's certificate. The registrar's certificate is copied from the certificate issued by the minister. His certificate is no good, but a copy will be accepted. I cannot understand why. Nor can any minister in Northern Ireland, whether he be priest or clergyman. I do not understand the Government's reasoning. The Government believe that their original proposals must be adhered to as though they were the laws of the Medes and the Persians. I am pleased that the Minister has accepted the proposal that the poll card should carry upon it a list of these documents. I am waiting to hear whether we shall have time during the elections in Northern Ireland to carry out the provisions contained in the Bill. I trust that we shall be told tonight that we shall have at least as much time at local elections as is provided on this side of the water.

Mr. Scott: The Order in Council that will extend the provisions of the Bill to local government elections will take account of the point that the hon. Gentleman and others have made about the length of polling hours. The draft order will be made available to the political parties for consultation before it is laid before Parliament.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I welcome that assurance, because it is essential that the people of Northern Ireland have time to produce the documents and time to cast their votes. The Minister's intervention encourages me. I know what happens on election day, and I know that time is needed. I agree that something should be done, and the proposition of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) was a good one, but it has been ruled out. The Bill includes a list of prescribed documents but does not include a document that would be produced by the presiding officer and confirmed by the voter. It is a pity that more thought was not given to the idea of the hon. Member for Foyle. The Minister told me that it would be impossible to have such a system in operation by May. That may be so, but why could we not introduce it after May?

It would be better for us not to rush through this legislation. That is why my hon. Friends and I will vote against it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 105, Noes 13.

Division No. 42] **[1.11 am**

AYES

Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Best, Keith
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Favell, Anthony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harvey, Robert
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, John
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raffan, Keith
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John

Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archie Hamilton and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
McCrea, Rev William
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. A. Cecil Walker and
Mr. William Ross.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

PETITION

Human Embryos

1.22 am

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I have the honour to present a petition for the protection of the human embryo, signed by some 1,295 residents of my constituency. They state

Wherefore Your Petitoners Pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

I support the petition, and beg leave to present it to the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Law of the Sea Convention

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Mather.]*

1.23 am

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): While I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise a matter of great and growing international importance, the House this morning has to face the reality that the Cabinet almost certainly decided yesterday that Britain should not sign the law of the sea convention. The convention has been open for signature for two years. The period comes to an end on Sunday. So far, some 143 Governments have signed out of a potential 162.

I believe that the decision that the Cabinet had to make was a major one, and that the Cabinet made the wrong decision. It was a negative, shoddy and shameful decision, and fell well below the level of events.

Britain's self-interest as a great seafaring country happily coincides with our international responsibilities and obligations. It is a matter of great international importance. Seventy per cent. of the surface of the globe is covered by the sea, and the international negotiations in which Britain proudly and rightly played a major role lasted for almost three decades.

On this matter of world importance, a Conservative Government have gone out of their way to divorce themselves from Commonwealth thinking — and have done so after the most recent Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference when a powerful and unambiguous statement was produced calling for support for the convention. In 1980, the Carter Administration in the United States said that they were willing to accept the principles of the treaty which were then agreed on. Britain, under the present Government of course, followed suit, as it was clearly felt to be in our best interests. The Reagan Administration, as soon as it came into power, demanded the right to reconsider the entire package. Enlightened opinion in that country is that the United States is making a mistake in not signing the treaty. Elliot Richardson, a most distinguished former United States ambassador to the Court of St. James, said a year ago:

"The real importance of the Law of the Sea Convention cannot be found either in the sum of its parts or in its extraordinarily comprehensive whole. It lies rather in its demonstration of the capacity of 160 sovereign states to work out accommodations among vital competing interests. This is an achievement whose significance will loom even larger as the world increasingly finds itself forced to come to grips with its own inseparability".

The House knows the reason for Britain failing to sign the convention, having previously supported it under Governments of both parties over the years. It is that President Reagan and the mining interests in the United States do not wish us to do so. As a strong supporter of the Atlantic Alliance, I claim that that is absolutely the wrong way in which to proceed. The United States' interests are not entirely the same as ours. Our U-turn suggests a willingness to be pushed around by the bigger partner.

In an editorial two years ago, *The Times* said:

"The Government's decision to go along with the United States and jettison the UN convention of the law of the sea is very much to be regretted".

The editorial ended thus:

"Britain, as a maritime nation rightly anxious to retain her distant-water naval capability has a higher interest in the fate of

[Mr. Cyril D. Townsend]

this convention than anything to do with polymetallic nodules on the ocean floor. Freedom of navigation, the limits of territorial rights, development of the continental shelf, the passage of international straits, oceanic pollution, the peaceful transit of warships—these are all matters about which uncertainty has arisen . . . They are matters which, when uncertain are likely to give rise to conflict. They are all matters that are amenable to resolution under a system of validated international law."

More recently, the *Financial Times* of 30 November advised:

"In the end, there must be some stable international legal regime for exploiting the sea-bed beyond coastal waters, if those waters are to be exploited. Difficult though it may be in practice, the Law of the Sea Convention is better built upon than demolished or ignored".

I like to think that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in favour of this international measure in principle. For the Ministry of Defence, it has great importance, especially for the Royal Navy, and for dealing with creepy crawlies and submarines. For the Department of the Environment, it has much to say about pollution; and the Department of Trade and Industry must be only too conscious of the strong support of the convention from maritime interests.

Only one part of the whole—indeed, only one part out of 17—is disputed. That is the mining aspect. The advice that I have been given is that such deep-sea mining is highly unlikely before the beginning of the next century and many experts think that it will be uneconomic for the foreseeable future. The cost of setting up a deep-sea bed mining operation is usually put at $1 billion to $1·5 billion. No investor will be prepared to commit such sums unless he has assurance that he has exclusive and unrestricted access to the mine site. The only way in which such access can be obtained is through the treaty.

I am told that Shell and BP are both potential deep-sea mining companies, as well as major shipping companies. Both have said that while they are dissatisfied with the mining provisions, the overall interests in freedom of movement must take precedence, and both companies favour signature. How much more important, therefore, is it for the Government to support the convention? Other nations with deep sea mining potential have signed, such as the Soviet Union, Japan, France and Canada.

We learnt today that the European Community is to sign those parts of the convention that it can sign, and Britain has acquiesced in this move. This has put us into a ridiculous position. It would have been far better to have reaped the rewards of signing ourselves.

In the past, Ministers have talked of Britain's increasing international importance. For example, I recall the Government's success in settling the Rhodesia issue, which had been a sore for so long. Only last night, we debated the considerable achievement of the agreement with Hong Kong. Why, then, do Ministers allow such effective and worthwhile international work to be constantly undermined by short-sighted, and sometimes penny-pinching attitudes? I think of the Government's decisions on overseas students fees, overseas aid, the external services of the BBC, the British Council, information officers overseas, and Wilton park. All these weaken our standing in the international community.

Yesterday, with one blow, the Conservative Government upset the Royal Navy, the Commonwealth and the maritime interests that are vital to our island community in the developing world in which we trade. Yesterday, they quickly took a decision that our party, our people and country, and many of our international friends will live to regret. Let wiser thoughts prevail. Let us work within the international community. Above all, for God's sake, let us have some vision.

1.32 am

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) has made a most valuable contribution, and I congratulate him on it.

In creating a constitution for the oceans, the convention was described by Ambassador Koh of Singapore as:

"a monumental achievement of the international community, second only to the Charter of the United Nations."

It is a convention of supreme importance for those of us who believe that world peace can be achieved only by a greater global security through international law. The convention sets out a regime that governs 70 per cent. of the surface of the globe. At Montego bay in December 1982, 119 nations were able to sign it immediately. It is an international agreement of a magnitude unparalleled in the history of the world. Is the United Kingdom to have no part in this? Where is our international responsibility to greater order in the world? The Secretary-General of the United Nations described the convention as:

"Like a breath of fresh air at a time of serious crisis in international co-operation and a decline in the use of international machinery for the solution of world problems."

I asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary three questions in November this year. I asked:

"(1) if he will recommend that Her Majesty's Government should accede to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea before the deadline of 9 December.

(2) which aspects of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea are still unacceptable to Her Majesty's Government; what progress has been made in the last 12 months to resolve such difficulties; and what progress he expects to make in the future;

(3) if he will make a statement on the United Nations convention on the law of the sea. — [*Official Report*, 29 November 1984, Vol. 68, c. *591*.]

I received an unsatisfactory answer—I say with respect to my hon. Friend the Minister — because it merely referred me to a reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford, North (Mr. Skeet). That reply stated merely:

"We have as yet taken no final decision. We remain in touch with other European countries which have not signed the convention."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1984, Vol. 67, c. *42*.]

I think that my detailed questions merited a more comprehensive reply than was given.

A parliamentary question was asked and answered today, which told us, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath said, that the European Community, whose competence on the convention is limited, will sign the convention, and the Government will not stand in its way. It is time that we took a lead. We should not be equivocal: we should be in the forefront of the EEC. Only the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy, as I understand it, have said that they will not sign. So, although we agree to the EC, of which we are a member, signing, we will not do so ourselves.

On 2 December 1982, questions were put to my hon. Friend, and he said that the Government would do their best to achieve a more satisfactory solution. I ask him to say what the Government have done positively in the last two years to fulfil that promise?

Let this Great Britain of our have the courage to lead and not just to follow. We are not, nor must we ever be perceived to be, the lap-dog of the United States, even

though she may be our closest friend and ally. Unlike the United States, we have not refused to sign the treaty totally but have said that there should be improvements and that we are prepared to work for further compromise. We must do so, and the initiative must come from us.

On 29 November, I asked my hon. Friend what benefits would be lost to the United Kingdom if we failed to register under the preparatory investment protection resolution of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea. I received the surprising and incomplete answer:

"I am not aware of any United Kingdom entity with deep seabed mining interests which wishes to take advantage of the deep seabed regime presently proposed under the United Nations law of the sea convention."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 591.]

Yet the reality as set out in the recent excellent pamphlet on the subject by David Ward is that

"Britain's mining companies can enjoy special status as 'pioneer investors' only on condition that we sign the convention within the two-year signature period which expires on 9 December 1984. The privilege of virtual guaranteed access to future seabed mine sites offered under the PIP resolution was among the major concessions offered to the industrialised countries by the Group of 77 at the end of UNCLOS 3. Ironically, Britain stands to throw away the benefits gained from earlier negotiations simply because of reluctance to sign the convention, which in any case requires ratification by 60 states including Britain before it can be enforced on our mining companies.

Should Britain fail to sign, our mining companies will fall behind those consortia or state enterprise that have been able to register as 'pioneer investors'. Already four countries — France, India, Japan and the USSR—have registered, which clearly indicates their intention to carry out deep-sea mining under the regime established by the convention. In particular, the Soviet Union and India have agreed an understanding to avoid competition for mine sites prior to their application for registration as 'pioneer investors'."

We should be prepared to lead in Europe, in the Commonwealth and in the world. That is the aspiration of every hon. Member and every citizen. Especially of this Government, who have done so much to restore our international prestige and position, we have a right to demand it. The eyes of the world are on my hon. Friend when he responds to the debate. I hope that he is able to do so with sufficiency of purpose. Our country's influence is crucial and will determine the success or failure of the law of the sea.

1.38 am

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): It is a great pleasure to support my hon. Friends the Members for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) and for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best). It is regrettable that the only hon. Members present are Conservatives. We keep hearing from the Opposition that the Labour party, the Liberals and the SDP are worried about this matter, but tonight they are absent. It is a great shame, because this is a national and an international issue.

I understand that the Government are saying that they do not intend to sign this treaty on the basis that they do not intend to ratify it and therefore they do not sign what they do not intend to ratify. I understand that point of view. I also understand and share the Government's considerable disquiet with part XI, dealing with deep-sea mining. It is substantially flawed, but it is my belief that in the main the convention produces such considerable benefits for us that if we sign without ratification we can engineer changes in the convention that will allow part XI to be amended so that it is acceptable to the nation.

The Government say that they will not sign that which they will not ratify. However, there have been occasions when they have signed but not ratified. I shall give three examples. In 1971, we signed the International Maritime Organisation convention on liability for the carriage of nuclear materials in ships at sea. We have not yet ratified it. In 1977, we signed the north-west European offshore civil liability convention. We have not yet ratified it. Again in 1977, we signed an important convention, the Geneva convention on the laws of war. We have not yet ratified it.

I suggest that we should take as an example the 1973 Marpol convention of the IMO. We ratified it only in 1980. We did so only after a protocol had been negotiated to amend the convention before it came into force, allowing us to accept some but not all of the annexes. That is a good precedent for us to follow. We can sign with honour the convention on the law of the sea. We do not need to ratify it until we have negotiated far more sensible arrangements on part XI. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that approach and, therefore, to urge on his right hon. and learned Friend that we sign the convention and work for a much fairer system in part XI. The convention will stop, or at least contain, maritime anarchy, and that is desperately important.

1.41 am

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) for affording me two minutes during his excellent Adjournment debate to make my contribution on my own behalf and on that of the the United Nations Association in my constituency. I support the wisdom and faith in his words and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Ynys Mon (Mr. Best) and for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) in major respects.

We must, for the sake of British trade interests, settle and codify international maritime law, especially navigational rights. Secondly, we must settle now, well before commercial interests run riot in the next century, the deep-sea mining problem. We are storing up trouble for ourselves from the year 2000 onwards and we must have the foresight to deal with it. Thirdly, we must show confidence in the concepts of the Commonwealth, the European Community and, above all, the United Nations. There is no better way of doing that than by signing the convention on the law of the sea.

I believe that the opposite of co-operation is isolationism, that of foresight is narrowmindedness, and that of generosity is greed.

1.43 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I very much agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) when he spoke of the seriousness and importance of the subject. I can assure him and my hon. Friends the Members for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best), for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) and for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) that the Government attach the same importance to it. I can confirm that the Government's view has not changed from the one expressed in 1982 and that we have taken the decision that Britain should not sign the United Nations law of the sea convention.

Although 9 December is the last date on which signatures can be attached to the convention, it remains

[Mr. Malcolm Rifkind]

open for accession by states after that date. It would be open to the United Kingdom, or to other countries which have not signed, to become a party to the convention if in future it is improved in a way that we would find appropriate.

We have decided that, although we cannot sign the convention, we shall not object to the signature of the European Community being attached to it. The Community's competence is limited to fisheries, pollution, customs matters between landlocked states and commercial policy to a limited extent. There is nothing illogical in us not objecting to the Community's signature. The parts of the convention for which the Community is competent are parts to which we do not object. We should have been happy to sign the convention if it had dealt only with those issues.

I take exception to the idea that the United Kingdom is simply following United States policy without considering the British national interest. I urge my hon. Friends to reflect on that accusation, because it is unworthy. We have not followed the United States. We have insisted on participating in the preparatory commission and have shown our willingness in certain circumstances to accept the desirability of signing the convention, while the United States has taken a harsher position on most of the issues.

The suggestion that the countries which have refused to sign the convention are the lapdogs of the United States does not hold much water when one sees the list of countries which have refused to sign the convention. Over 30 countries, including those well-known followers of America such as Libya, Nicaragua and Albania, as well as many countries with varying political complexions, have refused to sign.

When about 14 years ago we entered the negotiations on this convention, the United Kingdom hoped for agreement on a comprehensive regime on marine matters which was generally acceptable to all nations. In the latter part of the conference it became clear that agreement could not be reached on the provisions related to deep sea-bed mining. Instead of being adopted by concensus, the text of the convention was put to a vote, in which the United Kingdom abstained.

Although much of the convention was recognised as valuable, the proposed regime for deep sea-bed mining was unacceptable to almost all the states which had the capacity to develop the industry. Although some countries involved in deep sea-bed mining might have signed the convention, all the western countries with an interest in the industry have made it clear that they do not intend to ratify the treaty unless substantial changes are made to it. Only ratification will introduce new rights or obligations.

We came to the position which I have described to the House on 2 December 1982. We were not prepared to sign the convention with the current mining regime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn asked what we have done in the last few years. We have tried to influence the improvement of the convention. We have faithfully followed that objective. We have participated to the extent that our being non-signatories made possible. We have put forward proposals and ideas and have fully participated in attempts to improve the convention. However, that has not produced the results for which we hoped.

We have a number of objections to the mining regime —the onerous financial and other terms governing the participation of commercial operators, the cost that would accrue to this Government of supporting the over-elaborate structure of the authority and the activities of its operating arm—the Enterprise.

I shall explain the costs. For example, the fixed administrative cost of ratification at 1983 prices, with the sea-bed mining provisions unaltered and in force, would for the United Kingdom be between £3·6 million and £8 million. Running administrative costs would be between £1·5 million and £1·8 million.

In addition, the estimated cost to the United Kingdom of financing the Enterprise on the present basis would be between £25 million and £40 million in interest-free loans, plus the same amount in debt guarantees. That is on the assumption that the United States is also participating in the convention and paying its 33 per cent. share of the total cost. Since we know that the United States has no intention of participating, we have to add about 33 per cent. to those figures. Very large sums are therefore involved for a profoundly unattractive regime.

A further objection is the undesirable regulatory powers of the authority, in relation to production limitations, for example. In addition, there is the mandatory transfer of technology which sets an unacceptable precident which cannot have attracted any of my hon. Friends.

Finally, it is proposed that there should be a review conference 15 years after commercial mining commences. That review conference could force through an even more unattractive deep sea-bed mining regime through the use of the majority vote by which countries that had no deep sea bed mining interest of their own could enforce their views on those that did and were paying for the whole operation.

Our delegation to the preparatory commission went to considerable lengths to put across our views and to open up possibilities for obtaining improvements, but only a few limited technical proposals met with any response. Accordingly, the balance of advantage had to be decided between the greater part of the convention which is acceptable, but much of which is codification of existing laws, and significant aspects which are unacceptable to us. Those parts of the convention which cause us difficulty raise such significant problems that it would not be in our interest to sign. Moreover, none of the benefits to us in the convention is certain or, indeed, will take effect until the convention comes into force. There may be 138 signatories to the convention, but only 14 countries have so far ratified, and the convention will enter into force only after 60 states have ratified or acceded. There is no legal status under the convention which has not yet entered into force.

Some people, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn, have suggested that, by not signing, the United Kingdom loses the possibility for our companies to operate as pioneer investors under the convention's final Act. However, the terms are unattractive, and no United Kingdom entity interested in sea bed mining has indicated to us a wish to take advantage of those provisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East has argued that we should sign the convention and show a commitment to it in the hope that the preparatory commission will listen to our concerns. As I have mentioned to the House, it is not our practice in the United Kingdom to sign international treaties that we do not think

we will be able to ratify. We are not in a position to undertake to ratify the United Nations law of the sea convention. Even those who favour signature would regard ratification of the present convention as against our interests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East mentioned various examples which he described as precedents — there is no such thing. The examples he cited are not cases where we signed a convention or a treaty in the declared knowledge that we did not intend to ratify them. In some cases there have been reasons that delayed ratification. The original signature may have been rendered inappropriate in the light of the new, changed circumstances. There is no precedent for the United Kingdom to sign a convention that it already knows it cannot ratify. That is an important consideration.

I must emphasise the fact that all the major European Community countries and other countries such as Japan which have signed the convention have made it clear that they will not ratify the convention. It may be acceptable to them to sign treaties that they do not intend ratifying, but that is not a principle that has carried weight in the United Kingdom. I should be surprised if my hon. Friends were suggesting that we should go back on a basic principle of our approach to international treaties, simply because it might have a beneficial political effect on our international relations.

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 December 1984

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

9.34 am

Sir Humphrey Atkins (Spelthorne): Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present two petitions from residents of the borough of Spelthorne. The first petition was initiated by Mr. Christopher Redding of Ashford, Middlesex, and contains 489 signatures, and the second was initiated by the Reverend Peter Brown, the vicar of Laleham, and contains 108 signatures.

Both are in identical terms. They affirm the petitioners' belief that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living individual human being, and both oppose all practices which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or human dignity and right to life.

Sir, the petitions continue as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

The petition initiated by Mr. Redding concludes:

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

That initiated by the Vicar of Laleham concludes:

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray for the guidance of Almighty God upon all your deliberations etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Associated Octel Plant (Closure)

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of several thousand electors of the constituencies of Tatton and Eddisbury.

The petition shows that

it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to secure the reduction and eventual elimination of lead in petrol; and that this policy has led directly to the closure of the Associated octel plant at Northwich in Cheshire, causing the loss of 250 jobs; and that those employees to be made redundant are statutorily entitled only to the limited benefits available under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978; and that such benefits are a mere fraction of those available under special Government schemes for redundant mineworkers, steel workers, dockers and others working in industries which, unlike Associated Octel, have been an extensive drain on the taxpayers for many years.

The petition prays

that your Honourable House will express support for legislation which will allow the same generous redundancy benefits for Associated Octel workers as are provided under the Redundant Mineworkers' Payments Scheme.

The petition concludes:

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Torture

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg leave to present a petition to the House which has been collected by members of Amnesty International in the Orkney part of my constituency.

The petition states that those who have signed it wish to register strong support for the campaign against torture run by Amnesty International and to declare their wish that torture should be totally eradicated from the world; they believe that this would be advanced if Governments implemented Amnesty International's 12-point programme for the prevention of torture.

The petitioners pray that this House will urge Her Majesty's Government to support an effective United Nations convention against torture and in particular the extension of compensation to torture victims, to support proposals both at the United Nations and at the Council of Europe to create an international commission to make unannounced visits to any place of detention, and to intercede whenever and wherever possible on behalf of prisoners being tortured. It concludes by saying:

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

I believe that the terms of the petition will have support in all parts of the House. Torture is degrading to human dignity. I hope that it will be especially noted by Her Majesty's Ministers who are in a position to exert influence in international forums.

To lie upon the Table.

GENERIC SUBSTITUTION (NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE)

Mr. Laurie Pavitt, supported by Mr. Willie W. Hamilton, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Terry Davis, Mr. Ken Eastham, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mrs. Renée Short, Mr. Michael Meadowcroft, Mr. Reg Freeson and Mr. George Foulkes, presented a Bill to permit a dispensing pharmacist to substitute a generic substitute for a medicine prescribed by a general practitioner in the National Health Service unless the general practitioner specifically orders that such a substitute may not be dispensed: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 39].

PLANNING AUTHORITIES (RESTRICTION OF LIABILITY)

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, supported by Mr. Martin Stevens and Mr. John Wheeler, presented a Bill to restrict the liability of planning authorities for the payment of compensation under the provisions of section 165 or 169 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 25 January and to be printed. [Bill 40].

Tourism

9.40 am

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the great importance of tourism as a growing industry in this country and in particular the East Midland Region of England; welcomes the significant part it can play in reducing the number of unemployed; and accepts the Government's commitment to further growth of the industry.

Taking advantage of my luck in winning the long-standing Back-Bench privilege to choose the subject for today's debate, I worded the motion with my constituency and the unemployed in mind.

Those who were lucky enough — or unlucky, depending upon one's view—to hear my maiden speech last year will recall that my constituency's major industries are mining, agriculture and tourism. I need say nothing more at present about mining in my constituency, except that it is the greatest coalfield in Britain.

I doubt whether anyone in the country or in the world has not heard of Sherwood forest and its famous characters Robin Hood, Maid Marian and the wicked sheriff of Nottingham. Increasing tourism means more jobs. I am not a recent convert to the needs of the unemployed. As long ago as the last election I said that this human tragedy was our party's greatest enemy. I was in the distinguished position, according to a *Sunday Times* survey of the time, of being the only new candidate to say that and be elected.

Today I am worried that we might be blinkered by the euphoria that the new technology will be our saviour. That is true only in as much as it can create new wealth, not wholesale jobs. The latest estimate for jobs in high tech is about 6 per cent. of the working population, leaving the service industries as the only viable alternative for job creation in the non-academic sphere. Sticking out a mile as the industry with the greatest growth potential is tourism.

My noble Friend the Earl of Stockton, in his historic speech in the other place, talked about new horizons, more leisure and fewer working hours not only for the British people but for the rest of the western world. With that potential reservoir of customers we must build on what we have already achieved to provide services and amenities for visitors.

Last year, British tourists spent £4·5 billion here and overseas tourists £3·5 billion, making an impressive total of £8 billion. In the first nine months of this year, a record 11 million tourists visited Britain. That is 12 per cent. more than last year. The 1973 total was 7·5 million, which shows that the tourist industry is the leader in terms of growth and employment. It is ahead of aerospace and the motor industry. Projected forward to the next five years, that works out at a 54 per cent. increase in income, amounting to £14 billion at current prices, and shows the immense opportunity before us.

With that record, it is clear that the industry's future can be established by the continuing involvement of the national and regional tourist boards, with their expertise and cash working in harmony with local government, and with private and commercial enterprise. Such pump priming with taxpayers' money will give us an excellent return on a ratio of one to four between local authorities and commercial investment.

I believe that this expanding industry will find its growth in the regions and cities. No region is better placed than the east midlands, which is situated midway between the first leg of the tourist milk run from London to York and Edinburgh. That analysis is endorsed by a recent ministerial review of tourism.

I remind the House of the important part that the industry plays in the east midlands economy. Visitors spend about £360 million annually on accommodation, in restaurants, shops and garages and on entertainment.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My hon. Friend is concerned about employment and the economy in the east midlands. Will he comment on the astonishing fact that 20 times as many Conservative Members are in the Chamber as Labour Members? Only one Opposition Member is present. That is disgraceful and shows a complete lack of care by the Opposition for employment and the economy of the east midlands and the rest of the country.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend speaks for us all.

About £54 million is spent by overseas visitors, £212 million by British tourists staying away from home and £101 million by day trippers. It is no idle boast to say that there is something for everyone in the region's five counties — Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.

The famous Peak district of Derbyshire has added attractions, with the new impressive cable car at the heights of Abraham Matlock and the opening of the new Brittania park in 1985. There are many local initiatives. An example is the centenary celebrations of the famous author, D. H. Lawrence.

This year the number of jobs in the region was equal to 32,000 full-time workers, with many more in supporting roles. I draw particular attention to the cost to the Government of creating one new job in the tourist industry. It costs £4,500, compared with £35,000 to create a new job in the manufacturing industries. It will not have escaped the Minister that £4,500 is less than the cost of keeping someone on the dole.

I have provided only a glimpse of what we have achieved. We are looking to the future and to the direction in which we should be going to help. After close consultation, the East Midlands tourist board, local authorities, regional organisations and the private sector have issued a framework for the east midlands. It aims at improvements to provide a better quality of attraction and accommodation in line with market needs, at encouraging the development of new accommodation and facilities where there are deficiencies in provision and, where potential exists, at creating new areas of tourist activity.

To attract and accommodate new and expanded tourism, effective and co-ordinated marketing and information dissemination, including signposting, is needed. Since Nottinghamshire has been chosen as one of the two trial areas for additional signposting, I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that the charge to local authorities will be outside the ceiling for increased expenditure for the current year.

We must help to extend the tourist season with all-weather, health and recreational facilities as well as tourist accommodation. We should develop the holiday village concept. Rural tourism projects such as farm accommodation, countryside hotels, accommodation in pubs and attractions based on rural traditions will strengthen the rural economy. This will cater for the present growth sector of short holiday breaks for families at the weekends. Travelling tourists and senior citizens might take up the midweek places.

Another significant group is the 18 to 30-year-olds who must be persuaded that Britain is better for an away break than going abroad. Such people are not satisfied with visiting places depicting our traditional heritage. They need a crowd-puller such as a theme park. There is no better place to start than right there in Sherwood forest.

For visitors, Sherwood forest goes hand in hand with Nottingham—like Robin and Marian, like Torvill and Dean. In the middle of 500 acres of natural forest is that gigantic tree, the Major Oak, under which the devoted couple spent their romantic moments. It is now gazed upon by 1 million people annually.

When in Nottingham, the visitor's mind turns to the barbaric sheriff who did so much to persecute the innocent peasants of that time, when justice had a totally different meaning from that of today. Perhaps we are seeing something of those far-gone days on the picket lines that are part of the coal dispute. Acts of violence are condoned and encouraged by the equally hated and self-styled sheriff of Sheffield.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): When all the evil was going on to which my hon. Friend has referred, was the Nottingham council Labour-controlled?

Mr. Stewart: The Labour party is a modern phenomenon which is being phased out gradually but surely. Sheffield tried only recently to turn history on its head by claiming that Robin Hood came from that area. I must tell Sheffield to be patient, as it will have a winner in the near future. It will be able to show tourists the 20th-century castle of the last union dictator.

Nottinghamshire's success so far has been spearheaded by the local authorities, mainly by the city council and the county council. They have been supported by the East Midlands tourist board and the Countryside Commission. I pay tribute to the countryside division of Nottinghamshire county council, which has developed with vision and attraction during the past 10 years the two famous country parks of Sherwood and Rufford, which have attracted 2 million visitors. A further 500 acres of reclaimed pit spoil is now being transformed into the Leen valley country park.

Nottingham would not forgive me if I failed to mention Newstead abbey in my constituency, which was the home of Lord Byron. The abbey attracts worldwide attention.

My purpose in using the opportunity that is afforded to Back Benchers to submit motions to the House is to ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State whether he has any new initiatives which can be implemented to finance the essential theme park, whether it is situated in the city or the forest. As local authority expenditure is being capped, the regional tourist board's budget is being apportioned according to the national board's allocation. Its role will be mainly marketing and advising, and private and commercial interests will be left to capitalise on our heritage.

Nottingham, without a doubt, has been outstandingly successful and the Robin Hood theme park will take us forward to the next important stage in the county's provision for visitors. Above all, it will create new jobs.

I hope that I have presented sound facts, figures and statistics, but perhaps the most vital factor in ensuring a successful tourist industry in my area is fun. It can be said that fun covers laughter, interest, action, suspense and even education. The role of the theme park will provide all those things. It will capture the imagination of all ages. It will offer the choice of active participation or exciting spectatorship. Our pubs, hotels and restaurants will present the most delicious food and the warmest welcome to visitors. We propose to build for the east midlands a reputation as the best tourist region in Britain.

9.54 am

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on his initiative in introducing the debate. I am glad that so many hon. Members are present to avail themselves of the opportunity of giving their constituencies an advertising broadsheet and perhaps to give my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State some useful advice on the promotion of tourism.

I appreciate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood but I think that he spelt incorrectly the name of the area of greatest attraction in the midlands. In fact, it is Shrewsbury and not Sherwood. It seems that he rejigged some of the letters in Shrewsbury. It is a great privilege and an experience of considerable interest to represent one of the finest Tudor towns in Britain. Hon. Members may be aware that Shrewsbury is listed by the Department of the Environment as being among the top 12 towns of the most historic significance. It is a town that I commend hon. Members to visit. I had great pleasure during the summer recess in seeing many hon. Members wandering around the Pride Hill shopping area of Shrewsbury while visiting a beautiful and historic town.

Shrewsbury, like many historic areas, is not without its transportation difficulties. We are in the process of a major public inquiry into the extension of the M54, which runs from the M6 to Telford. It would not be appropriate now to comment on the outcome of the inquiry. However, it is of considerable importance to historic towns that they have a sensible road system so that the inhabitants can enjoy their life while having the benefit of the trade that tourism brings by various forms of transport, especially the motor car. Motor cars bring about 70 per cent. of the tourists that visit the midlands.

Shrewsbury still has the benefit of a rail link but one wonders for how long that will continue. It is not the fastest service in the country. That is much to my regret during my weekly journeys by rail. Shrewsbury has an attractive railway station and can be described as a typical country station. It is being modernised considerably, but the historic nature of the town is being kept in mind.

We all look forward next week to an announcement on Stansted airport. I shall be able to support the Government only if they propose to develop Manchester and Birmingham airports. It is important to the midlands that those airports are developed. The development of a third London airport at Stansted would not find favour with those of us who have a regional interest to express in the House.

Mr. Jessel: Many of us will sympathise with my hon. Friend's wish to attract more airport traffic through Manchester and Birmingham airports and other airports in the midlands. Does he agree that it is essential to prevent an increase in traffic through Stansted and Heathrow? Will he insist with equal force that there should not be a fifth terminal at Heathrow? He will recognise that a decision not to proceed with a fifth terminal would direct more traffic to the north.

Mr. Conway: My hon. Friend's intervention would obviously be better directed to another quarter. Most of us who represent tourist areas away from London appreciate that London is an important gateway for tourism and that many of the tourists whom we welcome to the midlands begin their stay in Britain in London. We are not so naive as to think that we should stop tourists arriving in London and ask them instead to come direct to us. To have them arriving in Stansted would discourage them from travelling to the west, and the House will understand that I have a particular interest in Shrewsbury. It would discourage them also from travelling further on, into Wales. My hon. Friend's concern about the development of Heathrow and increasing traffic in other regional airports may be lessened when the Government come to denationalise British Airways. When that happens we may be able to sort out the mess of scheduled, charter and part-charter travel which is distorting the market.

I direct the attention of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to his Department's activities in the promotion of tourism in Britain. The House will know that that responsibility lies with the Department of Trade and Industry, especially with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the Minister of State. The Department is aware of the importance of tourism to jobs and trade. However, there could be a great deal more co-ordination. There are several tourist boards and I am pleased to serve on the Heart of England tourist board. It has dedicated officers and it does an extremely good job.

There is a role for the Department in co-ordinating to a greater extent the efforts of the English regional tourist boards and the activities of organisations such as the British Overseas Trade Board and the regional employment promotional councils, which are part-financed—up to 50 per cent.—by the Department. It would be useful and a recognition of the importance of tourism to jobs and trade if more foreign missions that promote industrial employment and orders also developed a role for tourism. A great deal of co-ordination at minimal cost could be achieved and could be of considerable benefit to Britain.

Hoteliers in my constituency, who, naturally, I meet regularly, tell me that one of the greatest things the Government could do for their business would be to seek to end the wages control that applies to that industry. That is a false control. It does not reflect the market available to them and goes a considerable way towards generating the amount of foreign labour employed in many of our tourist areas. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will use his considerable influence with the Treasury to reduce the cost of employing people at the lower wage scale levels, especially with regard to national insurance contributions.

During the last Session, I introduced, on behalf of Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council, a Bill to enable us to provide more car parking spaces to cater for tourists in Shrewsbury. Sadly, it did not receive the necessary support from hon. Members, and it failed to progress. To a considerable degree, therefore, the House has a responsibility for the traffic problems in Shrewsbury. I intend on many occasions to return to that issue—regardless of how boring the Department feels it is—when we debate Department of Transport issues. Traffic causes a problem in Shrewsbury and hurts that attractive and historic town.

I look forward to learning of the success in Sherwood of the signposting exercise mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood. Lack of signposting is a problem in my constituency also, and the hoteliers feel—I sympathise with them—that a more sympathetic view by those involved in planning and other controls would considerably help to increase employment in the constituency.

Those who visit Shrewsbury can be assured of a warm welcome and the friendliest staff in this country. I look forward to welcoming hon. Members, if they find time during the Christmas recess, to visit the finest historic town in the country.

10.1 am

Miss Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): I recently gave a talk at a conference organised by the City branch of the Institute of Directors. That conference was about the regeneration of the economy so, having been given a choice of subject, I chose tourism as the most hopeful growth industry. I was dismayed, however, after I had finished my speech and the questions started to come in, to hear one man say how pleasant it was to have a diversion from the main topic of the day. I fear that I retorted rather sharply that, if that was how he regarded it, my message had failed completely. Insufficient understanding of the importance of tourism is too prevalent, even among a fairly sophisticated audience of business men.

Tourism is not a candyfloss industry or some peripheral activity—acceptable, but not like the serious business of earning the country's wealth. We must get that message over firmly and, for that reason, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) chose this topic and placed the emphasis on jobs and job opportunities.

The size and scope of the tourist industry is not clearly understood even within this House, and certainly not outside it, except by those closely connected with the industry. I am not especially keen on figures, but perhaps a few will illustrate the point. In 1983, the tourist industry generated £7·6 billion—the latest full figures available. That is a colossal sum. When it is compared with the output of any other industry, one notes that, far from being a peripheral industry, tourism is essential to our economy's well-being. The English tourist board estimates that about 1·5 million people are involved in the tourist industry. I should add that I act as an adviser to that board.

We must realise that it is not simply a matter of hotels or caravan sites. They are certainly central to the industry, because if tourists spend time away from their homes—I suppose that if they do not, they are classed as day trippers — hotels and other forms of accommodation are important. The importance of the industry spreads much further than that. As well as hotels, restaurants and cafes are affected. That excellent but perhaps little known paper "British Business", which I believe is a product of the Department of Trade and Industry, says that in the last year there was an increase in the number of jobs in the hotel trade of 17,000 and in the cafe trade an increase of 6,000. When we consider the difficulties of producing that number of extra jobs by more artificial and deliberate means, we can see the potential and importance of the tourist industry.

What about transport? I do not know the proportion of visitors travelling on the London underground, but I

suspect that they must be making a substantial contribution to the running of that system and the money generated from it. British Rail and the coaches that travel all over the country benefit from our visitors. I hope that we can encourage more people not to do just the circuit of London-Stratford-on-Avon-Edinburgh or some such route, because that under-values and under-plays what can be offered by other towns and cities and parts of the country. We could thereby greatly increase the amount spent on transport.

Theatres also have a great part to play in entertaining visitors. I have American friends who come over here especially for the west end theatre. That is the one aspect that pulls them—not only because the variety and scope is far greater than they can find on Broadway, but because the theatre is far cheaper. They get better value all round. I hope that there will be a development of the theatres in the provinces.

Hon. Members may know that recently we established the Theatre Royal in Plymouth which is generating great interest and is very much a tourist attraction. I need hardly say that there were numerous and passionate arguments and disagreements about whether it should be built. There can be no gainsaying the fact that, now the theatre has been built, it is providing a wide range of entertainment from classical to pop and is drawing in visitors. That theatre is a great advantage and addition to what my city of Plymouth can offer.

I am pleased that the English tourist board's latest promotion is going under the theme of "England entertains". If we increase the quality of the entertainment and the number of entertainers—whether in a hotel or in the theatre—more employment will be provided in that profession.

I shall now consider the role of the Government, local authorities and private enterprise in promoting tourism and, thus, the growth in jobs. As a Conservative, I believe that the key role should go to private enterprise. It is right and proper that private enterprise should bear the brunt. It is essential that in tourism, which is so scattered in its impact, there should be a good lead from the Government and good support from the regional tourist boards. In that respect, local authorities certainly have a part to play in supporting their local tourist board and in providing an impetus for others. I commend to the House the marketing bureau set up in Plymouth, which was one of the first in the country. It brought together representatives of the local authority and private enterprise. They work together to promote Plymouth as a place where tourism is important.

I am pleased to see that this example is followed, for example, in Bristol. It is tehnically part of the west country but I am not sure that Devon and Cornwall see it that way, although that is irrelevant for this argument. Bristol has brought up to date a derelict part of the docks and has made a good and enterprising area out of what was a seedy and rundown one. There is no end to the scope, not solely in the more obvious tourist attractions, but within cities as well.

I thought it worthwhile to study what is happening in a part of England far removed from my own, because it is easy to become parochial on these occasions. It is extremely instructive to look at Northumbria. It could not be much further from my west country.

When the Northumbria tourist board was set up in 1969, it calculated that tourism was worth about £4 million —not much. It is now reckoned to top about £200 million and there is still great scope for going further. I have read that Durham county council has an ambitious project to recreate an entire 19th-century lead mining complex at Killhope Wheal—not something that one normally associates with tourism, but how enterprising to have a little of our industrial history put in a form which tourists can understand. I hope that that will be done in different ways all over the country.

The chairman of the Northumbria tourist board has rightly said:

"Tourism is our only growth industry, so it is vital that it continues to grow."

I share the dismay expressed about the lack of representatives from those areas. They are the ones who ask for most, and badger the Government most about unemployment. That is right, because it is a vital subject, but why are they not present today when the debate deals with the greatest capacity for increasing employment and hope for our young people?

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Miss Fookes: Reluctantly.

Mr. Jessel: When my hon. Friend hears what I have to say I do not think it will be reluctantly, because I am sure that she will agree with me that no Member of the Liberal party or the SDP has been present for at least half an hour.

Miss Fookes: Yes, it was worth giving way. I hope, however, that my hon. Friend will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make his own contribution when I shall look forward to doing the same to him.

I was about the make a point about prospects for young people. It is essential that tourism is promoted by those who have resonsibility for such matters as a worthwhile occupation for young people to enter, whether that be in the traditional occupations in hotels, cafés and the like, or in the leisure and entertainment centres—the complexes which are springing up to cater for visitors—or in the theatre, or transport which has a tourism input.

I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister tell us what the Government are doing to promote training in those occupations. My understanding is that the youth training schemes are beginning to recognise the possibilities and to allow that tourism is a possible work experience for young people. I believe that that must be geared so that young people at school are aware of the possibilities of tourism when they come to consider a worthwhile career.

I come now to a point which many hon. Members may feel controversial, but which I believe has an important input to our tourism potential. It is what is called, rather curiously, the continental fixed link — the Channel tunnel, Chunnel or possibly part bridge, part tunnel. I do not pretend for one moment to have any idea what might be the best form in engineering and financial terms. What seems to be glaringly plain is that such a link would be extremely valuable in making it much easier for continental visitors and even American visitors, who may fly direct to the continent rather than to us, to come here. I recognise, of course, that we may have a flow the other way. Apart from the employment opportunities available in building the tunnel — they are not to be underestimated — it would make us much more accessible to the continent and therefore increase vastly the opportunities for tourism.

Mr. Forth: I recognise the force behind my hon. Friend's argument. The sea crossing can be, in itself, a pleasant experience and take little over an hour on some of the faster ships. It is a highly acceptable way of crossing the Channel and provides a great deal of employment. How will an underground railway tunnel, where one has to get on to the train to go under the Channel, be a step in the right direction and significantly improve the pleasantness or speed of the journey?

Miss Fookes: I suspect that the answer to that will depend upon how good a sailor one is. Many people dislike crossing the sea and would infinitely prefer to go under it.

I am not suggesting that there should be only one way or the other. Surely my hon. Friend agrees with the Conservative principle that there should be freedom of choice and as much choice as possible. No one will be sent underground if he does not want to go. I should expect that the links over the surface of the water will continue, as they did after the advent of aeroplanes. I see a role for that crossing, and I hope that the Government will look kindly upon that suggestion. They have already said that they will not put public money into it, and I accept that. If private enterprise judges that it is worth building and is willing to risk its money, that is the best bet for the country and the House.

I do not wish to detain the House long because many of my hon. Friends are anxious to speak. I hope that the lessons to be drawn from the debate will not be lost upon those outside the House. Tourism provides a better opportunity for employing more people than any other industry that we can think of, or are likely to see in the foreseeable future. I do not underestimate the value of manufacturing industry, but I suggest that tourism and manufacturing can go side by side.

10.18 am

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I must declare an interest in these matters. I am an adviser to Horizon holidays and Best Western Hotels. I am a governor of the St. Andrew's Old Course golf hotel and country club. I wish to speak not about those matters, but about the effect on tourism generally and on the west midlands.

I have listened to my hon. Friends speaking about enchanting places such as Shrewsbury and Sherwood forest, which I have had the delight of driving through on many occasions. I appreciate them and the vistas of the coastline around the country, which provide the traditional form of holiday tourism. But they are not something that I have in my central west midlands constituency of Birmingham, Yardley. What I have is another form of tourism, which does not enjoy the same benefits. It is exhibition, conference and business tourism, which is the fastest-growing employer of labour, contrary to what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) muttered from a sedentary position. Instead of destroying industry tourism is helping to preserve and perpetuate it and to give it the richness and wealth that it deserves.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I sought to make the point that hon. Members from Humberside are fully aware of the advantages of tourism, but that manufacturing is a major area of employment. Considering that the hon. Gentleman comes from the west midlands, it should be in the forefront of his mind that something must be done about manufacturing if he genuinely wants to do something about jobs.

Mr. Bevan: It is because the west midlands has been the iron heart of England and has been concerned about jobs and manufacturing that the Government gave the equivalent of assisted status in a discretionary way to the west midlands. I would appreciate it if the hon. Gentleman would make a full speech on the matter later because, Lord alone knows, his ranks are so depleted that he needs to. It is astounding and bewildering that Labour Members are completely uninterested in the subject of our fastest-growing industry. I shall listen to the remarks which he will make from a more proper stance later.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I can understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety to move from a point on which he is on such weak ground, but will he tell the House what has happened to manufacturing employment in the west midlands during the past five years?

Mr. Bevan: I listened to the point made from the serried ranks of the Labour party. Industrial capacity in the west midlands has been much reduced during the past 40 years by the actions of successive Governments, especially the Labour Government, who introduced the formula of assisted area status through the President of the Board of Trade in 1945. Under the Labour Government that policy continually militated against the west midlands. The area was additionally burdened by the policy of not granting industrial development certificates to allow factory development.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): I do not wish to divert the debate into an equally important question, but does my hon. Friend agree that the most prominent estimate of jobs lost to the west midlands region through discrimination against it in regional policy has numbered about 112,000 jobs? Does he agree that the region has been an industrial blood donor to other parts of the country?

Mr. Bevan: I agree with my hon. Friend, who puts the point succinctly. The west midlands has been a blood donor to the body politic which was laid out for operations continually by the Labour party when it was in Government. That being so, it is essential that we start to make provision, despite the St. Vitus' dance example from Opposition Members, for a healthier framework and body in the west midlands.

I welcome the presence of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary who has done much to assist the west midlands lately. I hoped that his right hon. Friend the Minister who has special responsibility for tourism would be present this morning, but I am aware that he has additional responsibilities brought about by the great tragedy wrought at Brighton by the outrageous bombing. I hope that my hon. Friend will pass on the important messages about tourism.

I have the honour to chair for Conservative Members the committee that deals with tourism matters. Because tourism is so important, it is essential that there should be a Secretary of State for tourism with Cabinet rank, and a full and separate Department. I hope that the Government will see that that is an appropriate way in which to recognise and give a sense of direction to these most important matters.

The Minister has just conducted a review of tourism and introduced many new matters, including a new structure, which are welcome. It is essential to have a Select Committee to undertake a permanent review of the accomplishments of tourism and progress made by it, and to give inducement and encouragement because vast sums are involved. Tourism brings vast improvements to employment. We must back up the new structure for tourism.

All those engaged in tourism are subject to the adjudication of at least six Ministries at the moment, including the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Transport, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office. As a result we are subject to the considerations of many Ministers within those Ministries. That diffusion is not in the best interests of the sector, and points to the need for an adequate reform, which I hope will come about shortly.

I asked a written question on 15 July 1982 regarding the numbers then employed in the tourist industry. The Minister replied that precise numbers employed were not available as the 1968 standard industrial classification

"does not identify tourism as a separate industry."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 1982; Vol. 27, c. *434*.]

Although attempts have been made since then to get a better overall presentation of the figures, it is not possible to assess the full benefit of tourism to the country in terms of wealth and the jobs. That needs continual attention.

In a subsequent contribution in the Chamber I urged the Minister to give us regular monitored figures — I suggested quarterly figures—but it was not accepted. It is still necessary to argue the point that we have an intelligence of overall tourist figures that distinguishes all the categories of employment involved. When the question was asked in July 1982, the answer was that about 813,600 people were employed in some departments of tourism. It is variously estimated now that 1·2 million to 1·4 million people are currently employed in tourism.

The BTA's most recent publication opts for a figure of 1·4 million people employed in the industry. If the earlier figure was correct, that is an increase of about 600,000 in three years. The BTA makes the more modest claim that at least 50,000 jobs are being created every year. While most other industries, including many in the west midlands industrial sector, have, regrettably, been shedding jobs in one way or another, the tourist industry is accumulating jobs, generating employment and bringing more and more people, especially young people, into the profession, for that is indeed what it is—a trade, a profession and a vocation.

Tourism is and will continue to be Britain's biggest job creator. That is why special attention must be paid to giving it the necessary muscle to continue that progress. It is already the third largest industry in this country and will be by far the largest well before the year 2000. It is also the second biggest currency earner, after North sea oil, which it will shortly overtake just as it is overtaking industries at present considered more important, such as the motor industry and the retail industry, considered as a conglomerate.

To back up the necessity for new labour, we need a young persons' tourist task force. On previous occasions I have urged consideration of this as a means whereby young people can give a national service to their country just as when I was younger, and in better condition, I and others contributed in a more military sense.

If young people today wish to serve in that military sense, I hope that there will be opportunities for them in the armed forces, but in a civilian sense tourism offers breath-taking opportunities to take up even more of the unemployed. Such a task force could help in the planning sphere through pilot schemes and later general schemes and in building and refurbishing the heritage, which has been a major feature of the presentation of our castles, country homes and estates as a tourist attraction. The theme park concept also needs to be developed further, not just in Sherwood forest, but perhaps also in docklands and around the national exhibition centre complex in the west midlands.

Young people could be employed on a local, residential basis just as national service men were, acting as guides or linguistic helpers and generally training for entry into the hotel sector and other areas of the profession. If the service chiefs say that such a scheme is no use to them, it could certainly be of use to tourism. Let us not, therefore, throw away this chance for a substantial take-up of unemployment.

By 1985, the number of overseas visitors to this country should reach 15 million per year, including 3 million from the United States and Canada. Visitors already bring in approximately £5 billion in foreign exchange, and domestic tourism generates about £6 billion for the home market. That is the size of the industry with which we are concerned.

The CBI has announced that it intends to examine the job creation prospects of the tourist industry to sharpen awareness of that vital aspect of the industry. In the public sector, the Government should set up a Select Committee to examine in detail the importance of tourism in continued job creation and the provision of the necessary private and public investment in the infrastructure needed to support the industry. For the first time, our tourism figures have caught up with those of the sunshine areas of France, Italy and Germany and will shortly leave them behind, to achieve the highest level in the world per head of population.

Holiday tourism is still in the lead, but it is being closely chased by business and conference tourism. Nevertheless, there is still a dire need for capital schemes to assist the industry. Capital schemes for sewage disposal in many seaside resorts could lead to sewage-free seas and mammoth clean-ups of the beaches. It is also vital to continue to create and refurbish the necessary hotel support. We must reintroduce building and refurbishment assistance, either as grants or as pump-priming loans to modernise and improve the infrastructure.

We must also widen employment in tourist-related industries. In the second quarter of 1984, employment in restaurants increased by 6·9 per cent., in public houses by 4·2 per cent., in hotels by 6·4 per cent, in sports areas by 3·2 per cent. and even in museums by 6·4 per cent. at a time when the increase in all industries was just 1 per cent. and in the service industries together only 2·5 per cent. In Scotland alone, figures for the tourism sector showed an increase of 18 per cent. between 1982 and 1983.

It is in the context of golf in particular that sector tourism can be developed in Scotland. The number of north American tourists to the United Kingdom — I

[Mr. Bevan]

realise that it was affected by the low value of the pound compared with the dollar—increased by 33 per cent. between 1982 and 1983.

Let us consider the necessary reforms that we must introduce to satisfy the tourists. We must not lag behind the continentals in this respect. A reform of our licensing laws is long overdue. We must allow free access to hotels and public houses at any hour of the day for the taking of refreshments of an alcoholic nature if that is what is desired. The obsolete laws introduced in 1916 to keep munitions workers out of the public houses should be repealed immediately, as was suggested by the Errol report among others.

Shopping hours should also be reformed. That would create jobs just as jobs would be created in the licensed trade by freeing the hours. The industrial building licence should be allowed for the large stores. That would affect tourism directly, because tourists from the continent home in on the big stores in the south of England. They come over on one-day and two-day trips and clear the shelves of clothes, often by midday. The large stores contribute to tourism and they should be helped.

There was an increase of 17 per cent. in the number of overseas visitors between August 1983 and August 1984. The contribution to the balance of payments increased by 23 per cent., and earnings increased by 15 per cent. in 1983 compared with 1982.

Areas of the west midlands considered by some to wear a sombre robe are in fact dynamic and attractive centres for exhibition, conference and business tourism. My constituency of Yardley is cheek by jowl with the newest and fastest-growing centre in the world in this respect, providing great prospects for job and wealth creation.

There are three wards in my constituency. Two of them have unemployment rates of 18·4 per cent. and 18·7 per cent. In the third ward, Sheldon, which is the nearest to all the new infrastructure that we have created in Birmingham the unemployment rate is only 11 per cent. That is no accident. As a councillor in those days, I was proud to contribute to many of the decisions that led to that result. Nine years ago, we created the national exhibition centre, with its nine halls. We planned and built Birmingham international station at a cost of £6 million—a magnificent station giving immediate admission to the exhibition centre for passengers from London and Birmingham and on the main inter-city trains. We also have the Birmingham international airport terminal. We have plans to build another industrial and commercial estate in the area, extending over 120 acres.

At our urging, the Government wisely agreed to the creation of the freeport. I thank my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for his contribution. The freeport is shortly to come into existence in Birmingham. Also, a few miles away, we have created a sports arena. There may even be plans to create a sports quadrena in the fullness of time—one of the most futuristic in the world.

We shall ask for Government assistance to add to the national exhibition centre an international convention centre, and to take up a further 80 acres of total dereliction in the Gas street basin area—the inner area of Birmingham. We shall ask the House for permission to run a road race for motor cars on the roads of Birmingham as part of our tourist effort. Contemporaneously, we should aim to reduce the cost of travel in this country. This has partly been achieved by the running of express coaches on the motorways. A further achievement will be the reduction in internal air fares that must come about.

We must also be aware of the vast advantages of conference tourism. Birmingham demonstrates the great role that the cities will play in providing for conference and business tourism. The number of international meetings held in Britain has increased by nearly 80 per cent. in 10 years. Birmingham was able to host the international Rotary convention this year—*[Interruption.]* That is no laughing matter. It was the largest single conference ever held anywhere in the world, and it was hosted at the national exhibition centre. It was reckoned to bring in a vast amount of money, not least in terms of spending by each tourist. The average delegate spends £360 per visit, or £56 a day. That figure must be compared with the £23 a day generated by holiday tourists. A delegate spends more than twice what the holiday tourist spends, and therefore he employs vastly more people.

In 1983-84, the exhibition business in Britain brought in £1,250 million. Sixteen million people have visited the national exhibition centre since it was opened nine years ago. Thirty-five exhibitions are held there annually, with 65 other events, including sporting events. A total of 2·5 million people spend £70 million in the region in spin-offs in hotels, travel, theatres and restaurants. Some shows can produce as much as £50 million individually, 25 per cent. of it from overseas.

The national exhibition centre is responsible for creating 4,000 jobs—that is not chickenfeed—and half of those jobs are permanent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) said, tourism is not a candyfloss business. It is a serious business and a job creator.

I ask the Government to help us to finance the international convention centre. If they cannot give us first division status for regional aid, let them help us in respect of the £54 million which will be required over and above the Brussels money which will be forthcoming and the local and private money to be invested in the Birmingham convention centre. We are asking for an injection of money to prime the pump.

When completed, the convention centre will generate an additional income of £38·2 million a year at 1983 prices. That is sufficient to support another 1,857 full-time jobs. Spending generated by the centre and those jobs will lead to the creation of a further 876 jobs. That makes a total of 2,733. A new 500-bed hotel is to be built in the city centre privately. An entire new area of the city will be developed. The canals, or "cuts" as they are called in Birmingham, will be rebuilt. There are more miles of canal in Birmingham than in Venice and recreating the canal structure will generate more tourism in Birmingham.

I have made my plea for continued help with the convention centre and for the car race, a Bill concerning which will shortly be laid before the House. That race will bring in at least £1 million in the first year in profits. We recently had a trial, which was fully supported by the police. No fewer than 250,000 people turned out to see the vintage cars. Those figures will be regarded as chickenfeed in the future. We in Birmingham are not wailing. We regret that our industry is not stronger but, given a chance, we shall reinforce it. Given the chance we shall create wealth and employment in conference and business tourism.

10.52 am

Sir John Wells (Maidstone): Hon. Members will not be surprised if I start by paying tribute to our former colleague, the late Lord Geoffrey-Lloyd, who, in a few short years of work with the Leeds castle foundation, built up the notion, activity and reality of Leeds castle, which is in my constituency, from one of the nation's unknown beauties into one of our premier tourist attractions. That success is due almost entirely to the energy and loving care of our late colleague.

I do not wish to bore the House with special pleading but I firmly believe that those parts of the home counties with interests and features to offer visitors and tourists should put their best foot forward. London hotels are, lamentably, far too expensive. Just a few miles out of London there are hotels in my constituency and elsewhere which are nearly as good and a great deal cheaper. I urge overseas visitors to sleep out of London and see some of our local beauties. *[Laughter.]* I remind right hon. and hon. Members who are laughing that Charles Dickens made one of his characters say:

"Kent, sir — everybody knows Kent — apples, cherries, hops, and women."

We have perhaps the premier carriage museum in the world, tucked away in what were formerly the archbishop's stables. We have great spring blossom routes signposted by the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club. People drive round our farmland and see the beauties of our countryside. We have many farm trails. They are important for overseas tourists and for educating our urban neighbours.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) dealt at length with the nature—I shall not say the beauties—of Birmingham. He has mentioned the charms of its canals. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends and Labour Members—there are no Liberal or SDP Members present—of the importance of educating the urban young into the rural way of life. Kentish farmers are leading the way in providing farm trails and educational facilities. However, there is one great danger, which applies to Wales as much as to Kent. People walking in the countryside with dogs allow them to run loose and worry sheep. That is a serious matter as we now have more sheep worrying. That happens because some visitors to the countryside do not understand the country code. I hope that the tourist boards and those who encourage visitors to the countryside ensure that they behave themselves and see that their dogs do likewise. Nevertheless, we who live in the country are privileged to be there and want to share it with our neighbours from the towns.

Kent has the two great cathedral cites of Canterbury and Rochester. I should like to make a specific point to our tourist authorities. Our great historic buildings are in danger of wearing out as a result of too many feet pounding through them. There is also a real danger of inconvenience and unpleasantness for people who live there and wish to live a quiet and peaceable life. Cathedral closes were designed not as tourist attractions but as places for clergy and meditative people to live in peace and some seclusion. A balance must be struck.

I should like to pay tribute to the extremely good work of the Historic Houses Association. It has maintained the flow of publicity material and ensured that historic houses that are visited by the public are still living entities, nearly always inhabited by families who have been there for several or many generations.

A completely new aspect of tourism has hit Britain this year. I refer to the Liverpool international garden festival. Everyone knows that Chelsea is the greatest flower show in the world, and I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland — the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott)—in his place. Chelsea has a new rival in the form of this imported continental notion of a garden festival which runs for some six months rather than the four days of Chelsea.

The festival is over, and technically it is unnecessary for me to declare an interest. However, I should inform the House that I was an exhibitor. My only faintly light-hearted criticism of the organisation is that I received a £4·20 invoice for the amount of electricity I had consumed. I wrote to the Merseyside development corporation and pointed out that I should be delighted to pay for the electricity if it would reimburse me for the few hundred pounds it owed me in prize money. I am delighted to be able to inform the House that the prize money was forthcoming and that then I paid £4·20 for the electricity I had consumed. It is unfortunate that the organisers made the recipients of prizes wait for their cash until they had the neck to write and ask for it. Liverpool was the first venture of its kind. I believe that we shall go from strength to strength with this new style of exhibition.

I wish to pay a tribute to two people who not only made the Liverpool festival possible but brought about the smooth working of its day-to-day arrangements. The commissioner, Lord Aberconway, was very largely responsible not only for the vision he brought to the organisation but for its execution. There are many other people whom I should like to single out for praise, but there is one person in particular I should like to mention. He had great charm and energy. Above all, he possessed the great British quality of pouring oil on troubled waters. Anybody who has ever tried to stage an exhibition knows that tempers become frayed. This person was Mr. Bill Richards. He should be named in this House as the person who carried out the most wonderful work in Liverpool during the past summer.

Before I leave the new international garden festival concept, I must warn my hon. Friend and the Department than when unattractive city after unattractive city comes bidding for an international garden festival to rescue their nasty dumps and make them into more attractive places, it must be borne in mind that those cities must possess the basic charm of Liverpool. They must have fine buildings, fine parks and the potential of Merseyside. It is no good going to places where it always rains and where the natives are unfriendly. Nobody could have been kinder, nicer or friendlier than the people of Liverpool. It was due to the natural good nature of the citizens of Liverpool that the festival was such a success. It is essential that the Department, or whoever considers the granting of licences for the holding of such festivals, should be selective.

Finally, may I say a word about Chelsea and the horrors which afflict Chelsea because of the traffic jams. The Royal Horticultural Society is trying very hard to alleviate the problems. It is looking at every possible way in which to maintain the pre-eminent excellence of Chelsea and at the same time make Chelsea a more pleasant place for its inhabitants. I have already mentioned the wearing out of facilities and the wearing out of buildings. It is essential

[Sir John Wells]

that life should not be made intolerable for those who live adjacent to our great tourist centres. For this reason I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) is here. He is the only Minister sitting on the Government Front Bench. He will be well aware of the problems, even though he is unable to voice a constituency interest. I hope that I have been able to voice that interest for him.

I turn to another rural aspect of tourism. The depleted Benches opposite will probably howl at me for what I am about to say. There is no doubt that the blood sport industries of this country provide a massive tourist import. Fishing in all its forms, shooting in all its forms and hunting in nearly all its forms attract people from America and from the Continent in ever-growing numbers. These interests provide employment not only for those who live in the countryside but also for those in the sporting industries. My hon. Friend the Member for Yardley, in his wide-ranging dissertation on Birmingham, forgot to mention the very successful gun-making industry in Birmingham. If it were not for the great tradition of the English best gun we should not have that great industry in Birmingham. The fact that one of our great gun-making companies in Birmingham is celebrating its centenary this year is to be welcomed. Therefore, we should be grateful to those of our rural colleagues who are providing such pleasant, healthy and open-air recreation for visitors.

My next point has already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Yardley—the tourism generated by exhibitions and conferences. Not sufficient people know about it. The exhibition industry falls into two parts: the hall owners and those who stage the exhibitions. The national exhibition centre has been excellent for the nation and for the west midlands. However, when one drives through that area one finds that the car parks are miles away from the NEC. Better car-parking facilities ought to be provided. It is unfortunate that the car parks for the greatest motor show in the world should be scattered over so wide an area.

Mr. Bevan *rose*——

Sir John Wells: I shall not give way because many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. Let me continue with the point I am making about the division of the exhibition industry into its two component parts: the hall owners and those who organise the exhibitions.

The hall owners are charging higher and higher rents. It is possible for a British exhibition organiser to hire a hall in Gothenburg, Boston in the United States, Hamburg or New York and mount a cheaper exhibition than can be mounted in London or by the NEC. Hall rental and service charges are getting out of hand. In part this is due to the activities of authorities like the Greater London council which have pushed up the rates. It is also due in part to the demands of the fire officers. We respect the sensible rulings of fire officers, but I have a nasty suspicion that they believe that they must exert an ever-increasing tightening of the regulations in certain areas, not in order to save lives but in order to save their jobs. This is a harsh criticism to make, but I believe it to be true. British fire officers have a superb record. Virtually no lives have been lost as a result of fire hazard. The hazards have come from the collapse of stands and other such matters. My hon. Friend the Minister and his Department must give some guidance to fire officers. They should not be over-zealous because that is one of the contributory causes of increased charges. They should not be negligent, but there is a sensible mean course which has not been pursued in recent years.

Will my hon. Friend make representations to all the hall owners not to price themselves out of the market? In addition, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the need for another exhibition hall or centre in Greater London. There are opportunities in the docklands. There are opportunities, not on green field sites but on demolition sites. When my hon. Friend seeks advice on that matter, I hope that he will seek it from not only one man representing one point of view, and a vested point of view at that, but from as broad a base of people as he can find who really understand the industry.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, I asked for a statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the incident in my constituency yesterday in which what was described as an undercover unit of the British Army killed two people who were described as an active service unit of the IRA. That incident raises fundamental questions as to whether the authorities in Northern Ireland have abandoned——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I must have a point of order on which I can rule. The hon. Gentleman must not develop an argument.

Mr. Hume: I am about to make my point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That issue raises the fundamental question whether the authorities in Northern Ireland have abandoned the rule of law as their approach to the problem or whether they are dealing with——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now abusing the procedures of the House. If he has a point of order on which I can rule, I shall try to help him, but he must not try to develop an argument.

Mr. Hume: May I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker? If that incident had happened in broad daylight in any city in this island it would call for a statement from a Minister. It seems to show an acceptance of a level of violence which is unacceptable to me at any rate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret that I cannot help the hon. Gentleman, but I am sure that he will be able to find ways in which he can raise the matter about which he is obviously worried.

11.12 am

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): First, I warmly welcome the excellent motives of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) in bringing before the House today one of Britain's most important industries — tourism. I must declare an interest as parliamentary consultant to Consort Hotels, an important organisation of independent hoteliers, and also as secretary of the all-party parliamentary tourism committee.

As many of my hon. Friends have already said, tourism is an important growth industry. Britain is one of the few countries in Europe, if not in the world, which does not give adequate recognition to an industry employing some 1·5 million people, earning £5,000 million a year from overseas visitors. I am saddened—I put it no stronger than that—that the Minister of State, Department of

Trade and Industry who has sole responsibility for tourism has not found the time in a busy day to join us in this debate, but I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will make known to him what is said. Nevertheless, this is the first debate on this important subject since the general election. We have had one short statement and several parliamentary questions, but this is the first debate.

Tourism should be managed in such a way that it generates wealth and employment at both a national and local level. Look at the enterprise in areas such as Bradford and the successful harnessing of tourists with history, along with the revitalisation of the inner cities. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) is, I am sad to say, missing, but no doubt if he were here he would mention the Bradford chop. However, the matter goes much further than gastronomy. The old satanic mills of the 19th century have been reborn.

Let me take the example of my constituency of York to illustrate the link between history and tourism. Fairfax house, recently opened in York, must be one of the finest Georgian houses in Britain, with an exquisite range of Georgian furniture. There is also a link with overseas countries. The most imaginative development of the Viking centre links Denmark with the United Kingdom —perhaps York is the Commonwealth of Scandinavia. Not least, there is the work of the churches, such as the Undercroft museum in York minster. I could give many other examples in other fine cities but those are a few that I want to single out in York.

Local initiatives rely upon councils and the Government to be sympathetic and to set the groundwork. Have local authorities an effective tourism strategy? Does each acknowledge the employment aspects and ensure close links between, for example, further education and industry? Is the infrastruture of car parking and signposting provided? When we as tourists so often visit lovely parts of the country, we find that the signposting is inadequate. The conflict generated in turn forces the local population to wear badges saying, "I'm a resident, not a tourist."

We do not want to alienate this vital and important part of our economy. It is a growth area. In England last year the local economy benefited by £7,600 million, £4,300 million of which came from British tourists. The balance came from overseas.

Does each local authority belong to its regional tourist board? There are some glaring anomalies. The south-east tourist board covers Kent, west Sussex, east Sussex and part of Surrey. Yet west Sussex, a prime county for tourism, is not a member of the board. Will my hon. Friend the Minister write to the county and district councils—to encourage them to join and participate in the management of tourism? I should like the carrot to be voluntary. Unless we can spell out the key advantages to participating in the decision-making process, we are partly working in a void.

The absence of west Sussex from the south-east tourist board means that inquiries to the board by the travel trade and the public cannot be fairly dealt with. Justice is not done to that important geographical area while a major constituent part fails to pay its dues and participate.

Of course there are and should be constraints. So far in the debate we have heard a lot in favour of tourism. However, it would be wrong not to mention some of the environmental constraints. Some years ago the Greek Orthodox church announced the text of a new prayer asking the Lord to have mercy on Greek cities, islands and villages

"which are scourged by the worldly touristic wave"

and to protect the Greek people from

"these contemporary western invaders".

Many inhabitants of Britain's tourist centres, especially London, would fervently subscribe to that plea. I am not sure whether that would apply to the see of Durham. The Bishop of Durham should be mindful, before he moves into that area as well, that within his jurisdiction there is a substantial tourist trade. I hope that we shall not require such prayers on too common a basis here. We should appreciate that while tourism has many plus points we should not at the same time consume our environmental seed corn.

In an industry with a turnover of some £9 billion, more than the aerospace industry and not far short of the motor industry — an important point when one takes into account the hon. Members from the west midlands who have participated in the debate — the growth signs continue to excite. Employment in the hotel trade has increased by 7·5 per cent., or, to put it in numbers, by 17,000 and in restaurants and cafés by almost half that figure, with an additional 6,000 jobs simply in the second quarter of this year. When compared with the rest of British industry, that is a sizeable leap forward, as there was only a 1 per cent. increase for all industries and a 2 per cent. increase for the service industries. Not surprisingly, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is devoting more time to the service sector of the economy.

New jobs are being created in tourism at the rate of some 50,000 a year. That is a striking contrast with many parts of our economy, but do the Government appreciate that investment in the service sector will produce more employment per pound invested than the manufacturing and processing industries? The investment is not all in de luxe hotels. Indeed, no new hotel has been built in the nation's capital for some time. The plans for the development of the South Bank have not materialised. Tourism is just as much about the marginal hill farms with an income derived from farmhouse tourism.

One or two specific points concern me and others who have tourism closely at heart. The first is the thorny question of classification. Earlier this year, the Minister asked the English tourist board to examine ways to strengthen the voluntary registration scheme to make it a more effective weapon against poor standards. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister how far the discussions between the English, Scottish and Welsh tourist boards have gone, and how much consensus there is. Is my hon. Friend aware of the unrest in the hotel sector?

There was a proposal to have a unified registration system of one to five crowns and for it to be adopted by 1987, but hearts are being developed by the Heart of England tourist board and another symbol is being developed in the Isle of Wight. There is great confusion not only for British tourists going to another part of the country, and who want a recommendation for hotels and other forms of accommodation through such symbols, but for the overseas tourists coming to the country who see the great number of symbols and try to understand what they mean. We need one common symbol system for the United Kingdom, and proper verification, especially with all the electronic data that can be easily retrieved by the tourist and travel trade.

[Mr. Conal Gregory]

We want one system and a nationally agreed scheme, but the Grant report for the Scottish tourist board showed only 42 per cent. of its establishments were classified correctly. We need a self-policing voluntary scheme, as just under half of the establishments approached by the inquiry were not able to fill in the forms properly.

Consultation has not been adequate. Why have important organisations such as the RAC, with its vetting system and officials, the AA, Michelin and Egon Ronay not been consulted? There seems no qualitative aspect to the proposed system. We effectively have registration, which is different from classification, through the fire and hygiene regulations, but this can cause problems. At what stage is a house promoting tourism? I have this problem in York, which is a thriving centre for tourism. Does an advertisement placed by a house owner constitute a change of use? Is it letting one room to a student? Is it letting two rooms to tourists on a regular basis, or is it, as the York city council suggests, the letting of 25 per cent. of rooms? I could go on and give other examples of what is interpreted by district councils. I am trying to emphasise that, in the absence of case law, which is extremely expensive and time-consuming for small bodies to take through court, we need a move by the Executive in setting out clearly what is meant by registration. We should not leave it to local officials of each district to set different criteria.

Signposting has been referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood and for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway). I welcome the experimental tourism signposting scheme that was used this summer in Kent, which included new brown and white signs with symbols to denote a range of tourist attractions. I look forward to hearing the outcome of the second scheme, which is to take place in Nottinghamshire next year. However, let us move further on from these two experimental schemes. Why do we not show access to hotels? Why, if one is going to a particular centre, is it not possible to see the hotels clearly shown in advance? There should be more than a little symbol on the wall saying "hotel". Is that the hotel that one is booked into? Does one want to go there? Why is there no consultation before the signs go up?

My hon. Friend the Minister may respond that this is a matter for the highways authorities, usually the county councils, which do not generally permit hotel signs within the highway boundary. There is the associated problem, as the nation takes more and more to cars, of car parks in national tourist parks. Tourists clearly require accommodation, refreshment and a variety of services. Therefore, the responsibility for requiring a criterion that will be adopted on a local and regional basis may revert to the Department of Trade and Industry. Again, in the example of signposting, we are showing lack of co-ordination.

The third sector in which we show a lack of co-ordination is licensing. This occupied the time of the House a week ago, and many of us participated in that debate or read with considerable interest the views of our hon. Friends. However, it is time to implement reforms and to see licensing in the wider framework of tourism. Why should a visitor from another part of the country or an overseas visitor who is seeking refreshment, whether alcoholic or not, find only that he is told the time of day?

It would be remiss if we did not draw attention to the importance of education for tourism. Clearly, there is an inadequate link between education and tourism. There is too great a concentration of resources on management skills rather than on craft courses. We need assistance at all levels. How often, when we have been to a hotel, restaurant or café, are we served by non-EC nationals or EC nationals of another state? I am in favour of mobility and I am glad to see that so many people come to Britain, but it is sad when so many youngsters are not going on craft courses despite unemployment. We need to develop the craft side and give a feeling of satisfaction in a growth industry. I hope that my hon. Friends in the Department of Employment will take this on board. Will they visit jobcentres and the hotel and catering schools and talk to hoteliers and restaurateurs?

Many of my points have been about the lack of co-ordination. Different Departments are working on tourism. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) referred to five Departments concerned with tourism, plus the Department of Trade and Industry. That is stating the case by half. Twelve Departments are involved with tourism, and I shall mention these to show how much we need a co-ordinating committee that will pull this together.

First, there is the Department of Trade and Industry, with specific responsibility for tourism. Secondly, there is the Treasury, with responsibility for fiscal matters. How much of the new tax approved in the autumn statement in this House last night will go towards developing the infrastructure of tourism? Thirdly, there is the Department of Transport, which is concerned with highways, with coach and train regulations, and with the provision of adequate coach and car parking in great cities such as London. Fourthly, the Home Office has responsibility for licensing and for fire regulations. It is also responsible for television licensing. There was a significant lack of consultation when the new rates for television licensing were introduced for the hotel industry. Fifthly, there is the Department of Employment, which obviously is concerned with employment matters.

Sixthly, there is the Department of Education and Science. Here it should be noted that the tourist industry, through its hotels and catering, provides two vacancies for every university graduate. No other industry in Britain could make that claim. Seventhly, the responsibilities of the Department of the Environment include sport. Eighthly, the Department of Health and Social Security is responsible for the health regulations governing hotels and other accommodation. Ninthly, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is concerned with farmhouse tourism. Tenthly, the Foreign Office obviously has a responsibility for the overseas aspects of tourism. The eleventh and twelfth examples are the Scottish Office and Welsh Office, and to make it a baker's dozen we have also the Northern Ireland Office.

Through unco-ordination there has been confusion in an industry that is essentially voluntary. We need to co-ordinate and to recognise the potential of tourism. We need a Minister whose sole responsibility is tourism and who will ensure that the industry goes from strength to strength.

Little mention is made in Britain of the European Community's investment in tourism. In the period from 1975 to 1983, tourism projects represented under 1 per cent. of the total European regional development fund

allocation. Britain benefited most. The allocations of grant to Britain for tourism for infrastructure projects were £9·03 million. It is interesting to note how we compare in that respect with the other member states of the European Community. It is obvious that we are doing extremely well. West Germany comes next, with an allocation of £7·2 million. Then there are Italy, with £6·8 million, France with £1·5 million, and Denmark with a mere £42,000. There is no such investment in Ireland, the Netherlands, Greece, Belgium and Luxembourg. Therefore, we are using our channels of communication correctly in the interests of tourism by seeking sums from the EC, and that effort should be applauded.

In November last year, my hon. Friend who has responsibility for tourism announced that he planned to maintain grants for section 4 expenditure in England at about the current level over the four years until 1986-87, making a total of about £35 million for the period.

The industry needs more incentives. There is a need for much more co-ordination and recognition. We are sowing a seed that is bearing fruit. Let us consider that today.

11.34 am

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I intervene at this point in the debate because I think that there is a danger —I exempt the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory), who has just made a thoughtful speech, from my criticism —of the debate becoming a series of encomia for the tourist attractions of the constituencies represented by the speakers, and I am anxious to give the debate a slightly sharper focus.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) chose tourism as his topic following his luck in the ballot. His interesting contribution gave the debate a worthwhile start. I wonder whether his constituents in Sherwood, when looking at the hon. Gentleman's 1 per cent. majority and thinking of the deficiencies of the Conservative Government's record in regard to tourism and many other matters, may think that he did enough this morning at least to guarantee himself a job in tourism after the next general election.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does not the hon. Member recognise that in the past six months 20,000 members of the National Union of Mineworkers have withdrawn their political levy to the Labour party?

Mr. Gould: I thought that I was rather generous in giving way so early in my speech, but I shall not be diverted by that sort of point. However, I hasten to agree with another point that the hon. Gentleman and other speakers have made—that we should all welcome and recognise the importance of the tourist industry.

There is no question but that an industry that now has a turnover of about £8 billion is of very substantial significance. It is an industry whose foreign exchange earnings will, we hope, approach about £5 billion. That is of very considerable value and benefit to the economy. We are told that 1·4 million jobs are produced by the industry. There is some slight variation in the figures that are given. It is notoriously difficult to ascribe certain kinds of economic activity to tourism. It is difficult to separate the meals bought in restaurants by tourists from those bought by local inhabitants. Nevertheless, I am content to accept the figure of 1·4 million jobs. I also accept the argument that tourism, by its nature, is a labour-intensive industry, and is likely to provide yet more jobs in the future.

I listened to and understand the predictions that tourism might well create 50,000 new jobs a year, and that there might be 250,000 jobs to come from that source over the next few years. That has been recognised by the Confederation of British Industry, which has instituted its own examination of the job creation prospects.

The debate takes place in the context of a somewhat wider argument concerning the role of service industries as compared with that of manufacturing industries in our economy. I do not think that we need get too bogged down on that argument. However, when I hear Conservative Members, such as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes), claim that tourism is our only growth industry, I fear that that tells us little about tourism but a great deal about the state of the rest of the economy. If our economy were as flourishing and as healthy as is sometimes pretended by Conservative Members we would not be pointing to tourism as our only example of growth. We would be looking, as the Prime Minister herself did only a year or two ago, to electronics and information technology, not to mention all the other aspects of manufacturing industry that have so sadly suffered over recent years.

While registering the point that the tourist industry figures, in terms of turnover, foreign exchange earnings and employment, all look somewhat better than they should—simply because the industry is at least keeping its head above water while so many others are sinking —we cannot afford the luxury of picking and choosing between jobs in one industry or another. We are not in a position to say that we would much rather have higher paid jobs or more highly skilled jobs somewhere else. In our position we are bound to take what we can get. That is a sad reflection of our present economic plight, but it is nevertheless a realistic acceptance of it. So, when hon. Members and all those involved in the industry point to the real prospect of job creation, I am prepared to acknowledge and welcome it. But that in turn imposes an obligation on the Government and on the industry to make sure that the job prospects are brought to fruition, and that real efforts are made to maximise that potential. In that context there has been a danger this morning of being somewhat carried away by euphoria.

One speaker after another, intent on praising the attractions of his own constituency, has tended to give a somewhat one-sided picture of the way in which the industry is developing. As in so many other matters, Conservative members have a curious blind spot—it may be shared by the Minister when he responds—in looking at balance of trade figures. They are very content to point to figures that show an increase in our foreign exchange earnings but seem totally oblivious of the other side of the account. Although the picture is promising and offers some hope for the future, it is by no means as healthy and as satisfactory as has sometimes been suggested during the debate.

The number of overseas visitors, for example, is only now approaching the peak that it reached in the late 1970s. There followed an enormous trough, and that in turn was reflected in tourism's contribution to the balance of trade figures. In 1981, virtually for the first time in modern history, an industry which traditionally had earned us a substantial balance of foreign exchange payments went into a deficit of £302 million. The following year the deficit rose to £472 million. In 1983 there was a slight improvement, with a deficit of £399 million. This year we

[Mr. Gould]

appear to be on course for a deficit of about £354 million. Most worrying is the forecast commissioned by the industry, which suggests that by 1987 the deficit will have increased to £519 million.

Looking back over the recent period we have to recognise that the number of overseas visitors spending nights here between 1980 and 1983 fell by 2·5 per cent., whereas the number of British visitors who spent nights abroad rose by 51·4 per cent. The trend is very much against us.

The industry's own forecast is that between 1982 and 1987 the number of long holidays taken in Great Britain, whether by overseas tourists or by British holidaymakers, will fall by 2 per cent. The rosy forecasts so often made for employment in the industry will be realised only if real efforts are made to ensure that that growth occurs.

Unfortunately, when we consider the factors which will influence that development we find that, true to form, and in this case quite realistically, the Government take the view that the most important influence on the future of the industry is the general economic climate. I say "unfortunately" because the experience of the past three or four years suggests exactly what impact the general economic climate has on the tourist industry. We have moved into deficit in the industry, because the figures fell in exactly the same way as so many other industries suffered.

It is easier to identify some of the precise causes when we consider tourism. One of the them was the grossly overvalued exchange rate against the American dollar. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) pointed out, it is true that that has been remedied. We see the benefits of having a more realistic exchange rate. But the pound remains substantially overvalued on any reckonable basis against many of the European currencies, and that must still be hurting our tourist industry.

But it is more than just a question of an overvalued exchange rate. It is the general climate in which investment throughout the economy has been depressed in recent years, and again it is possible to identify the respects in which the tourist industry is peculiarly vulnerable to some of these developments.

The Government have made great efforts over recent years to cut the level of spending on public services and to prevent local and other authorities from maintaining their levels of expenditure. The consequence is that many basic services on which tourism depends, such as public transport, are now less good, less efficient and less good value for money than they were only a few years ago. As a consequence of our impoverishment through high unemployment, we are now a shabbier, scruffier, dirtier country to visit than even a few years ago. Anyone who cares to visit European cities will notice the staggering contrast between the levels of cleanliness and prosperity visible in the streets of our major cities. That is a great deterrent—one which we shall ignore at our peril—to overseas visitors. They find that the promoted tourist attractions are well worth visiting, but the time that they spend scruffing around our increasingly dirty streets because local authorities cannot afford to clean them properly is becoming less and less pleasant for them.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): My hon. Friend should look at Wandsworth.

Mr. Gould: Wandsworth is a case in point.

The Government are in grave danger of making this worse. In the future we know that there will be even less spent on some of these services. The trend of Government policy on taxation will add to indirect taxes and make our country more expensive for tourists as a result. There is a great deal implicit in the Government's economic policies over the past three or four years and what they propose to do in the remainder of their term of office which, inexorably, will move against the interests of a developing tourist industry.

Apart from reversing their overall policies, which is unlikely, the only way that the Government can remedy the situation is by taking some action to promote tourism directly. Many hon. Members have rightly said that the prime responsibility must rest with private enterprise. But it has been noticeable and noteworthy how many of them have managed to slip in a plea for this or that public expenditure project to promote tourism. The hon. Member for Yardley ran up a bill approaching £1 billion by the end of his shopping list. He was looking for very substantial intervention.

Mr. Bevan: Will not the hon. Gentleman agree a figure of £54 million, which is somewhat less than he suggested?

Mr. Gould: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has costed it, but I doubt whether even £54 million will get past his right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary.

The Government also have an obligation to shape the structure of public involvement in the industry. Just over a year ago we had a statement by the Minister of State following the long-awaited results of the review of the tourist industry. What was announced then was a slightly curious mish-mash of a reorganisation. Everyone accepted that something had to be done, but what came forward was what might be described as a half-way house. It was neither a merger nor a clear division of responsibilities. We have the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board operating under the same chairman but still with somewhat different functions. It will be interesting to hear the Minister say how he sees that reorganisation developing. Has it been successful? Is it working well? What further changes does he think may be necessary? Is it still the case, for example, that the Scottish and Welsh tourist boards are in limbo, without a clear relationship established with the more central authorities?

Then there is the role of the regional boards. This is a matter about which I know the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) has been extremely worried. He argues—and I agree with him—that to stimulate tourism in the regions, which has been the theme of so many speeches in the debate, we need more powerful, though possibly fewer, and better resourced regional boards. There is no sign that that is the direction that the Government are taking.

The London tourist board is a good example. Only a year ago the Minister told us that London was the gateway for English tourism and that that was where our effort had to be concentrated. The London board is now issuing cries of distress because it has lost its GLC funding. If the Government have their way there is little prospect of that being restored, yet they have done little by way of response to that loss of resources.

In the last financial year, the general resources available to all the regional boards fell in comparison with

the preceding year, though admittedly only by 0·2 per cent. When the industry pleaded for help through capital allowances, the Government, claiming that they were treating the tourist industry in the same way as manufacturing industry, refused it capital allowances and reduced those available to the manufacturing industry.

Several hon. Members have stressed the need for more training in the tourist industry. That is a general problem. We have paid far too little attention to the training of skilled people in industry, and tourism is no exception.

The local authorities have an important role in promoting tourism in the regions. They are able to make proper co-ordinated arrangements with regional tourist boards and other interested parties. Again, the thrust of the Government's policy is to reduce the resources available to local authorities. If the authorities showed any signs of wanting to do something on the lines suggested by the hon. Member for Yardley they would promptly be rate-capped and told that they were acting beyond their competence.

In the tourist industry, as in so many other industries, the prospects and potential are obvious, but the Government offer nothing more than rhetoric. They say that they see a wonderful and glorious future for the tourist industry, but that it has nothing to do with them. They say that the industry must get on by itself and that they will create the economic climate in which its efforts will succeed. Unfortunately, difficulties of a general economic nature will penalise and handicap the tourist industry.

When the Minister replies to today's excellent speeches, I hope that he will make a practical commitment in terms of interest and, most of all, in terms of resources. We do not want the Government to fund the entire enterprise. We want them to provide the seed money, without which the potential for the tourist industry cannot be realised.

11.52 am

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was full of doom and gloom. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) and others have made clear, tourism into Britain remains buoyant. Tourists from the United States are increasing because of the rise in the value of the dollar and more tourists are arriving from Europe, Japan and the rest of the world.

We should not be gloomy. Tourism is a great growth industry. Britain pulls the crowds. Tourists spend £5 billion a year here. Tourism is a job creator. The hon. Member for Dagenham rightly said that we cannot pick and choose which jobs we create, yet many people are noticeably unenthusiastic about tourism. One wonders why. I have identified three reasons.

The first is a vague feeling that the production of physical objects has a higher value than the production of services. That is sheer nonsense. What matters is that people's demands and requirements are met, so that employment is generated. It does not matter whether one manufactures something which, when dropped, hurts one's toe, or whether one provides a service such as insurance or hotel accommodation. We must get away from the peculiar metaphysical distinction between the production of goods and the production of services, because it makes no sense.

Secondly, some people find tourist annoying. They jostle on pavements; there are many of them; they queue in shops and cause delays for local shoppers. We must get over that because of the economic importance of tourists.

Thirdly, in some people's minds tourism is linked with hotels and restaurants and some think that cooks, waiters and those doing other quasi-domestic work are servile. That traditional British attitude has never been shared on the continent, where the chef at a restaurant or hotel and his staff are honoured and respected as highly valued citizens.

Perhaps that prejudice in Britain has diminished with increased foreign travel. I am not sure how far that process has been hastened or otherwise by the large number of British girls who, in the last 20 or 30 years, have gone on holiday and fallen in love with Italian, Spanish or Greek waiters or others employed in the tourist trade.

Tourism is vital. It has great potential for increasing employment. People come to Britain not only to seek specific enjoyments that generate income and employment, such as the arts, our heritage, our traditions and the beauty of our countryside, to patronise hotels and restaurants or even to shop. Many tourists come here simply to wander around to see what they can see and get the feel of the place.

According to the ETB's digest of tourist statistics for 1983, a survey of people leaving the country revealed that the two most popular tourist spots were Piccadilly circus and Trafalgar square. They were more popular than Buckingham palace, Westminster abbey, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, the Tower of London, St. Paul's cathedral, the National gallery, the British museum and other venues in London and the provinces.

Such places are so overcrowded that we should concentrate on dispersing tourists nationally and locally. London has its great art galleries and historic places such as the National gallery, the British museum, the Tate gallery, the Victoria and Albert museum and the science museums. We should try to persuade more tourists to visit other places such as the magnificent Wallace collection, the splendid Dulwich picture gallery and the Imperial war museum in south London.

The same applies to the east midlands. Another table in the digest says that the number of visitors to Burghley house, Stamford, between 1982 and 1983 rose from 46,600 to 61,400—an increase of 32 per cent. in a year. That is a remarkable achievement.

There is much to see all over Britain. We should try to persuade more tourists into the mark 2 places instead of trying to cram them all into the Tower of London, Stonehenge, Stratford-on-Avon and Hampton court in my constituency, which is one of the most popular places in the country.

Much more can be seen in the Twickenham area besides Hampton court. Twickenham Week was started four years ago when the Prince of Wales visited the area on the 900th anniversary of the town. I have the honour to be president of Twickenham Week. The occasion boosts the area, which contains many historic and lovely buildings, including the historic St. Mary's church, Marble Hill house, and Orleans house gallery. Many places in Teddington are also worth seeing. I refer to St. Mary's church, the famous Horace Walpole house and Strawberry Hill, which was the foundation for the new gothic architecture without which the Palace of Westminster would never have been constructed in the 19th century.

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

Near Hampton court there is Bushy park and Garrick's villa, and many other places are to be seen along the Thames.

Hampton court itself remains an important place and its interior was visited last year by about 500,000, in addition to those who visited the gardens. Its success was augmented by the son et lumière programme of its history, which was presented in aid of the Save the Children Fund and sponsored by the Milk Marketing Board, whose headquarters is nearby.

There is a problem with the increase in the number of restaurants in outer London areas, where traditionally residents are not used to so many. There were about a dozen restaurants in my constituency 15 years ago, and now there are well over 30. Given the nature of the area and the size of the main streets, some of the restaurants are close to housing areas.

There is an increasing demand for the services provided by restaurants, both from tourists and local people. However, when a restaurateur wants to open a new restaurant, he encounters planning difficulties. There is often local opposition because of the need to provide car parking space, the noise of doors being slammed late at night and the way in which cooking smells and canned music impinge on the environment of those living nearby. This problem has arisen in several places locally and seems bound to continue.

There is conflict between the demand for restaurants, which stems partly from the growth of tourism, and the protection of the environment of those living nearby. I hope that the Department of the Environment will co-ordinate experience in different parts of the country to ascertain what we can learn from one another in resolving a problem which has given rise to considerable local controversy in many areas.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood for having brought the motion before the House and given us the opportunity to debate it. I fully support it.

12.3 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): I, too, extend my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) for providing us with an opportunity to discuss the important subject of tourism and employment. The House will know of my interest in the subject as a constituency Member and as the parliamentary consultant to the British Hotels, Restaurants and Caterers Association.

It is an unfortunate fact that all Governments spend far too much time attempting to save declining industries and giving insufficient attention positively to support and encourage successful and expanding sectors of the economy. We all know why this unsatisfactory situation exists. It has become a characteristic of our system that Governments, for whatever reason, spend a disproportionate amount of time in responding to events rather than seeking to influence the pattern and sequence of future developments.

There is no doubt in my mind that tourism, and especially the Government's attitude to the industry, is caught up in the unfortunate framework to which I have referred. However, the present Administration have made certain attempts to enable the tourist industry to break out of the dilemma. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry and his immediate predecessor, Mr. Iain Sproat, carried out a thorough investigation of the tourist industry. They deserve much credit for taking that initiative. Their review of tourism has led at least to the establishment of the basis of a fabric for a future strategy for tourism. It is important that we do not lose this initiative.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) observed that in structural terms we need to follow through that initiative on behalf of the regional tourist boards. We must also maintain the impetus in a financial context, especially as there is a good base on which to build.

Tourism is our largest growth industry. It is estimated that 1·4 million are employed in it. Furthermore, it is creating about 50,000 new jobs annually. That figure is in stark contrast to the regrettable job-shedding that is taking place in so many sectors of the economy. Tourism is the greatest single earner of foreign currency. It produces annually about £5,000 million in invisible exports. In addition, it is earning about £6,000 million from the domestic market. It can be justly proud of its record nationally on behalf of those who are involved in it.

I welcome the initiatives that have been taken by Ministers and I welcome also the recent announcement of the CBI to carry out a study into job creation prospects in the tourist industry. Both the Government and the CBI have recognised the important role that tourism can and should play in our economic and social life. Our immediate task is to persuade Ministers of the need for some modest pump priming to increase the momentum. I shall suggest one or two ways in which that should be done.

Section 4 grant aid for approved projects is now available throughout the country. I was all in favour of that development. In addition, my hon. Friend the Minister of State has ensured that greater emphasis is placed on what might be described as the two sharp ends, the need to persuade overseas visitors to come to the United Kingdom and, secondly, the need to ensure that once they are here their requirements and expectations are met. It is in the latter context that section 4 grant aid is important.

In 1983-84 the English tourist board allocated £6·3 million for this purpose. It was able to assist 503 projects. That meant that 116 projects were assisted in the south-west at a cost of £2·76 million. Although 116 projects were assisted, 151 were approved by the West Country tourist board. That means that a significant number of worthwhile projects had to be excluded because of financial constraints. The cost to the taxpayer of the creation of each full-time job in tourism in the south-west is about £5,000. That is money well spent, besides the fact that it is cost effective. In my constituency of Cornwall, South-East unemployment is 16 per cent. We all know that the cost to the nation of each of those unemployed is almost £6,000 a year. I should have thought that that was a worthwhile conversion ratio in respect of the money made available under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969.

Last year, some 3,500 places were made available for training through the provisions of the hotel and catering industry training board. About 90 per cent. obtained jobs at the end of their year's training with the employer with whom they had spent most of their time. I gather that this year more places are available than have been taken up. I should have thought that the Government, and especially the Department of Employment, had a responsibility to

make that information more readily available. Increasingly, there are enhanced career structures in employment in the tourist industry.

Excellent work has been undertaken by COSIRA—the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas. That council does an excellent job. I welcome its emphasis in trying to persuade people to diversify their plans and its advocacy of the concept of, for example, multi-purpose land use in conjunction with agriculture, especially in the hill areas.

I emphasise the need for an adequate infrastructure. The issue of roads and signposting is important. I support everything my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) said about the need for a fundamental reform of the licensing system. Such a reform is long overdue.

I emphasise the importance of tourism to regional economies. My county of Cornwall has more than 3 million visitors a year but, sadly, only 10 per cent. of them come from overseas. I certainly share the view of my hon. Friends that we should move away from the London-Stratford-Oxford-Cambridge circuit. Nevertheless, £250 million is spent by visitors in Cornwall of which, it is estimated, £90 million stays within the county. The equivalent of 25,000 full-time jobs are provided by the tourist industry. There is no doubt that the tourist industry has an important part to play not only in the national and regional economy but in providing greater job opportunities. I hope that, as a result of this debate, the Government will at least take on board some modest financial pump priming to ensure that the momentum is sustained.

12.14 pm

Mr. Peter Hubbard-Miles (Bridgend): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate as the only Member present representing a Welsh constituency. I recognise the fact that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is not directly responsible for tourism in Wales, but I am sure that my comments will find their way to the right desk.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) painted a scenario similar to the one in which my constituency is set. My constituency is perhaps suffering because it contains a famous coalfield and industrial area. It is not recognised sufficiently as an area of great beauty and historical interest. Travelling through the area, as I do regularly, one crosses the Severn and is then close to the beautiful area of the Wye and Usk valleys. One then goes through the Vale of Glamorgan to the Gower peninsula. If properly presented, this area will become a great centre for tourism.

I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood romanticise about Robin Hood and Maid Marian. I understand that recent research leads us to suspect that King Arthur was buried within or close to the boundaries of my constituency.

Within my constituency—and perhaps unknown even to those living there—there is tremendous historical interest. Within three or four miles of one another are the castles of Ogmore, Coity and Candlestone. The Roman road leading from Cardiff to the west called at the buried city of Cynffig which is another area of great interest. My constituency on the Bristol channel has nine miles of golden sands from the east to the west and, if the tide is right, I can walk the whole length of my constituency on golden sands.

The Welsh scene includes the Wales tourist board, the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh water authority and, recently, CADW which has been created to look after the ancient and historic monuments in Wales. Greater co-operation and co-ordination is needed between those bodies. We must recognise that, together with local authorities and central Government, they all have a part to play in bringing about an awareness of the need to develop tourism in this area of high unemployment.

There has been considerable investment by the private sector. New hotels have begun to spring up in various places. Local authorities, together with the Welsh Development Agency, have developed marinas and coastal attractions. I hope that the commercial success of Superted—the Welsh Rupert—will result in a Superted theme park on the south Wales coast.

I have referred to being able to walk along the golden sands that stretch from one end of my constituency to the other. That is where the crunch comes, or perhaps I should say squelch, ouch or yuk. One may find oneself walking not on golden sands but on a deposit from the inadequate and antiquated sewage disposal units which occur on the south Wales beaches and, I imagine, at many other coastal resorts.

The Welsh water authority has a programme for the modernisation of those sewage disposal units. It has a capital programme amounting to about £75 million over the next 10 years. Investment in such schemes is necessary. They will be profitable by improving the prospect of tourist development. I make no apology for urging my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ensure that no impediment is placed in the way of the development of those sewage disposal units so that the polluted beaches can be cleaned up.

I should not like hon. Members to imagine that all beaches are polluted. Most of those in my area are up to EEC standards. The fact that one or two are not up to those standards but are heavily polluted is bound to detract from the tourist value of the area. It is a matter of great anxiety to many that the developments should not be hindered.

Recently, the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) opened a new plant in his constituency. As a result, the number of complaints about pollution of the beaches east of the Mumbles dropped dramatically last summer. A continuation of that programme is needed in Barry and my home town of Porthcawl where there is desperate need for a new sewage disposal unit.

I should like to pay tribute to those conservation, preservation and historic societies which take care of and protect our places of beauty and historical interest. They do a tremendous job of making people aware of the interesting parts of the environment. There are times, however, when they pay more attention to the means of achieving their objective than to the objective itself. While they argue about where a sewage outfall should be sited, the four-letter word remains on the beaches. It is sometines distressing to think that those who seek to improve and protect the environment are deferring the time when it will be improved.

The parts of south Wales that I represent, and the constituencies along the south Wales coast, suffer seriously from unemployment. We have the infrastructure. The M4 and the 125 inter-city line run through the middle of my constituency. That has enabled the Secretary of State to attract inward investment to the area. Considerable success has been achieved in bringing industry to that part

[Mr. Peter Hubbard-Miles]

of south Wales. There have been the Ford, Sony, Smith Kendon and Callard and Bowser factories, and now the new science park which has attracted a number of companies from America. Good communications should encourage the Secretary of State to take even greater advantage of the area. He should use them to develop the tourist industry.

It is a matter of great joy to me that, with good communications backed by the Cardiff airport, industry from all over the world is taking its place in the Principality—in the industrial and coal mining areas of south Wales.

We have places of great beauty and historical interest in south Wales. Much can therefore be done to alleviate unemployment by improving the tourist attractions. I hope that the Secretary of State will seek to bring together the agencies involved in tourism, make the south Wales coast another great attraction for tourists and allow the area to make its ever-increasing contribution to solving the unemployment problem.

12.26 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): The House will be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) for choosing this subject for debate today and also for his distinguished speech. It seems to me that he has talents not just as an accomplished parliamentarian but as a future Hollywood screen writer, as he showed with his reference to Robin Hood and Maid Marian.

There have been many good contributions from the Conservative Benches, but it is unfortunate that a depressing feature of the debate is that there has been almost complete silence from and absence of Opposition Members. One is almost tempted to ask, "Do they not care about where the new jobs are coming from?" If nothing else has emerged from the debate, it has become clear that tourism is one of the great growth industries of the future.

We have heard, time and time again, that the industry employs 1·4 million people and that 50,000 new jobs a year are being created. Of which other industry can it be said that over the next five years—before the end of the decade—250,000 new jobs will be created? However, the Opposition do not wish to take part in the deliberations about its future. The industry has been consistently undervalued and underrated. So much so that tourism is the slumbering giant of British industry. If my hon. Friend's debate does nothing else, I hope that it will improve our national and parliamentary perception of the potential of tourism.

A change of attitude is needed by the Government, Parliament, industry and the public. I should like to share my few thoughts on the subject with the House. A change of attitude within Government has, to some extent, already started. My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for tourism has done a fine job of overhauling the tourist boards. But one energetic Minister does not make a Government policy. Improvements are needed in the Government's attitude towards tourism.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) spoke eloquently—I wholeheartedly agreed with him—about the lack of co-ordination in the tourist industry. The problem goes deeper than that. The flow of information, especially statistical information, to Government on tourism is amateurish and inadequate in comparison with other industries. Even the most specialised classification of manufacturing industry is carefully watched by the Government in terms of statistics and the monitoring of figures, but the statistics on tourism are not much better than mere assertions provided by tourist boards.

We do not know where the 50,000 new jobs a year are coming from, nor do we know how the £5 billion a year of foreign currency earnings is spent. There is a whole range of leisure industries, such as gardening, do-it-yourself, health and fitness businesses and sports clothing industries, that are untabulated and unrecognised in job-creating and financial statistics. The entire database of the tourist industry is weak, especially when compared with other industries, such as the heavy and electronics industries, and needs to be overhauled.

Secondly, there needs to be a change in the Government's attitude towards the tourist industry and grants. So far they seem to have been positively parsimonious in their efforts to prime the pump for Britain's fastest-growing industry. The largest source of grants for tourism comes from section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969. These are running at the rate of £35 million for the next four years, that is, at about £9 million a year. That is not much for an industry that is creating 50,000 new jobs a year. Even when the coal industry is working, it employs only 250,000 people, but the taxpayer subsidises that industry to the tune of £1·3 billion a year, even in a good year. In comparison, therefore, tourism seems to be the poor cousin.

The time has come to shift ministerial responsibility for tourism from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Department of Employment. I mean no reflection on any of my hon. Friends who are Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, especially not on my hon. Friend the Minister of State who has responsibility for tourism, but that responsibility nevertheless needs to be changed for two reasons.

First, our most important fight is for jobs. Tourism is one of the few battlefields on which the nation is winning. We need to continue to win that battle. Employment is the key to the future of tourism and needs to be recognised as such by the Department, which has a large budget to encourage further employment. Until about a year ago the Department of Trade and Industry used to look at tourism almost entirely in terms of statistics for imports and exports. But tourism must be considered primarily in terms of jobs.

Tourism should also be considered in terms of training. Again, the Department of Employment is the spearhead Department in training matters and needs to seize that responsibility. There is a need for a change of attitude towards training in the tourist industry. The industry is crying out for a new training structure. As a nation we are not yet accustomed to the concept of professional service and hospitality, as it is understood and trained for by other tourist nations, such as the Swiss. British tourism is still bedevilled by what may be called the Fawlty Towers dimension of service.

All hon. Members know of the stereotypes, such as the grumpy cab driver, the surly waiter, the scatterbrained telephonist and the cleaner who flicks round with a duster that leaves the room even dustier when he or she has finished. Although the British love to laugh at those archetypal characters from "Manuel" country, visitors to Britain may have a different reaction when they encounter them. Obviously I speak of a minority. For every one

Fawlty Towers there are probably 50 good hotels. However, we need a training programme in the tourist industry and a training programme for the marketing side of the tourist industry.

The attitude of the public to tourism needs to be changed, especially the attitude of Opposition Members. British thinking remains rooted in the past when it comes to jobs. There is a great deal of macho union talk about the dignity of labour, as though this phrase refers only to heavy industry labour in smoke-stack Britain. Yet we are living in a era of massive and uncomfortable structural change in British employment.

Tourism has a great part to play in the new structure, but it still has a second-class status, even among the new sunrise industries. The Government rightly place much emphasis on the North sea oil and gas industry. Offshore, it employs only about 21,000 people. The Government's great white hope for jobs—cable television, which I persist in thinking will amount only to a licence to lose money—employs even fewer people. Well established high technology industries such as aerospace and computers are far smaller than the tourist industry. It is important, too, to bear in mind that high technology sunrise industries engineer labour out of the system whereas the tourist industry is labour-intensive and highly resistant to machine replacement.

As professionalism in the tourist industry grows, so I believe will recognition that there is just as much dignity of labour and managerial and technical skill in that industry as in any other. This becomes clear when one considers the specialisations within the industry. I shall refer to one of which I have professional knowledge—the health and exercise sector. I declare an interest as chairman of a health hydro. That sector of the industry did not exist 10 years ago but today there are many health hydros, health farms, exercise centres, fitness classes, body maintenance organisations, spas and gymnasia employing, at a rough guess, between 50,000 and 100,000 people. It is labour-intensive, it has large foreign currency earnings, job satisfaction is high, and it deserves encouragement.

Most tourist enterprises will always be cottage industries to some extent, inspired by individual proprietors and relatively small business men. In terms of creating jobs for the future the Government should seriously consider large tourist projects that create large numbers of jobs. Here I refer to the success of Alton towers and other theme parks, which seem not to have existed a few years ago but are now major employers. Alton towers' latest development is to transform Battersea power station into a huge pleasure park á la Disneyland, directly creating 4,000 jobs in south London and perhaps a further 2,000 indirectly. The Government should study the pump-priming effect of such major tourist magnets as theme parks and sports centres.

My constitueny is in east Kent, which has a very high rate of unemployment—nudging 20 per cent. One job in every 10 is in tourism, which employs a total of about 18,000. The area is well supplied—perhaps even over-supplied—with hotels and boarding houses and we have experience of the magnet effect of a major tourist attraction such as a sporting event. This year, Sandwich is once again proud to be the venue for the open golf championship. This means that for a week or so in the summer 130,000 extra visitors come to east Kent, many flying into Manston airport on charter aircraft from overseas, filling all the restaurants, hotels and boarding houses and bringing an enormous transfusion of economic vitality to the local tourist industry. If only we could have such a magnet all the year round or at least for the peak months.

I would like to see established in east Kent a magnet such as a national exercise and fitness centre; or an all-year-round garden centre; or a major national sports complex; or a coastal national park with nature trails and jogging tracks; or a historical theme park illustrating some of the pageant of English history at the Bulwark shore, from the landing of St. Augustine to the retreat from Dunkirk. A project of this kind in east Kent would be an enormous creator of jobs. The total cost of building such a centre would be perhaps £10 million or £15 million—far less than the £25 million that the Kent coalfield and its 2,400 miners lose annually on their activities in the same region.

I have sought to illustrate from a national as well as a constituency angle that at this time of our country's history, when the Government deserve credit for having to some extent won the battle against inflation but have not yet really begun to fight the battle against unemployment, tourism is a vital part of the battle and more attention and activity by Government and everyone else deserves to be devoted to it.

12.39 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on raising this important matter and on his excellent opening speech. As a number of hon. Members have said, tourism can and does play an important part in revitalising inner city areas, especially those suffering economic and social decline. It can provide new jobs where they are most needed. It is worth repeating that British tourists spent some £4 billion in England last year and that overseas tourists in Britain spent over £3 billion. We can conclude from that that Britain is one of the most popular tourist areas in the world.

Tourism benefits local communities by attracting money and providing jobs as well as creating and supporting extra amenities and facilities which are available for the residents to enjoy. That is why it is to be hoped that no local authority will ignore the tourist potential of their own area.

Figures published by *British Business*—a weekly news magazine published by the Department of Trade and Industry—show an encouraging increase in employment in many tourism-related industries in the second quarter of this year. That is especially welcome in the east Midlands. As has been said, employment in the hotel trade has increased by over 17,000 — 7·5 per cent. — while employment in restaurants and cafés has increased by 3·5 per cent., providing over 6,000 more jobs.

It is the service industries that are currently showing the biggest growth, and that is due in no small measure to tourism. In the east Midlands, in particular, that is an encouraging development.

I believe that tourism will remain one of the great growth industries, and I hope that the east Midlands as a whole will grasp the opportunity that it presents. Some people may say that certain cities are at a disadvantage in that events of historical importance may have happened elsewhere. I do not accept that argument. Cities are often surrounded by beautiful countryside and numerous stately

[Mr. Greg Knight]

homes, castles and other tourist attractions, and they are ideally placed to be promoted as centres for touring holidays. Tourists today are far more mobile than ever before. The cities themselves can provide entertainment and other attractions for travelling tourists who may be visiting nearby areas. We should not accept the idea that in order to exploit tourism one requires the presence of a castle or stately home. Cities in the east Midlands can increase their tourist potential, even with the absence of crumbling monuments in their midst, by providing entertainment and recreational activities.

It is not always necessary to spend huge sums from public funds. Many firms are becoming aware at last of the benefits to the local economy that can be derived from tourism and from increasing the attractiveness of inner city areas. One of the welcome developments of the past few years has been the increased sponsorship of the arts and live entertainment events by business. That trend should be welcomed.

I congratulate the English tourist board on its plans to publish the first-ever handbook, which, I understand, is aimed at school leavers and careers advisers, on employment opportunities in tourism. As tourism expands it will need to train and employ many people.

Most right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned the areas that they represent, so I do not apologise for referring to mine and surrounding areas. Derbyshire is and deserves to be an excellent and established tourist area. Britain's first national park is in Derbyshire and at Matlock Bath we have the country's first cablecar system. Wirksworth, which used to be the capital of lead mining in the midlands, is now a thriving tourist area. Crich has a tramway museum. At Hartington, former railway lines have been used imaginatively to provide the Tissington trail and the High Peak trail which are ideal for cycling or walking through a beautiful area which is also of historic interest. Nearby Bakewell, which is known for its tarts of a non-human variety, has been known since Saxon times for its iron-rich springs and fine gardens.

I was amazed to learn quite recently that there is a castle at Bolsover. I do not want to be provocative so I shall not suggest a possible use for its dungeon. However, information and publicity is extremely important and perhaps the district of Bolsover should try to get some publicity for the area's more positive features.

In the city that I have the honour to represent, we have the Royal Crown Derby factory, a fine cathedral, the Bridge chapel, the Guildhall and a fine selection of parks. I hope that, in the interests of both tourism and those of the city, Derby might soon have a new hotel in the market place instead of the derelict monstrosity that stands there. I urge the Government to support Derby's urban programme submission. It is a good case and I hope that the application will not fall on deaf ears. As I think Lord Byron said, there are things in Derbyshire as noble as in Greece or Switzerland. I would humbly agree.

What can and should be done to boost tourism? Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have referred to road signs. The problem is that all signs are, legally speaking, advertisements and therefore covered by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1984, which require express planning consent from a local authority. The country has an obligation to inform people of its heritage and attractions rather than merely assist those who want to find a garage for petrol or to visit a WC. More flexibility and good will is needed by many district and county authorities. Signs should be regarded not as an eyesore but as information to encourage people to stop and spend money.

We should also examine our attitude to tourists. The common view of the tourist is of some aging gauche American who wants to see a stately home. That is not the case. A tourist is someone who spends money during a visit, whether he be a sportsman, a rock climber, a potholer, a pop music fan, a railway enthusiast or just someone who is taking the family out for the day. Local authorities especially have tended to have a rather blinkered view of their areas in regard to their potential tourism value.

Businesses and local authorities should use imagination to encourage visitors. It is not just a case of, as I thought the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said—I hope that I misunderstood him — putting in more Government money. Planning committees should not be so narrow-minded and licensing justices should remember that we are now in 1984, not 1915. It is interesting that a recent survey of all overseas visitors to Britain showed that more then half of those interviewed had one special complaint, which was the inflexibility of Britain's licensing laws. It must be maddening for foreign tourists to find that if they go north of the border to Scotland the licensing laws are far more flexible than they are in England and Wales, where they may have difficulty in getting a drink. On a recent visit to Stratford-upon-Avon I met a number of American tourists who were bewildered by what they regarded as our archaic licensing laws. They had spent an interesting morning looking around Stratford-upon-Avon and decided at a quarter to three or 3 o'clock to have a meal and a drink. They were amazed to find that many of the town's fine establishments were closed or were about to close and that therefore they were unwilling and unable, if they abided by the law, to serve them. The Home Office must be urged to look at an early opportunity at our licensing laws.

We should not look down upon or discourage what colloquially can be called "popular entertainment." Alton towers was recently described to me by somebody as a hideous, over-blown pleasure park. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) has indicated, Alton towers is also a place that provides entertainment and pleasure for tens of thousands of tourists. Just as important is the fact that it provides jobs for very many people: not just for bar and kitchen staff but for security officers and musicians. On a recent visit to Alton towers I was surprised to find that a number of bands and musicians play there on a full time basis. The employment opportunities in places such as Alton towers cannot be underestimated. There is another spin-off. Money is spent by tourists either on their way to such places or on their way back. Money may be spent in a public house or in a restaurant or even at a garage which benefits from the sale of a couple of gallons of petrol and a Mars bar, or whatever, by customers who would not otherwise be using that route.

The House should be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) for initiating the debate. Tourism in Britain is a growing industry, not an industry that is nearing its peak. It is only in its infancy. Many economic benefits are to be obtained if only we seize the opportunity.

12.53 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): On behalf of my hon. Friends and colleagues I welcome the debate and am grateful to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) who introduced it. I apologise for not having heard some of the speeches made earlier in this important debate.

As a nation we have more leisure. Other nations share this predicament. The tourist of tomorrow will be a very different animal from the rich American whom we used to believe was the only kind of tourist who came to this country. I share the opinion of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), but we need to change not only the Government's attitude towards tourism but the attitude of the average Briton towards the average tourist. We complain that we cannot get on buses because they are full of tourists or that it is difficult to go Christmas shopping because the shops are full of tourists, without acknowledging the enormous financial advantage that accrues to this country from tourism.

I wish to mention a few aspects of tourism whereby the Government could and, I maintain, should provide help. People who have nice houses find that it is extraordinarily difficult to open their houses as hotels or guest houses and the Government ought to encourage this. They should make it easier for them to erect signs and to employ young people, even if occasionally they have to bring a glass of wine or a glass of beer to a customer. There is no reason why they should not be 16 or 17-years-old. Altogether there is no good reason why local authorities should make life quite so difficult and I am sure that the Minister could find it in his heart to persuade local authorities to look more benignly on such applications.

We should deregularise some of the insane laws that affect entertainment. We should encourage theatres to open on a Sunday. If we signposted motorways more realistically we would make Britain more attractive to tourists. We are the only country whose motorways do not signpost the distance to the next exit or tell travellers where the next exit will take them. When I make such suggestions to the Minister of State, Department of Transport, she says that extra signs always make for extra carelessness and more accidents. I do not believe that. Any hon. Member who has been to America will know that that country has more signs than perhaps any other country, yet its accident rate is no higher. People can drive and look at signs without it harming them.

Training structure must be looked at. I have in my constituency the excellent Isle of Ely college in Wisbech. The catering school there has a restaurant in which people can eat the food prepared by the students. That restaurant has to charge VAT. As a result, the prices are higher than they should be and local people are not encouraged, as they might be, to go and help in the training of young caterers.

A law should be passed outlawing gratuities. At the moment a visitor to any hotel or restaurant in France knows that the gratuity is included in the bill, whether it is for accommodation, food or drink. If good tourism is to make the tourist feel comfortable and at home, to make him worried about whether or not to leave a gratuity is a rotten thing to do to him. It would not be difficult to outlaw gratuities. They should be added to the account. We could even set up yet another small quango, if need be, to which anyone who is discontented about the gratuity that has to be paid, or even members of a hotel staff who are unhappy about the distribution of gratuities, can appeal.

The deregulation of licensing hours has been a success in Scotland, despite all the fears that it would lead to public drunkenness and marauders coming south still filled with drink obtained north of the border outside our licensing hours. That has not happened. It is time, for the sake of tourism, that we looked again at licensing hours and made it easier for people to obtain drinks when they wished to do so.

The difficulties for hotels and guest houses in employing casual labour should be looked at. The Minister might consider legislation to allow any young person working in the tourist industry to earn up to £50 a week without paying tax. That would be an assault not on the Inland Revenue but on Britain's black economy. Perhaps, instead of talking about student loans, students might be encouraged to work in their vacations in the tourist industry. It would cost little money to forgo an element of tax or national insurance which is paid at the moment.

Above all, our attitude to the catering industry must change. The service industry is somehow thought to be un-British. It is perfectly British to eat and drink but it is nasty and foreign to cook, wash up and pour things out of bottles into glasses. Until we are persuaded of the decency of the catering profession, that attitude will pertain. It is up to all of us to say that the catering industry is an honourable calling.

I made my maiden speech on this subject many years ago, and I have not referred to it again until this moment, but the problem has got no better. Socially, someone who goes into catering is still very low on the totem pole and it is not until we begin to show the real dignity that there is in the industry that we shall attract the right people.

We have so much to offer in the way of good food and drink. There is regional excellence, in local baking and cheesemaking, brewing and cider-making. With Government support, and a little more money to the English tourist board so that it could publish abroad the joys of coming to this country, tourism here would make for greater and more permanent employment.

1 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): I make no apology for speaking about tourism in Southampton, particularly as today is a sad one in Southampton because P and O has withdrawn its cross-channel ferry services from Southampton. That means that there is no cross-channel ferry service from Southampton to the continent for the first time in 140 years.

Tourism in Southampton is estimated to be worth about £35 million a year. At least 600,000 tourists stay in the city each year, mainly at the 65 hotels and guest houses. Some 1,650 bedrooms, a high proportion of them with their own bathrooms, are registered with the tourist board. The last detailed analysis was taken as long ago as 1976, but then it was thought that some 4,500 people were employed in hotel and catering in Southampton alone. I suspect that the figure is now considerably higher. Southampton has been promoting itself as a centre for tourism with tremendous flair and ability. It is known as the summer time city, not just because it is a lively city in the summer but because it has attractions throughout the year and has a pleasant,

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

genial climate. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) knows the attraction of Southampton well, from his service in that city in the past.

I pay tribute to Mr. Shaw, the tourism and publicity officer, because that small tourist office succeeded in winning the award for the most travel-trade-minded tourist authority in the United Kingdom this year. Tourism is dependent on many other jobs and tourism in Southampton is inextricably involved with the port, the docks, the liners, the cruise ships and ferries. A recent survey showed that 12 per cent. of overseas visitors to Southampton came there by ship. Next year, the figure is likely to be nil unless something happens in the present docks crisis.

Southampton has not only tourists but cruise ships, and it is the leading cruise port in the country. Some 60 per cent. of our cruise business goes out of Southampton. It is the home port for Cunard's Queen Elizabeth 2, and P and O's Canberra. Recently, the city was honoured by the decision of P and O to choose it as the location for the naming, by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, of the magnificent luxury cruiser, Royal Princess. That ceremony was itself a tourist attraction, and many come to Southampton to see the magnificent cruise ships. On one memorable day early this year—there was even a photograph of this in *The Standard*—the QE2, the Canberra and the Norway were all in the port at the same time. Sadly, it seems that such a sight will never be seen again by the people of Southampton if the dockers carry on as they have during the past few weeks.

When they are in port, the cruise ships do not generate much work for the dockers, but their passengers provide work for taxi drivers, the hotel and catering trade and even British Rail, and they spend money in the superb shops in the shopping centre. That is why it is so sad that some of the dockers now seem determined to drive the cruise ships out of Southampton for good. Four times already this year, the QE2 has been diverted to Cherbourg because of industrial trouble in Southampton. Each time it has cost Cunard not less than £1 million in transferring passengers by air to the mainland and so on.

The price of docking in Southampton has increased so dramatically over the past few years that it is now more expensive for the QE2 to dock in Southampton than to dock in New York, despite the weakness of the pound against the dollar. Seven years ago it was twice as expensive for the QE2 to dock in New York as in Southampton. That is an indication of the extent to which the port of Southampton has lost out in competition and become uneconomic.

If the QE2 moves from Southampton to a different home port—if it does it will be very much against the desires and interests of Cunard—it will be a disaster in jobs lost to the people of Southampton. At present, about half the QE2's crew of 1,250 are drawn from the Southampton area, so that that ship alone provides substantial local employment.

I appeal to the dockers in Southampton to enter into an agreement for normal working at all times in respect of the cruise ships to ensure that they remain in Southampton.

During the summer, when the second of the unnecessary dock strikes was taking place in Southampton, I was in the port of Miami, the cruise capital of the United States east coast. I had a meeting there with somebody called Arthur Coffey, the local president of the principal union involved in that port. He told me that the other unions in the port of Miami have a no-strike agreement in respect of the cruise ships operating from that port. That is how they keep and build business against competition from other United States ports. As a trade union leader, he found it incomprehensible that dockers' leaders in Southampton were prepared to sacrifice not only their own jobs but the jobs of many others as well in a political strike in support of the miners.

We are now involved not in a political strike but in an equally pointless industrial dispute which has brought the port to the present crisis point. This morning I received many letters from people employed by Solent Container Services Ltd., which has a staff of 170. Since 1971, the company has grown to the point where it has about 80 per cent. of the port's container traffic. Its success depends upon the dockers being prepared to work efficiently and effectively. It looks as though the people who worked so hard to build Solent Container Services Ltd. into a successful firm will be the victims of this latest crisis in Southampton's history.

Constituents have written to me asking what can be done about it. I hope desperately that something can be done, because time is running out. It is estimated that, within the next two weeks, the last of the major container consortia will, if matters are not put right in Southampton, be tempted to use Felixstowe in the long term.

The employment that comes from tourism and from cruise ships is not only in the service industries. When the cruise ships are refitted in Southampton they provide valuable work for the people in the ship repair yard. It is estimated that the shipping coming up the Solent each year would generate about £16 million worth of ship repair work for people in Southampton were they able to get the contracts. There is a knock-on effect in the tourist industry.

I hope that I shall not be criticised for having concentrated so much on one aspect of the tourist industry in Southampton, but it was necessary for me to do so in view of the limited time available. I know that several of my hon. Friends wish to participate in the debate.

There is quite a problem with the cruise ships and the employment on them of British personnel. It was a great disappointment to me and many others who went to the naming ceremony for the Royal Princess to discover that hardly any of those employed on that British ship were British. A few of the officers are British, but almost all those employed in the hotel and catering section are foreign.

I am told that one of the reasons is that the National Union of Seamen has priced its members out of those jobs. If that be true, it is very sad. But the position has not been helped all that much by the decision to withdraw the allowances for overseas earnings that seamen used to enjoy.

Mr. Gould: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that another way of putting that same sad situation is to say that British shipowners prefer to allow cheap foreign labour to undercut British labour?

Mr. Chope That was a wholly mischievous remark. The truth is that, because of its good will, Cunard is subsidising its other activities to try to give jobs to British people. It is determined to keep a British crew on the QE2, but it is costing the company between £5 million and £6

million a year more than it would to employ a foreign crew. It is not the fault of the shipping companies. They are bending over backwards to try to give jobs to British people. It is the job of our unions to make sure that those companies can offer terms of employment which are attractive and competitive in the world market.

I end with a final plea to the dockers in Southampton: "Settle your differences; think not of yourselves but of all the other people in Southampton whose jobs depend on your actions."

1.13 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): All hon. Members contributing to the debate have referred to tourism as one of our great growth industries. They are right, of course. Perhaps not everyone appreciates how sensitive the industry is to the exchange rate. A study of the development of the industry shows that there have been considerable changes from one year to the next in the numbers of visitors coming here. This has been linked closely to the value of the pound against other international currencies. In the last quarter, about 900,000 people came from the United States. That reflects the value of the pound against the dollar.

There is no doubt that the industry has a great deal further to go in the future. On current predictions it is estimated that by 1988 16 million people will come here from overseas countries and spend £7·5 billion. By the end of the century the figure could be more than 20 million people spending more than £10 billion. There is also a commensurate growth in the numbers of Britons travelling abroad, but perhaps it is fortunate that visitors who come here spend rather more than citizens of the United Kingdom who visit foreign climes.

The British Tourist Authority and the individual tourist boards have done a great job in one of their most important tasks, which is to ensure that the influx of tourists is spread reasonably evenly throughout the year. Between July and September, fewer than 40 per cent. of the total number of visitors arrive on our shores. Similarly, 60 per cent. of all their time here is now spent outside London, and that must be not only to their benefit but also to the benefit of the people who have to assimilate considerable numbers of additional visitors.

It remains true, though, that the target of most tourists at some stage of their visit here is London, and we have seen considerable improvements in many of the facilities available to them. One has only to go round Covent garden and see the thriving community of small businesses with high turnovers there to appreciate what can be achieved. Half the turnover of some shops in central London comes from overseas visitors.

Despite the improvements, there are still too few pedestrian areas in London compared with those in other European cities. The Greater London council has not fulfilled the potential for freeing parts of our great city from the scourge of heavy traffic.

In the environs of the Palace of Westminster little allowance is made for the tourists attracted here. The tourist may well not be able to come in, but I should like him to be able to go to an exhibition centre close to the Palace to fulfil the hope that Barry and Pugin had when the palace was built after the great fire of 1834. I should like to see a parliamentary exhibition centre, as originally planned for Westminster Hall.

The other side of Bridge street adjoining Parliament street is to be developed. The mass of scruffy shops which do not do credit to the Palace could be replaced by a centre to which visitors, attracted to the Palace of Westminster, could go to see artefacts and exhibits which would make the place more real to them.

The unwary visitor to London is likely to fall prey to unlicensed traders, pickpockets and illegal gamers who throng our streets in the summer months. We must ensure that the war on these parasites continues.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) referred to Bradford's tourist attractions. In the past it would have been considered curious for the hon. Member for York to refer to Bradford in that way, but things have changed a great deal. Bradford uses the slogan "A surprising place". Today it would be surprising if any publicity about Bradford did not refer to it being a centre of tourism. The slogan "the mythbreakers" is also used in Bradford. The myth that Bradford is just a city of dingy old mills has been well and truly broken. About 750,000 people a year visit local attractions, some of which are in my constituency. I think of Haworth, the home of the Brontes, and Ilkley.

Bradford has packaged its attractions, and 20,000 package holidaymakers visit Bradford every year. Since 1980 the area's tourism has grown to be worth £2 million a year. Many other areas which are considering expanding their tourist industries get in touch with the Bradford city council to find out how it achieved such success. Other places often base their own publicity and literature on the excellent material produced by Bradford.

The old buildings that have been cleaned and refurbished attract tourists and are also of enormous benefit to the local inhabitants. An attractive city with attractive surrounding countryside and leisure facilities will attract new manufacturing investment.

Keighley is the only part of the Bradford metropolitan district which does not have intermediate area status. We do not whinge about that. We get on with the job of building up our economy.

However, it is notable that the European Community non-quota fund for textile areas is intended to be used for building up new industries to replace the employment that was previously provided in the textile industry. I cannot think of a better industry than tourism, bearing in mind the attractions that are to be found in the area which I represent, for replacing some of the jobs which previously existed in the textile sector.

There is a good deal of duplication in the promotion of tourism in the area which I represent. In addition to the English tourist board, there is the Yorkshire and Humberside tourist board, the West Yorkshire metropolitan county council and the Bradford city council. I do not decry the work of the West Yorkshire metropolitan county council, but when the council is abolished we may be able to ensure that available funds are applied more economically. Bradford has shown that it is well capable of publicising the facilities that exist.

It is important also to draw attention to transport. There is a need to increase the number of routes to Manchester international airport, which has within a short distance from it enormous numbers of attractive tourist areas. There is a need in Bradford district to complete the new Aire valley trunk road, the construction of which is due to commence in the next financial year. The area is badly cut off—I refer specifically to Keighley—and that is a

[Mr. Gary Waller]

considerable disincentive to tourists who wish to enjoy the moors and dales. At a more basic level, there is a lack of signposting. One has to be a local in parts of west Yorkshire to know which routes to follow. There is considerable scope for improvement.

It is regrettable that many people have a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. That must change in future if we are to attract more tourists. The impression is given that there is a sellers' market, and that must be dispelled. Three examples are the non-availability of teas after half-past five in the afternoon, our antiquated Sunday trading laws and the licensing laws. I need not refer to them further because other hon. Members have already taken up these issues.

Tourism produces invisible earnings. Tourists are often all too visible but the benefits that they produce remain invisible. These benefits percolate subtly into the economy. My hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) have said that tourism is regarded by many as not having the same significance as manufacturing industry. I hope that that belief is now starting to disappear. I hope also that the debate will have helped more people to appreciate that tourism is a vital industry today and will be even more vital tomorrow. It should merit our support in every possible way.

1.23 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): By way of introduction, let me start by saying that I regret that my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) is not in his place. It seems that he and I will have to pursue elsewhere an alternative debate. He ascribed to Lord Byron the following words: "There are things in Derbyshire as noble as in Greece or Switzerland." I do not dispute the sentiments but I do dispute that they were uttered by Lord Byron. I may well be mistaken, but I think that they were said by Jane Austen, and had she lived 175 years later she would have resided in the constituency of Basingstoke. There is no evidence that I am aware of that Jane Austen ever went to Derbyshire and, therefore, I feel that these fictional words would be far better attributed to Hampshire.

I listened with greater seriousness and even a degree of sadness to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). It is clear that matters in Southampton have not changed significantly — indeed, they may arguably have worsened—since the days when the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and I knew Southampton in what might be called our previous political incarnations.

I, along with every other Conservative Member who has spoken in this debate, welcomed the knowledge that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) had drawn lucky in the ballot for today's proceedings and had selected this topic. I endorse all his comments.

Clearly, tourism has considerable importance. This is true from the point of view of the money it attracts, especially from overseas, and the wealth it thus recycles. Tourism is also important as a potential and real creator of employment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) reminded us, the tourist industry is important for its sheer breadth.

I regret the fact that the hon. Member for Dagenham is not present. His speech must be answered carefully and seriously. There is general common ground between what he said and what I believe. The differences between what he said and what I believe is more of degree than of kind. Of course tourism is important, but it is easy, especially in a Friday morning debate, to overstress its importance. If we look to tourism as the means to revive our national economy, we shall delude ourselves. Tourism is a small, but important industry, and that is that. I would go further, and agree with the hon. Member for Dagenham that unless and until we restore health to our manufacturing industry we shall not see the revival of the national economy for which we long.

During this debate a plethora of statistics have been cited—perhaps none more significant than those given by my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory). My hon. Friend pointed out—I do not believe we can dispute this—that in the last year employment in the hotel trade increased by 17,000—an increase of 7·5 per cent.—and that employment in the cafe and restaurant trade increased by 6,000, or 3·5 per cent. Of course, that is welcome. It shows a significant employment increase, well above the rate of job creation elsewhere in industry.

Somewhat contradictory statistics have been cited by some hon. Members. I was under the impression that, during the first eight months of this year, the tourist industry had earned for us £2·75 billion of foreign currency. Other hon. Members have said that the amount was higher. Be that as it may, clearly it is a significant and valuable contribution to our balance of payments and should be welcomed.

We have learned that last year the industry's national turnover was £9 billion. My hon. Friend the Member for York pointed out that that is higher than the turnover of the United Kingdom aerospace industry and is almost equivalent to the motor industry's turnover.

I acknowledge the fact that my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells), for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and for York touched briefly but not in great detail on a different aspect of the tourist industry. It is what I would call the poor relation of the tourist industry, not so much in the financial sense but because it is a relatively unknown newcomer, at least in its present scale. I refer to tourism as the "farmers alternative cash crop". There was an article in the *Daily Telegraph* earlier in the year written by Evelyn Cox. I quote from it. She stated:

> "Along the country lanes of Britain, to the despair of the highway authorities, signs are going up: Bed and Breakfast; Farm Accommodation; Cottage to Let; Camping; Caravan Site; Fishing; Farm Shop."

Then waxing lyrical she went on:

> "Quite as much as the blackthorn blossom and the dog violets under the hedgerows they are today's sign of spring and of a new aspect of British farming."

Tourism, in some of its various forms, is a major agricultural crop. It is a major support for thousands of family farms.

That development has not, perhaps, received the same attention as other features of tourism and farming. During the past 10 years or so, as a result of the unevenhandedness of the common agricultural policy, our farming has evolved in two different directions, until we have reached the point where we almost have two separate industries operating under contrasting economic systems. On the one hand, subsidies and rising yields have meant

that it pays the farmer to grow grain wherever possible. The results are plain. The eastern half of England has become a virtual prairie, and the EEC intervention stores are bursting with surplus grain.

On the other hand, and most significantly in relation to today's debate, for the livestock farmer life has been less of a fairy-tale existence. The level of subsidies, where subsidies have existed, has not been high enough to compensate for the increased price of grain for animal feeds. That has led many livestock farmers to diversify into the leisure industry.

Livestock farmers have set out, not merely to produce food for the market but to meet the growing demand for access to the countryside and to rural activities such as fishing, shooting, horse-riding, and, as I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone said, even fruit-picking. It is a change that the farming community has met with extraordinary vigour, enterprise and enthusiasm. After all, tourism is an entirely different industry from pure farming. For a community which naturally leads a fairly isolated and independent existence, tourism demands a new approach to life. It is one that fits in ideally with farming. On the livestock farms, most of the relentless slog takes place during the winter months when the livestock is in. Nowadays, when the animals go out in spring or early summer, the trippers come in.

The rural tourist industry has a great advantage over the seaside tourist industry because the season lasts for the seven lush months although, as we have heard, country sports — for good or ill — will bring people to the countryside at other times of the year.

It is no overstatement to say that tourism has brought money, life and hope to much of the countryside where vigour was draining away as employment in agriculture declined. Many village shops and pubs have survived because of tourism. Local craftsmen find a demand for their wares. Other farms are diversifying into cheese-making to satisfy a growing demand for produce grown literally on the doorstep.

The benefits have not just been financial. Unlike many industries, tourism in the countryside can, with careful management, enhance the environment. Untidy farms are spruced up, redundant farm buildings are converted into attractive holiday flats and cottages and, dare I say it, tatty market towns are transformed into idyllic backwaters. The appearance of the landscape begins to matter as well as productivity. Features such as hedgerows, dry stone walls, copses and pools become vital assets in attracting visitors to an area rather than mere hindrances to modern farming methods.

Farm tourism has gone some way towards reconciling the enduring conflict between, on the one hand, those who see the countryside as a factory floor for food production and, on the other, those who regard it as an amenity that everyone has a right to enjoy. We must not forget that farms involved in the tourist trade in all its forms—from bed-and-breakfast to pick-your-own—provide not only access to the countryside but a chance to savour the delights of country life. It is, therefore, not surprising that farm tourism has developed significantly recently.

Farms have learned what people want. Marketing is becoming increasingly professional and is moving from the technique of the daubed sign on the roadside. There are now a number of well-publicised booking agencies and voucher schemes to attract holidaymakers from home and abroad.

As in other areas of farm production, group marketing co-operatives are being formed. Last year 10 holiday groups covering 300 farms joined forces with the British Tourist Authority to tempt more foreign visitors to spend a holiday on a farm. No wonder farmers turn to the alternative cash crop. The harvest is good. So much for farm tourism.

In a recent Department of Trade and Industry press release in early November, I noted that the Minister said:

"Tourism is going to remain one of the great growth industries for the rest of this century and beyond. This is an exciting prospect for Britain because of the variety of our attractions and the infinite possibilities for developing new and unexploited ones. The Government clearly recognise the great potential of tourism and are determined to encourage its development."

The most positive features that have emerged from the debate are, I hope, the recommendations from Back-Bench Members to the Government on that theme.

I shall refer briefly to five points. The first is not a Government matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) spoke of the need for a Select Committee on tourism. I accept and endorse that suggestion.

Secondly, two or three Conservative Members pointed out that 12 Government Departments look after different aspects of tourists and tourism. I underline the point that that disparity cannot be the best way to look after things, that greater cohesion and co-ordination are needed, and that a better flow of information to the Government is needed.

Thirdly, it was pointed out that section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969, which deals with grant aid, channels about £9 million a year in that direction. I do not regard public expenditure as evil; indeed, public expenditure in that direction would be especially profitable. I urge the Government to review that sum.

Fourthly, we heard about the tourist infrastructure of roads and signposts. The present state of affairs is far from acceptable.

Fifthly, we heard about licensing and the need for pubs, shops and theatres to operate under different licensing laws which would be more acceptable to tourists. That is an important suggestion.

My final observation brings me back to my starting point. Obviously, tourism is important, but we must not overstate that importance in our search for other ways to revive the national economy.

1.39 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My first point—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is the only Labour Member here."] No, there is one here from Scotland. Scotland is an important part of the tourist industry. My hon. Friend has just reminded me—not that I need reminding after all my travels in relation to the miners' strike — that Scotland is a very beautiful country and one of the areas to which a large number of people go for their holidays, although I am not sure how many of them are Members of Parliament.

We have heard a lot of talk in the Chamber today about what a wonderful place Britain is and how we need to jack up tourist receipts and so on. I have been looking at the all-party "Whip" that hon. Members receive weekly. There are trips all over the world on offer. As I do not get involved in "fact-finding tours" — really just a euphemism for a fortnight's or a month's holiday—I made some inquiries about how many Members of

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Parliament apply for those trips. In winter, they usually go to places somewhere between the tropic of Cancer and the tropic of Capricorn. There are never any fact-finding tours of Greenland in winter, although I am sure that there must be plenty to find there. I was told by the person concerned that when he tried to open the door at 10 am the other day to see how many letters there were for the Caribbean trip around Christmas time it was jammed up because there were so many letters on the other side.

I do not want to over-egg the pudding, but there is always a certain amount of hypocrisy in all this talk about holidays in Britain. Like many other people, most Members of Parliament get their passports and go off on what I call a MacDonald holiday.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I commend the hon. Gentleman's austerity and seriousness of purpose in confining his travels to this country in support of the miners' dispute, but I put it to him seriously that if he continues to support that tragic and self-destructive strike he will risk turning the mining industry of this country into a museum, with Bolsover as the showpiece and himself as a prime exhibit.

Mr. Skinner: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman intervened. He failed to recognise, however, that the person trying to turn the mining industry into a museum is MacGregor. He was brought over from America, but not because he was interested in Britain, tourism or anything else. He left this country in 1941 when we were fighting the Nazis. He may wrap himself up in the British flag now, but he was not prepared to face Hitler then. He got on a boat and went the other way at the same time as the Prime Minister was deciding not to join the Land Army, the WAAFs or anything else, but to go off to university on public money so as to make a name for herself. Now they are having to shut down libraries and God knows what else.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to discuss those matters, I am happy to go on for ever. MacGregor wants to shut 20 pits in the next 12 months and 70 pits in the next five years and to make 70,000 miners redundant. The net result of that loss of wages will be that not enough money will be spent on tourism, which brings us back to where we started. The reason why so many people cannot trot off abroad, as Members of Parliament do, is that they do not have the cash. There are 5 million people out of work. They are not all included in the official statistics because those figures do not cover women who do not register and all the people on cheap labour schemes like the YTS. That means that a great deal of money is not being spent which would be spent if people had a few bob in their pockets.

It is not just miners who will not be able to go on holiday next year but all the other people whom the Government have thrown on to that pile of human misery known as the dole queue. The Government are hell-bent on seeing to it that there is a large reservoir of manpower on the dole so that they can depress the wages of the rest —except for Members of Parliament, of course, who had two wage increases last year and can have fact-finding holidays on the cheap. The Japanese Government will pay for a trip and I have no doubt that Members wanting to go to impoverished Third world countries can always find the money from somewhere. There is always a gravy train to hop on.

As for the Common Market, we could do a lot more for tourism in this country if we were not saddled with that great debt round our necks. We could use 1 per cent. of VAT for tourism in this country instead of sending it over to Brussels and Luxembourg to pay for all those bureaucrats — that mafia. The Common Market is supposed to be producing wine, but some of those vines only exist on paper. That is a fact. It has been reported in the posh papers.

Where could we spend that 1 per cent.? I have spent one or two of my holidays on the canals and rivers here in Britain, with my family. Very nice—away from it all —but things could be a lot better. If we spent money on improving the canals and waterways, a lot more people might spend their time and money in Britain. The Government think that everything just spins round their little cocoon. They think that they do not have to do anything at all or to spend any money, and it will all happen. They think that they can sit back while the forces of monetarism take us to a sort of utopia where everyone will live happily ever afterwards. It is time that they dropped that antiquated idea.

We know that that is not happening. As each year goes by, there is less and less money to be spent. We need to spend money positively—on refurbishing the canals, for instance. Money has been spent on Blisworth tunnel over the past two years, and the tunnel has just been reopened, but there are countless other problems to be tackled and repairs to be done.

The other year I took a boat down the Stratford canal, and I nearly had to carry that boat down that canal. I pumped away, but the water kept coming in at one end and out of the other. At every lock I had a political discussion with the lock-keepers. I told them about all the people on the dole—all the young people coming out of school with O-levels and A-levels and going straight into Mrs. Thatcher's Yosser-land shouting "Gi' us a job—gi' us a job". That is a real indictment of our society.

Those little locks are about 7 ft wide. I thought that some of the engineers and carpenters who have been thrown out of work could team up with the young men and women who do not have jobs. They could teach them a trade and put money in their pockets. The young people would have a bit more money to spend and — who knows? — they might spend some of it on tourism in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But the Government have a crazy way of running the economy.

Then there are the roads. Motorways are handy for some people, but we also need to spend money on improving the road infrastructure in the regions and in particular the east midlands, to which the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) referred. His constituency is well known for its tourist attraction and its major roads——

Mr. Andy Stewart: And its miners.

Mr. Skinner: And its miners, some of whom, I am told, helped to put the hon. Gentleman in this place. I am not so sure about that. Anyway, it takes all sorts to make a world.

More money must be spent on the railways too. Up in the north, a railway is to be closed which is supposed to one of the greatest railway attractions in Britain. The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) knows something about that. The railway between Carlisle and Settle is not far from his back door.

The whole thing is crazy, and it is all based on the nonsensical idea that everything has to make a profit. If this place had to make a profit—especially on a Friday—it would be struggling. In fact, it would have been closed down centuries ago. The thing costs a small fortune, and it is not just us—it is that lot up there in the Press Gallery, which I am not supposed to refer to. We keep the place open because it is supposed to be the mother of parliaments. It is supposed to be a tourist attraction.

The Government could make a few more bob if it was on telly. Have the Government thought about that? We could spend a lot more money very usefully on the railways, on the roads and on the canals. The sewer infrastructure wants a lot of money spent on it. All that would improve the attractiveness of Britain. Do not get me wrong, I am not into the national interest or anything like that, but if we want to improve on the amount of money that is spent in Britain we have to do some of the basic things that Governments would normally do rather than say that it is none of our business and that everything will come out right in the end.

I agree about tourism having a marginal effect on the economy. Nobody should give the impression that, if we improve Britain's tourist attractions, the whole economy will be put right. That is the last thing that I would suggest, but we could make quite a considerable change and get more people into employment. One thing is certain—tourism will last longer than North sea oil. I harbour the suspicion that there will be a tourist industry after that lot has gone. People should pay a little more attention to that fact. The Government should do that. Even a Government who object to planning and intervention should realise that tourism will last longer than some of our other assets. It will outlive privatisation. When the Government have sold off all the assets that they can find, we shall still have tourism.

The hon. Member for Sherwood has introduced a theme, perhaps unwittingly—I do not know—that turns the Government's philosophy on economic policy on its head because the moment we start talking about wanting to improve Britain's tourist attractions we talk about intervention. The motion could have been headlined, "Government intervention needed. Crisis signs. Amber warning lights. We need money in the east midlands." Spend a bit on Hardwicke hall or Bolsover castle. We have one or two attractions. We also have Cresswell crags.

Mr. Andy Stewart: I mentioned them.

Mr. Skinner: I am pleased about that. There are wonderful places in my area. We have spent this week abolishing the GLC—well, I have not; I have been voting against abolition. The Government have spent this week trying to abolish the GLC but on Friday morning they want to save tourism. There is a bit of a contradiction there. One of the GLC's main functions is to ensure the provision of necessary finance for the great tourist attraction of London. It is a bit fanciful for all these Tory Members, who went through the Lobby supporting the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment to abolish the GLC—no doubt they will do the same on Report and in Committee—to complain today about there not being enough money in the country to attract visitors. London is the centre of tourism in Britain.

I have gone on a bit longer than I wanted. We have covered quite a wide area. Nevertheless, this is an important debate. A delegation from the Peak District national park board came to see the Minster a couple of years ago about getting more money to enable that attractive area, which covers several counties, to attract more visitors. The board had some jobs that it wanted doing. The delegation left that meeting with, to put it in simple terms, a flea in its ear. If the Minister wants to do something useful, he should get in touch with John Beagle, the chairman of that board, and restart negotiations with a view to providing more finance. We should have no more of this talk about there not being enough money in the country. This Government can find money for all sorts of things if they want to.

The Government have spent £12,000 million on Trident and they are spending £20,000 million a year to finance the dole queue. There is plenty of money in the country. Since the Prime Minister came to power £2 billion has been spent on her gallivanting round the world. I do not suppose she would call that tourism, but the British taxpayer has had to fork out 2 million quid for the Prime Minister to go tripping round the world and lie in a gondola in Venice. Somebody in Bolsover said to me that they thought she was selling Walls Cornetto. If the Government can find money for that and for all the other things they are prepared to waste money on, they can find money for tourism, if they have the will and the guts to do so, and make this country a more attractive place for tourists.

One comes back to the basic philosophy of having to intervene to do what all these Tories have been asking for today, sometimes on a major scale, sometimes on a minor scale. It cannot all be done by privatisation or by leaving it to busybody entrepreneurs in this leaner and fitter Britain which the Prime Minister wants to create. They are not doing it. If they were, these issues would not be raised today. So the facts are on our side. The philosophy is also on our side. I hope that as a result of our debate fewer Tory Members of Parliament will consider walking through the Lobby to smash the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties, which have helped to provide money for tourism. I hope that they will think twice before doing so. They would not want to go through the Lobby with me. They could go through five minutes later.

1.57 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): It is singularly appropriate to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who laid such stress on the role that Robin Hood played in the history of his area. It seems to be a very contemporary theme, because this is the week of robbing the rich to help the poor. This is a theme which can be continued in our debate. In doing so, I am glad to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood. We on this side of the House agree—I say, regrettably, only this side of the House because so few Members of the Opposition have chosen to come here today to support the theme—that we must look at tourism, and the service sector generally, for the employment prospects of the future.

This theme is not attractive to the Opposition. They are still wedded to the idea that the major employment prospects for our country come from the manufacturing sector. Anybody who takes a realistic view of the trading, commercial and business prospects for this country must admit that this is no longer the case. It will become increasingly difficult for the United Kingdom to compete with the countries of the Third world because of their

[Mr. Eric Forth]

lower unit labour costs and their lack of shop and workplace regulations. Although we shall always be a manufacturing nation—and proud of it—and although our technology will carry us forward, the combined effects of overseas competition from low-cost countries, of the increasing use of robotics and of technology and mechanisation mean that we cannot look to the manufacturing sector for the future major expansion of employment.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that in this country, as in most others advanced countries, the long-term trend is towards a decline in the share of employment provided by manufacturing. But surely he accepts that over the past four years we have suddenly dropped, because of this Government's economic policy, well below any pre-existing trend or any conceivable trend established anywhere else. All that we are asking for in terms of employment in manufacturing is that we should replace those jobs that were quite needlessly and wantonly thrown away by mistaken economic policies.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman's point illustrates the difference in attitude towards the problem. In 1979 the accumulated problems of featherbedding, of cosseting and of ignoring the real difficulties facing us finally caught up with us after years of neglect and of pretending that they did not exist. The reason for the sudden change that the hon. Gentleman mentioned is precisely that. It had nothing to do with the deliberate running down of industry by the Government. It was a recognition—we said this before the 1979 election—of the problems of manufacturing industry and that we could no longer artificially maintain unnecessary levels of employment and manning, inefficiency and lack of productivity and profitability.

Those were the accumulated problems with which we have had to deal as a Government and a country. It is because of that that we now look increasingly to the service sector. Included in that is this vital element of tourism which is so rightly raised by the motion before the House today.

In tourism we have a combination of a number of different elements which provide an increased possibility for employment and therefore hope for the future. It combines travel and transport because people have to move around the country in order to enjoy its different tourist facilities.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and others have made many pleas for increased expenditure. The hon. Gentleman will not hear that plea from me today and he would not expect to. There are other answers to the problem, apart from throwing money at it, or, to use the trendy expression for throwing money at things, investing in the infrastructure.

The deregulation of Britain's bus industry, both in the past and to come, will provide increased employment prospects, efficiency and effectiveness for those wishing to travel. The catering trade, which has been mentioned, the accommodation trade and the retail trade will also benefit in their different ways from the provision of services related to tourism.

Important elements are built in, such as deregulating the licensing provisions and shop-opening hours — something which I am confident the Government will tackle in the next 12 to 18 months. Those will all make their contribution to the development of tourism. It is in deregulation and in freeing the industry to make better use of its resources that the real future lies, not necessarily in the expenditure of public money on what is and should be essentially a private enterprise.

My constituency of Mid-Worcestershire has a growing tourist centre, mainly centred around the ancient town of Droitwich, where we are now rebuilding, in an excellent partnership between the local authority and private enterprise with private resources, the unique brine bath facility which will draw many more people to that town. Incidentally, to recognise the spa towns—as I do—is another way in which we can in future attract an increasing number of tourists to Britain. It is in such ways, in towns such as Droitwich in Mid-Worcestershire, that we can look to the future with a combination of private investment, partnerships between private business and local authorities and with the Government not necessarily spending public money but looking at ways of reducing and removing the restrictions and regulations which at the moment inhibit the tourist industry.

It is in all those ways that we can look confidently to the future. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood for allowing us to discuss the matter today. I hope that we shall return to it again and again as one of the major future sources of employment.

2.3 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on tourism today, representing as I do a constituency which has some 2 million visitors a year. That shows the extraordinary importance of tourism to our local economy.

There are of course problems of accommodating and coping with such a large number of tourists as come to Stratford-on-Avon and the surrounding area. I want to pay tribute to Stratford town council, the Stratford district council tourism sub-committee, and the Stratford-on-Avon district marketing group. Between them they are approaching systematically the need to develop tourism on a sensible pattern for the future in our area. I congratulate all those concerned.

It is not only to Stratford itself that people come. They come to the whole of south Warwickshire. There are 120 villages in my constituency, one more beautiful than the other. There are also the National Trust properties such as Coughton, Charlecote, Upton and other famous houses such as Ragley.

It is not only the most famous landmarks that draw people. For example, there is the Stratford motor museum, and a little way from Stratford there is the Napton Nickelodeon at Napton on the Hill. It is an internationally celebrated museum of mechanical music. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) made his customary humorous reference to the monkey and the organ grinder yesterday, but if he is interested in organ grinding he should join his constituents and take a trip to Napton to see what organ grinding is about.

The importance of tourism for jobs in my constituency is enormous. It is estimated that some 20 per cent. of ratepayers in Stratford-on-Avon district are directly involved in tourism. But there are two threats to tourism in Stratford.

One is a major threat, with which many of my colleagues will be familiar because I had the opportunity to talk about it in an Adjournment debate earlier this year.

The Foreign Office and the BBC are proposing to site a transmitter, which would be one of the largest in Europe, at Bearley, three miles from the centre of Stratford-on-Avon. Some 24 masts, up to 300 ft high, would be an appalling visual intrusion into this historic and beautiful landscape, and, even more seriously, the effects of radio frequency interference on computers and other electronic equipment in the area would be devastating. The Royal Shakespeare theatre has said in plain terms that it would have to close in Stratford if the transmitter were built, and many other businesses, including 10 major hotels, for which conference business is an important trade, are seriously threatened.

I am also very concerned at British Rail's proposal that a section of the north Warwick railway line running into Stratford should be closed. This seems an extraordinarily short-sighted and negative policy. Stratford is one of the major tourist centres in the country, and already it is not easy to get to. There is poor road access and now there is a serious threat that British Rail will diminish rail access as well. I would regret it very much if that were to happen.

These are instances of how, as too often in Government, the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. I welcome, however, the Government's positive approach to the promotion of tourism, and their recognition that it is one of our growth industries. I welcome the rationalisation of the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board. I hope that the promised economies that that rationalisation was supposed to yield will be forthcoming.

We need a vigorous approach to ensure that there is a devolution of funds, in particlar for marketing, to the regional tourist boards. At the moment, we have some joint schemes for tourist promotion by the English tourist board and the regional tourist boards. That is a good interim policy, but we want to make more funds available on a devolved basis to the regional boards such as the Heart of England tourist board, which could enable them to do an even better job.

A rationale for the integration of the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board was that it would yield economies of perhaps £500,000 a year. If that is split up between 12 tourist boards, there is a useful £40,000 to £45,000 to supplement the funds available to each for marketing. The Heart of England tourist board has about £7,000 of its own to spend on marketing. Impressively, it raises about a further £140,000 from local organisations and local authorities to help its promotional work. It would make an enormous difference to the possibilities of promotion if we could ensure that the fruits of that reorganisation start to flow through reasonably soon.

It would make sense to spend a little more on bringing in, for example, writers from the travel press who could see for themselves at first hand. That is highly cost-effective. We need to prepare better brochures and press features on the area. We need to promote bed-and-breakfast establishments. A large number of these are small businesses which do not have enough resources to achieve publicity on their own. We need to produce a good package which can be available to travel agents all over the world to show the sort of accommodation that is available. We also need a central reservation facility so that a tourist who contemplates coming to the heart of England from, say, Dallas can discover where he can stay and what is available in south Warwickshire. For these reasons I hope that we shall soon see some fruits from the £500,000.

It is important to promote the interests of the regional airports. London has the lion's share of benefit from tourism. We do not begrudge London anything, but it is most important to have a balanced development. I am glad that the future of Birmingham airport was relatively well secured this summer, and that the Civil Aviation Authority's proposals to remove the licences for British Airways to fly out of Birmingham to certain European destinations did not prevail. I am glad that BA is now working with some of the smaller independent airlines. I hope that we shall not only develop business with Europe but that increasingly Birmingham will be made a second stop airport for intercontinental flights, so that, after calling at Shannon or Prestwick, for example, they will call at Birmingham.

I hope that we shall channel more resources towards training. Large numbers of people, particularly in the smaller tourist establishments, lack sufficient training. It is a problem to get them to recognise that that is what they need. As hon. Members have observed, tourism is naturally a labour-intensive business. That is one of its most hopeful and advantageous features for the future. It can make an important contribution to alleviating the unemployment problem. It is most important therefore that those who work in tourism should have training and be enabled to develop their expertise so that we can make the best of our opportunities in tourism.

2.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): As several of my hon. Friends have already remarked, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) has done the House a great service in choosing the subject of tourism for debate. No doubt many of the matters that he has placed on record on behalf of his constituents with regard to the problem of unemployment and the interests of the east midlands will be appropriately reported in the east midlands area. My hon. Friend has given us great food for thought.

During the debate several hon. Members have, quite appropriately, managed to reconcile the interests of manufacturing industry with those of the service industry, the tourist industry and all the components that make up what we hope will be a growing labour market. I am delighted that at long last in this House we are moving away from the sterile debates of high tech versus low tech, sunrise versus sunset, and service sector versus manufacturing sector. We are surely now agreed that they are all part of one wealth creation process. I am already on record as being one of the hon. Members who believe that manufacturing still has to be the core of wealth creation but that the service sector is certainly the most efficient job creator at the moment, with about 280,000 new jobs in the teeth of the recession. Prominent within service sector activity is the tourist industry, which has made a magnificent contribution to job creation in the United Kingdom.

I think it is important to deal with signposting, which was mentioned specifically by my hon. Friend. He asked about the cost of the experiment in Nottinghamshire, and

[Mr. John Butcher]

what cost would fall on the local authority. My understanding is that financial assistance is being considered by the English tourist board.

The expenditure ceilings on local authorities are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I welcome Nottinghamshire's participation in this imaginative experiment. I have no doubt that the tourist attractions and local communities concerned will reap the benefit of more effective signposting, as will the many visitors to Nottinghamshire. At a later date I hope that we shall see tourism signposting arrangements on these lines considered for adoption throughout the United Kingdom. This is a matter at which the Department of Transport is already looking. But there seems to be another area of consensus in the debate that we could perhaps make some slightly more imaginative moves in signposting.

I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind if I do not march too far into the subject of the Robin Hood theme park. A number of proposals and possible sites are being considered for this development, and initiatives of this kind are to be welcomed. I am sure that my hon. Friend will watch progress with interest and report back to the House or the appropriate quarter if he feels that we have a sticking point. We shall do whatever we can to help on a multi-departmental basis if need be.

I have taken very much to heart the comments of a number of hon. Members about the need for co-ordination. Someone has to hold the sponsoring responsibility for tourism, but it is precisely because the industry embraces so many disparate economic and commercial activities that it would be difficult to appoint a "supremo" who somehow could have an input into all the various Government Departments, although I shall come to the possibility of a Select Committee — and an even more dramatic move proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan).

Inevitably and understandably, my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) asked for the M54 to be extended, not just for tourists but for the peace of mind of his constituents. He made another interesting proposal, which was echoed by a number of my hon. Friends, that Birmingham and Manchester airports should be considered for expansion as opposed to the consolidation or further building on the Heathrow site. It was interesting that that suggestion came from representatives of nearly all the regions represented in the House today, including the hon. Member whose constituency is almost directly under the flight path of that very busy airport. No doubt my right hon. and hon. Friends will look again at the opinions which emerged from the contributions of my hon. Friends on that issue.

In a strong and ebullient speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Yardley correctly emphasised the important contribution that exhibition and conference tourism makes to our economy. I am sure that he will not be embarrassed if I remind the House that, as a former colleague of his on Birmingham city council, I witnessed his personal contribution in seeing that that imaginative exhibition centre, the NEC, got off the ground. It is to his credit and that of his other colleagues that Birmingham has built itself a major revenue earner for the benefit of its ratepayers and residents.

My hon. Friend mentioned licensing hours and shop hours. This is where I am caught on the hook which has been dangled before a number of Ministers responsible for tourism. I cannot anticipate the outcome of the deliberations on changes in the licensing laws or the thoughts of others on shop hours—no doubt the House will take a view shortly—but it would appear, watching the signs, that there are moves in those directions which will be helpful to the tourist industry.

I say in his absence to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells) that, although I suppose educating young urban dwellers into a rural way of life, which as ever was a typically astute and provocative suggestion from my hon. Friend, may have attractions, it may also have disadvantages. Some people argue that there is no point in decanting people from the cities only to decant them back again when the vogue changes in a couple of decades, in order to move them back yet again in another two decades. We do muck about with our population more than most countries.

I agree that we should not indulge in garden festivalities by planting garden festivals everywhere that is derelict or requires clearance and long-term rehabilitation. But a new approach is developing which people from all parts of the country and all walks of life find of interest and from which they derive great benefit. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone was able to report that he got his money out of Liverpool. The Government sometimes have equal difficulty in resolving cash problems with Liverpool.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) settled once and for all the question whether tourism is a diversion and a candyfloss activity or a real job generator. I was delighted that she was able to make her observations in a forum where major employers are represented. There are misconceptions about this industry; it is an industry, and a wealth creator. Jobs and job opportunities are being generated in the 17,000 hotels and 6,000 restaurants to which my hon. Friend referred.

My hon. Friend reminded Londoners that, although they might have cheered the line "bloody tourists" in a song by a punk rock group, the same tourists are keeping many of our theatres going, helping to reduce overheads and to distribute them more equitably throughout the year. Directly and indirectly, tourists help to continue the rich cultural life of our capital.

Another theme of the debate, highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Drake, was that the best way to promote cities is by self-help. Government and local authority funding, as ever, can help only on the margin. It can be used to good effect only when it is drawn in by local authorities with good, sound and imaginative management. I am sure that Plymouth is promoting itself well.

There was an interesting exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Drake and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) about the Channel tunnel and freedom of choice. My two hon. Friends were able to agree because of that proposition. The argument will come to the fore as some difficult decisions are made by others and, in due course, the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) raised the vexed question of hotel registration. A number of proposals have received a mixed reception. My Department has received the English tourist board's proposals and is studying them. The board is anxious to

obtain the industry's full co-operation and will be glad to receive detailed comments on its proposals until March next year. There is still time. Those with an interest should continue to make their views known, not least to hon. Members.

I refer my hon. Friend to my remarks in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood about signposting. We must start from a suck-it-and-see basis. The evidence of the two experiments will be examined with rigour.

My hon. Friend the Member for York rightly said that we should not consume our environmental seed corn. He also reminded us that liaison between local authorities and tourist boards is a key factor. The people on the ground must get on and be vociferous in championing the interests of their own localities.

In the short time that is available, I shall deal briefly with the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). I congratulate him on being president of Twickenham Week. He is therefore an activist and not merely a commentator. We offer him our sympathy in trying to reconcile the demands of the eaters in the burgeoning restaurants in his constituency with those of the residents in the area who have been subjected to the increased demand. I understand that there are a number of "noises off" which cause a disconcerting set of circumstances in Twickenham.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) is a great expert and seasoned commentator on these matters, as well as an activist. He advised and exhorted us not to lose the initiative, but to maintain the momentum. He stressed that many regional economies gain a great deal from or are dependent upon tourism. I can assure him that his representations will be treated seriously. I shall respond to his remarks in greater detail, especially those directed to training and section 4 grant aid. I cannot report on the section 4 issue now, but I am optimistic that certain moves that are being made with the training boards will bear fruit and that there will be a recognition of and proper status attributed to the professional training that those at technician and management level in the tourist industry have received.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) left us with perhaps the phrase of the debate. He described the tourist industry as the slumbering giant of British industry. That may be, but perhaps he will agree with me that it is a giant which has woken up in the past two or three years. He reminded us that we should obtain better statistics on tourism and observed that theme parks and the approach adopted at Alton towers offers prospects for the future. I congratulate him on being able to witness the open golf championship in his constituency.

I shall combine my response to the observations of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) with my response to the remarks of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) — *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I had better uncouple that connection. It seems that the view of the House is that confusion could arise if I took that line. I found it easy to agree with parts of the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham. The majority of hon. Members have extolled the virtues of London as the "major draw" area from which the rest of the country eventually benefits. I recognise that at the very least there is room for improvement in the way in which London presents itself.

Great strides have been made, but it seems rather strange that, while we have a marvellous link between Gatwick airport and Victoria, jet-lagged travellers from various parts of the world are spewed into Victoria station, perhaps with leaks from the roof trickling on them, not a taxi to be found and sheer chaos on the other side of the barrier. That should be considered. Perhaps I am being unfair to choose one of my hobby horses, but the general observation that London could try to tidy up some of its tattier areas is well taken.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) is another great expert in these matters. He would like to see more young people working and training in the tourist industry. His argument that we should do something to reduce or eliminate the on-cost of employment for employers is being considered by many commentators and pundits in the context of making the offering of employment generally more attractive to employers. Although it may not be totally in line with the fervour of today's debate, it would be unwise to pick out catering, rather than other sections of the industry, to try that approach.

Time has pressed on. I agree to write to hon. Members about the specific points on which they may not have received answers today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises the great importance of tourism as a growing industry in this country and in particular the East Midland Region of England; welcomes the significant part it can play in reducing the number of unemployed; and accepts the Government's commitment to further growth of the industry.

Education, Science and Arts

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. George Walden be discharged from the Education, Science, and Arts Committee and Mr. Malcolm Thornton be added.—*[Mr. Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Social Services

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. James Couchman be discharged from the Social Services Committee and Mr. Tony Favell be added.—*[Mr. Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Unemployment (Special Programmes)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The biggest problem facing this country, the major cause of pain and misery, and a symptom of so much else that is wrong is unemployment. The House has not yet begun to face up to the scope, dimension or nature of current unemployment or how we are to cope with it. On 4 May 1979, in a party political broadcast, when she was the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister said:

"I think it's terrible if a person who wants to work can't find a job. You have no self-respect, you haven't got the respect of your family if, somehow you can't earn yourself a living and them a living too."

On 28 August 1980 when she was Prime Minister, the right hon. Lady said in the *Daily Mirror:*

"I do hope to goodness that the jobless total never gets to two and a half million".

Later that year, in the *Conservative Monthly News,* she said:

"There is a real hope that a year from now things will be looking distinctly brighter."

The following year, on 16 June, in a speech to the CBI dinner, the right hon. Lady said:

"We are now beginning to win through."

Later that year in a speech in Glasgow she said:

"I think we are through the worst of the recession."

Later that year, when talking at the Lord Mayor's banquet, the right hon. Lady said:

"I believe we can begin to see the first signs of recovery."

However, the following year on 11 March, in a speech at a meeting for the Young Businessman of the Year award, she said:

"Unemployment is now one of the greatest unsolved mysteries of our time."

It seems that unemployment has been accepted. It has almost become the answer, not the problem. The Government appear to have given up. The Chancellor is budgeting for as much unemployment next year as this year. The alleged economic upturn or recovery will not happen, or not in any way that will end or significantly diminish unemployment.

Monetarist dogma predicted a temporary rise in unemployment as inflation was brought down, and then healthy economic growth, as if by spontaneous combustion, was to provide the necessary jobs. It was an illusion. It was never likely to happen, and it has not happened. The Chancellor told us that unemployment would fall last year. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told us that it had reached a plateau and would fall; he now admits that he was wrong. All those ministerial hopes of unemployment flattening out and falling are exposed as wishful thinking.

Unemployment is continuing its upward trend. Within that total, the hard heart of the problem—the number of long-term unemployed—is increasing relentlessly and remorselessly. Ten years ago, one person in 250 was long-term unemployed; it is now one in 25. No one has yet come to grips with the magnitude of the problem we face. Government policies are exacerbating and deepening the problem.

The Government's simplistic and completely misguided policies since 1979 have been an attempt to cut public expenditure and, they hoped, taxes. Apparently, they did not understand that most public expenditure ends up being spent on orders for goods and services from the private sector. Recently, we had the annual report of the Property Services Agency, which shows that it spent £1·8 billion in 1983-84 and 80 per cent. of it was spent in the private sector.

As public expenditure is cut and orders diminish, private industry is squeezed and labour is laid off. It is the Exchequer which picks up the tab in unemployment pay. That is the fallacy of monetarism. The growing dole queue now costs some £17 billion per annum which is more than we spend on the National Health Service, education and the whole of the rate support grant, but it is also public expenditure, albeit useless and unproductive, which pushes up the total. As a result, public expenditure is a bigger proportion of GDP now than it was in 1979 as is, incidentally, the burden of taxation. Meanwhile British industry is being destroyed.

That leads to yet further demands for cuts in public expenditure. It is a self-defeating, vicious circle of decline, the worst peacetime disaster in our history, causing a monstrous rise in long-term unemployment—on a scale which is now a moral as well as an economic problem. The only pretence of unemployment policy now is the panacea of lower wages. That is the despairing cry of a bankrupt Government. It is also nonsense.

What are we going to do now? No conventional approach will deal with the problem. No ordinary economic upturn will cure unemployment or contain the problem. The House must face the stark, brutal truth that chronic, long-term, mass unemployment is with us for the foreseeable future and, certainly, for the Government's lifetime. The Chancellor has budgeted for as much and more next year. It is a pipe dream to imagine that it will disappear through any conventional method.

What are we to do? Can we possibly allow the wound to fester? Surely it is myopia of the most appalling and criminal kind to think that we can allow millions of our fellow countrymen and women to be pushed over an abyss without the most fearful consequences for our society. It is not just a betrayal of our people and an act of violence against them; it is economic nonsense.

How can it make sense to pay millions to do nothing? Is it not the most insane lunacy and an appalling waste of human and economic resources? Is it suggested that nothing needs doing? It must make more sense to pay people to do something than to do nothing. Are we saying that we lack the wit and intelligence to arrange things so as to match unmet needs with unused resources?

The last time we had mass unemployment was in the 1930s. We came out of it in four ways by the growth of the construction industry, by a measure of protection afforded by the imperial preference agreed at the Ottawa conference, by a competitive pound, and, fourthly, and decisively, by the war. The drive to produce tanks, guns, planes and ships converted a labour surplus into a labour shortage throughout Europe within months. We did not leave that to the workings of the market or to free enterprise. We organised and mobilised a great national effort.

The challenge is to do the same again now. We should mobilise the nation's resources, but this time to produce the prerequisites of peace and a civilised society, thereby bringing back hope and giving a lift to national morale. Again, it cannot be left to the free markets with a couple of pence of income tax to galvanise the sluggish

entrepreneurs, about whom the Secretary of State for Education and Science used to speak. The nation must mobilise its intelligence and step in. It can.

The key matter to understand is that the economics of the state employing a previously unemployed person are different from a private employer doing the same. If, for example, an employer pays someone £100 a week, he pays the full amount and national insurance and so on. It is different for the state. First, unemployment and supplementary benefits are deducted, and then taxation revenues and national insurance contributions are added. As a result the marginal cost of the state employing a person is substantially less.

I advocate that we take advantage of that. We must launch a new national programme, possibly under the Manpower Services Commission, to cope with the epidemic of mass, long-term unemployment. We already have the nucleus, the prototpe, of such a scheme in the community programme. It is popular and oversubscribed. It should immediately be built upon, upgraded and vastly expanded. The Minister may know that the Select Committee recommended that in its report on last year's corporate plan of the MSC. We must be sufficiently bold and radical to take steps commensurate with the scale of the crisis.

We must transform the situation and uplift the spirit of the country. We should announce our intention to remove 1 million long-term unemployed people from the dole queue next year. That is entirely practicable, realistic and feasible. The MSC annual report for 1983-84 showed that 113,000 places on the community programme cost £400 million. Page 30 of the report states that the net costs are one third of the gross costs. At a cost of £130 million net, we have 113,000 places on the community programme. If we get some of our "own money" back from the European Community social fund, it would work out at about £100 billion for 100,000 places. That is 1 million places for £1 billion net. The costings are entirely realistic.

According to the MSC, in 1985-86 the Government propose to spend £580 million gross to secure 130,000 places on the community programme. However, according to figures in the participants survey, which is in the Library, the net cost is only about £190 million. The difference between the gross and net costs is again due to benefit savings and tax flowbacks. If account is taken of the contribution from the EC social fund, the true net cost is reduced further.

The bid for ECSF funding in 1984-85 was £55 million. Assuming that that was successful, it would be possible to buy an additional 930,000 places for £1 billion net, which gives a total of more than 1 million places.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer told the House that he had at least £1·5 billion to give away in next year's Budget. Rather than paying it out in tax handouts, which would create few new jobs, it could be used to finance an imaginative scheme such as the one which I have described. £1 billion is less than one quarter of 1 per cent. of gross domestic product. It is less than the Chancellor's overshoot this year, and less than the cost of the coal strike, not to mention the cost of the Falkland Islands.

That money would not be a net loss because a million workers would create a great deal of added value. There are a host of projects that such a programme could tackle. This would need to be done in such a way as not to compete unfairly with existing businesses or to provide cheap labour. Trade union rates would be paid and participation would be entirely voluntary. The projects would be for work that otherwise would not be done and which is not in any existing programme.

An obvious area of need is our decaying housing stock. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) here. He will confirm that in our borough the already decaying housing stock is deteriorating faster than it is being renovated. There is a crying need for that work. It is labour-intensive and it uses British materials. There is a major role for such a programme there. The recent drought has shown that our water supply and reservoir system is inadequate.

In Newham and throughout the country many of our roads, especially secondary roads, are in a very bad state of repair. About a thousand towns and villages in this country have been identified as needing a bypass to relieve traffic congestion, but we are currently building only about 30 per year. The need for improvement there is obvious. Our sewers, too, are a classic case of essentials that are not provided by market forces. That, too, could be tackled by such a programme.

Looking to the technologies of the future, the whole country needs to be equipped with cable. We could be the first country to do that. Valuable fuel could be saved if buildings were insulated and draught-proofed.

The number of elderly people is increasing rapidly. It is far cheaper to care for the elderly—and, indeed, the disabled and the mentally handicapped — in the community rather than in expensive institutions, but that requires community services. Such services are labour-intensive and make good economic sense.

Large parts of our industrial landscape need to be tidied up and improved. All these things would provide real jobs, but private enterprise and the market are not providing them.

Such a programme would run in parallel with the expansion of the conventional economy and would, indeed, give it a boost and a fillip by supplying new orders to it. For a relatively modest expenditure, which could be recouped in the value of work done, the situation in Britain could be transformed. Parliament could show that it cared and hope would be offered where none now exists. The Government would have to shed arid dogma and show determination, will and imagination. I call upon them to do so. Are they capable, or shall we have to wait for others to do this?

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) on raising this subject today. I hope that he will not take it as too much of an insult to his Front Bench colleagues if I say how much more I welcome what he said today than what the economic spokesmen for the Labour party said yesterday. It is becoming difficult to understand with what voices people are speaking. I hope that my response will not be seen as too partisan.

The hon. Gentleman has spelt out, just as Conservative Members and the Government have spelt out, the fact that having so many people out of work is not just a waste of resources for the country but is often devastating for individuals and their families. As the hon. Gentleman said, the greatest and worst effect is felt by the long-term unemployed.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the community programme. Last week, I was involved in a radio broadcast on "Woman's Hour" in which a sponsor of a programmes scheme said that some of the changes in the rules had prevented the taking on of the people needed for a particular project. I responded by saying that it was often those who had been out of work for the longest period and whose needs for both income and employment were greatest—for economic, social and psychological reasons — about whom the Government were most concerned in the context of the programme.

The numer of places on the community programme has risen from 30,000 to 130,000. Given the amount of time that people spend on the programme, 200,000 people a year could benefit from it. The future size of the programme is not fixed. As year follows year, the Government consider which programmes to expand, which are most effective and which best match the needs both of those who need employment and of those who can contribute to the economy as a whole.

The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that there is a growth in the number of community programme places that are linked with training. He and other hon. Members will welcome the Government's moves, at the other end of the age scale, to make the youth training scheme far more effective for the young people leaving school who are seeking to join the employment market with the skills, attitudes and habits which will enable them to contribute. We are all united in wishing to give people the opportunity to contribute to the society that we all share. When, through unemployment, people feel debarred from contributing, there is a loss both to them and to the country.

The hon. Gentleman will not wish me to indulge too much in swapping quotations. At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Gentleman showed that he had done considerable research. That is what one would expect from the hon. Gentleman. I, too, have done a little research. I discovered an interesting article in the *New Statesman*, written by Doug Jones, who is the economic adviser to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). Mr. Jones says:

> "To my knowledge there is no economic evidence that there is some high, non-accelerating level of inflation that would provide a permanently high level of output and employment. Indeed, there are doubts about whether even accelerating inflation, apart from being politically unacceptable, would deliver higher output and more jobs."

This is not the time to take up the arguments about the link between pay and jobs. We can all agree that strikes do not help growth or create jobs, and that unrealistic pay settlements—not pay claims—can make the country less competitive. As the hon. Gentleman showed in his analysis of the growth of unemployment in the 1930s, protectionism does not help Britain. We are a trading country, exporting more per head than Japan. We need to work for more free trade both within the European Community and across the world, and to make sure that we are competitive. If our competitiveness continues to decline, the opportunities for both Government-assisted jobs and jobs in the private sector are diminished. I believe that that is common ground. Those who do not say that only the Government have a role in creating the conditions for economic growth and growth in employment are those who realise that their own actions can be consistent with the growth of output and productivity, and greater opportunities to share in a higher standard of living.

The hon. Gentleman referred to some of the employment and training measures. If the community programme is to work effectively, even on the present scale of places, there must be co-operation from local authorities and the unions. I recognise that some trade unions have natural fears about displacement effects. They believe that people might do under the community programme work that would otherwise be done by those in normal public or private employment. However, if possible sponsors or local authorities stand back from the community programme, many of those who might have benefited are not given the chance to do so.

I am glad that the borough of Newham is overcoming its earlier doubts and has approved an agency for 300 places, but the hon. Gentleman will not need me to remind him that one of the local trade unions is not yet co-operating. It would be useful to have the hon. Gentleman's support in trying to make sure that there is co-operation, while we try to maintain reasonable safeguards. Only with broad co-operation can the community programme deliver the goods to the many people who need them.

In regard to the recovery from the 1930s, the hon. Gentleman also talked about the role of the construction industry. He will be as aware as I am, as both of our constituencies were built up more densely during that period, that a great deal of the construction was done by the private sector. People managed, with the imagination that the hon. Gentleman asks of the Government, to build houses, employ people and pay them wages which enabled them to buy the houses. Occasional trips down memory lane on television show advertisements of the £5 down and 17s 6d a week which generated growth, employment and homes. There is no evidence to suggest that such things happen only when the public sector gets involved.

I do not fully accept the hon. Gentleman's idea that costing for publicly financed jobs should be all that different from privately financed jobs. It is not possible to disregard the tax take or just take account of the tax take, national insurance or any other return and say that we should transfer all employment from the private sector to the public sector, which would be the logical consequence of going too far. I accept, however, that the Government should continue to look for the most effective way in which to use public funds where the Government have a role as a direct employer, in financing other work and in employment and training measures. I know that the Government look forward to hearing the views of the Select Committee on Employment, which the hon. Gentleman serves well as Chairman. The views advanced might not always be identical but at least they concentrate on, and attempt to get, the most effective programmes using given resources so that more people can be relieved of the despair and lack of opportunity which unemployment often creates.

During the past two and a half years, there has been a recovery in the economy, but it has not been shared equally. We have the apparent paradox of a growing number of people in employment and, sadly because of demography and participation in the work force, a rise in the number of people out of work. We should continue to consider whether those who are out of work should be kept on the sidelines or whether it is possible, through some of the Government's schemes such as the job release scheme,

to let those who want to leave the labour force to do so and have their places taken by others. It is not easy to expand such schemes without incurring a great deal of extra expense, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

The fact remains that people who are in work are getting an increased standard of living. It is perfectly fair and reasonable that they should ask for and negotiate an improved standard of living as that is the nature of free collective bargaining. That view is shared by the Government and the trade unions. However, if the results of those bargains mean that those who remain in work continue to get all the benefits of growth, we are left inexorably with a growing number of people who are out of work. Nobody seriously argues for a fixed incomes policy at the moment, but I should like there to be a sense of solidarity so that those in work take account of the interests of people who are out of work or might be out of work in the future because of decisions that people take freely and which are not within Government control. I hope that we shall build a greater common understanding about what types of decision Government take and what types of decision people outside Government take which are compatible with reduced unemployment, and growing employment and which, within people's ideologies and prejudices, are consistent with the macro and micro-economic policies that we heard about yesterday. No doubt we shall hear about them again in future major debates on economic policy.

I hope that, like the hon. Gentleman, right hon. and hon. Members will continue contributing so that the House is the focus of concern with economic policies that are consistent with rising employment and economic growth. I also hope that, when it is possible for the Government to adapt ideas and move forward, such ideas are discussed in the House. That is far better than standing back and throwing out statistics about what happened until 1979 and what has happened since. We should recognise that we have a common worry, ensure that the unemployed get as much attention as the employed and work out a better future for all of us together.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

1. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and how this compares with the figure for 1978-79, at constant prices.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. John Stradling Thomas): At November 1983 prices the figures are £739 and £666 for 1982-83 and 1978-79, respectively.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures make nonsense of claims by the Opposition that there have been severe cuts in education under this Government?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. When allowance has been made for the effects of pay and price increases, local authorities' current expenditure on education has remained virtually at constant levels for number of years, while the number of pupils in schools has declined markedly—10 per cent. between 1978 and 1984. That is not, of course, consistent with allegations about heavy cuts.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Does the Minister accept the serious criticism of the education service in Wales contained in the HMI report on the effects on the education service of recent local authority expenditure policies? When will the hon. Gentleman respond to that report in the House? When can we have a debate on it, so that the people of Wales can see the real impact on the service of education cuts?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I can give no undertaking about a debate, because that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. What the hon. Gentleman referred to as central Government policies are, of course, local government policies——

Mr. Ron Davies: That is evading the question.

Mr. Stradling Thomas: There is no need for me to evade the question. The facts speak for themselves.

The number of pupils has fallen markedly, but the fall in the number of teachers has not kept pace with that. I must stress that it is a matter of management of resources. I have studied the report carefully and am concerned about certain aspects. However, it is clear that, in the main, there has been consistent support from central Government for local education authorities.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my hon. Friend saying that local education authorities, such as Clwyd, could avoid cuts damaging to education—especially to the size of classes—if they would concentrate their resources on those areas where they could do most good, rather than wasting money on expensive capital projects?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I concur with that in the context of what I said a moment ago. The management of resources by local education authorities is the vital lesson that we must draw from the HMI report.

Mr. Barry Jones: Why does the Minister continue to pump more than £500,000 annually into private schools in Wales when every local education authority in Wales is at its wits' end about how to manage? Will he cancel the £500,000 cash for the private schools in Wales and ensure that that sum goes to the eight LEAs?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: No, Sir. I have no hesitation in saying that we believe in a variety of provision of education and freedom of choice.

Enterprise Zones and Trusts

2. **Mr. Hooson** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make a statement on the progress of enterprise zones and trusts in Wales.

Mr. Stradling Thomas: It is estimated that the three enterprise zones have attracted some 1,700 jobs so far and that the trusts have created or saved some 4,000 jobs. I regard this as excellent progress.

Mr. Hooson: I have gained the impression that Powys Self-Help has been one of the most effective trusts. Does my hon. Friend have information to back that impression?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I most certainly do. I understand that Powys Self-Help is making good progress. To date it has helped 80 new businesses to start and 60 existing firms to expand, and it has helped to create or save 300 jobs.

Mr. Anderson: Will the Welsh Office try to learn from the experience of the first enterprise zone in Swansea and, in particular, consistent with current regional policy, could not the benefits be more job-related? How does the Welsh Office see the future of retailing in the enterprise zones, given the effect in adjacent areas, and can we still support the idea in principle of having retailing enterprises within the zones?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, Swansea has been identified as one of the more successful enterprise zones in terms of completed floor space, attraction of firms, employment and provision of service sites. I am aware of the views expressed about the retailing side. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware of this, as he keeps in close touch. We have recently made a modification which, having consulted both sides in the matter, I can say will be welcomed generally.

Mr. Raffan: In view of the recent tragic announcement of redundancies amounting to nearly one third of the work force at Courtaulds green field, will my hon. Friend seriously consider any applications from Delyn borough council for an extension of the land included in the Delyn enterprise zone and treat sympathetically any request for financial aid to meet the problems created by those redundancies?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I am aware of that concern. The Government regret the redundancies that have been

announced. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited the plant last year and knows of the efforts that have been made to make it profitable. The redundancy decision must be for the company in the light of its assessment of future commercial prospects. However, I have taken note of my hon. Friend's point and will give serious consideration to any proposal that is put forward. For understandable reasons, I can give no guarantee of the outcome of the deliberations, but at the same time I must warn that statutory procedures would have to be gone through.

Mr. Coleman: Is the Minister aware that rumour has it that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has some goodies to announce today? Does he agree that the efforts of trusts, such as the Neath Development Partnership, which on its own has created about 900 jobs in the past five years, have done a great deal to reflect the status of Wales as a place for people to come to?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I pay tribute to the efforts of the Neath partnership, which is a very good example of how well both the private and public sectors can work together. I have visited that partnership, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will visit it later this week to provide encouragement for the good work that it is doing.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Is it not absurd to impose tolls on the Cleddau bridge, in the enterprise zone in the Secretary of State's constituency, which restrict movement from one side to the other, thus defeating the object of the exercise? In view of the astronomical figure of unemployment in the Secretary of State's constituency, does it mean that the right hon. Gentleman has forsaken those people as well?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: My right hon. Friend forsook them to the extent that the Government provided a £4 million interest-free loan. Furthermore, as this matter affects a private Bill, I am sure that it would be out of order to make any further comment.

Nurses

3. **Mr. Hubbard-Miles** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many nurses were employed in Wales per 1,000 population on 31 March 1978 and 31 March 1984.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): Monthly data were not collected in 1978. However, according to the annual census at 30 September 1978 the National Health Service in Wales employed 8·1 whole-time equivalent nurses per 1,000 population. The figure at 31 March 1984 was 9·3 whole-time equivalent nurses per 1,000 population.

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Can he say how that substantial increase in front-line workers in the NHS has affected the number of inpatients and outpatients being treated?

Mr. Roberts: Certainly. The increase in the number of inpatients being cared for between September 1979 and September 1983 was 10·9 per cent. The number of day cases cared for increased by 11·2 per cent. and outpatients by 12·6 per cent.—a very creditable performance.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that that increase reflects the increase in demand, particularly through the growth of the geriatric population? Does he also accept that the increased pressure on hospitals comes from a cut in resources for local government and a failure to maintain home helps, which means that people who would otherwise be helped in their own homes have to go to hospital?

Mr. Roberts: No, I do not accept that. A certain element of the increase in the number of patients treated is a result of demographic change, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there has been a comparable increase in the amount of money spent by local authorities on personal social services.

Sir Raymond Gower: In view of those significant figures, can my hon. Friend explain the extent of the propaganda to the contrary?

Mr. Roberts: It is very difficult. One can only hope that truth will triumph eventually, and I am glad to assure my hon. Friend that it does appear to be triumphing at long last.

Dr. Marek: If the Minister wishes to take credit for those numbers, perhaps he will supply the House with further information. For the dates that he has mentioned, what were the average numbers of hours worked per nurse, and what was the ratio of SENs to SRNs?

Mr. Roberts: On the last point, if the hon. Gentleman will put down a question I shall answer it. I am sure that he will not expect me to carry those figures in my head. During the period about which we are talking there was a reduction in the number of hours worked by nurses, but, even so, there was an increase in the total number of nurses over and above that required to compensate for the decrease in their working hours. There was also an increase in the total number of front-line staff for the Health Service.

Coal Industry Dispute

4. **Mr. Harvey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs have been lost in Wales as a result of the coal mining dispute; and how much the total cost of the dispute has been to the Welsh economy.

17. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his assessment of the impact on the Welsh economy and on the prospects for employment in Wales of a further prolongation of the coal mining dispute.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): It is not possible to give detailed figures in respect of Wales, but there is no doubt that jobs are being lost, particularly in businesses with direct connections with the coal industry. The longer the dispute continues, the greater will be the threat to those businesses and to economic development.

Mr. Harvey: Does my right hon. Friend accept that this represents a shameful and tragic waste of human resources in Wales? Will he urge Welsh miners to follow the excellent example set by Bersham colliery workers in going back to work?

Mr. Edwards: As I said at the CBI dinner on Friday, I agree that the most tragic aspects of this dispute are the waste of the resources involved, the destruction of coal faces, and the loss of markets and of resources that would be going into new productive industry.

Mr. Terlezki: Have we not lost the order for 600,000 tonnes of coal that were to be exported to France because

of this violent and undemocratic strike? At the same time, will not British Rail, the National Bus Company and, in particular, small businesses suffer because Mr. Scargill and his subordinates are denying their members a free and democratic ballot?

Mr. Edwards: Undoubtedly, jobs and exports are being lost, and industries and markets are being affected. For example, I know that the National Bus Company had to lay off about 20 people at its Bridgend depot as a result of the dispute.

Mr. Ray Powell: I do not understand why the Minister did not couple question 14 with these questions. Is the explanation that he is pandering to his Conservative colleagues? Has he read the January edition of *Accountancy*, which clearly states that the National Coal Board's accounting system needs to be thoroughly investigated? Is he aware that in this magazine five accountancy experts said that it was time the system was changed? Is he further aware that if this system of accountancy had been operated in the Wyndham Western colliery in my constituency, which closed on 7 January, in all probability it would still be open?

Mr. Edwards: I did not couple the hon. Gentleman's question with the other two because it is a different question. The taxpayer knows from the amount of money being paid to loss-making pits that, no matter what form of accountancy is used, substantial losses are being made by several pits and that the cost of producing coal in the best pits is very much less than in the most expensive loss-making pits.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: At the end of the Scargill strike, which surely cannot be far away, will British Rail be able to win back all the coal traffic that it previously carried, particularly between Port Talbot and Llanwern?

Mr. Edwards: That will be a matter for the customers to decide. I understand that the cost of road transport has proved comparable and sometimes competitive with that of rail transport. Thus, some changes may take place, but that will be for the management of the steel industry and others who use coal to decide.

Mr. Ron Davies: Is the Secretary of State aware that there are fewer miners working today in south Wales than last week? Does he not understand that there is no possibility of the striking miners in south Wales going back to work, other than on the basis of a negotiated settlement that suits them and the NUM? Will the right hon. Gentleman at last begin to take his responsibilities seriously? Last Thursday the Leader of the House told the House that he wanted further talks on the basis of the NACODS settlement. Given the Secretary of State's responsibility for the turmoil in south Wales, will he tell Welsh Members what he is doing, at Cabinet level, to bring about the resumption of those talks?

Mr. Edwards: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his clear statement that the leaders of the NUM are apparently interested only in negotiating on their terms, and not in considering the interests of the nation as a whole, of other industries, of the consumer, or of the future of the coal industry.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to repeat in the House the remarks that he made at the CBI dinner in Cardiff on Friday? Those remarks were considered deeply offensive by 100,000 miners and their families in south Wales.

Mr. Edwards: I cannot see how anyone could have found offensive my condemnation of violence, my view that the terrible waste was destroying markets and job prospects, or my appeal that people should be allowed to return to work without the threat of violence and should be able to hold a ballot, as is their natural right.

Mr. Grist: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that record investment of more than £100 million is earmarked for the south Wales pits if they return to work, and that Mr. Sid Moore, the marketing director of the NCB in south Wales, has stated that the threat of massive closures in south Wales is political bunkum?

Mr. Edwards: I noticed that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) threatened that more jobs would be lost in south Wales than now exist in the south Wales coal industry. That would seem to suggest that he has been exaggerating his case, as so often happens. It is known that the NCB is anxious to get on with considering investment in west Wales, at Margam and elsewhere, and that its plans are being held up because of the dispute.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Secretary of State confirm that as a result of the Government's incompetence and bigotry the financial cost of the dispute stands at between £2·5 billion and £4·5 billion and that the social cost cannot be calculated? The attempt to bribe miners back to work has failed dismally in south Wales. The right hon. Gentleman should be trying to negotiate a decent settlement instead of confirming losses and attempting to exaggerate the situation.

Mr. Edwards: I would welcome negotiation on the basis of the NACODS settlement, but it is very difficult when the leader of the NUM says that he is not prepared to negotiate on the central issue in dispute.

Mr. Barry Jones: Is not the only way to resolve the dispute for the Government to get the parties to the negotiating table before Christmas? Otherwise, the dispute will last well into 1985. Will the Secretary of State urge his Cabinet colleagues, specifically the Secretary of State for Energy, to involve themselves in negotiations? Does he agree that he should bring more statesmanship and a little less contemptible behaviour to the issue?

Mr. Edwards: There can be little point in proceeding with negotiations if the president of the National Union of Mineworkers says that he is not prepared to negotiate on the central issue of the strike—whether uneconomic pits should be closed, as they always have been under every Government.

Welsh Development Agency

5. **Mr. Best** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current activities of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The agency is vigorously implementing the strategy set out in its published corporate plan. Its activities are aimed at regenerating the Welsh economy and improving the industrial infrastructure and the environment. Particular importance is attached to

securing more inward investment and encouraging technological development, and every effort is made to harness private sector funds.

Mr. Best: Is the Welsh Development Agency in a position to help locally by paying particular attention to local needs and problems, such as those in Holyhead?

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend has recently met the chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency and discussed local problems with him. He will know that as a result of recent difficulties the agency's regional office is about to launch a series of informal sessions and seminars with WDA tenants and other local business people. Such local consultative activity will be helpful.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to encourage Welsh local authorities to take advantage of the investment fund set up by the Welsh Development Agency and urge them to examine their own investments, and pension funds investments, in order to gain practical benefit from their capital resources?

Mr. Edwards: I welcome that suggestion. The closest co-operation between the agency, local authorities and the private sector is the key to success if we are to make the best use of resources.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will not the cuts in regional aid make the WDA's job that much more difficult? Has the Secretary of State forgotten that, following the slimline operation, thousands of steel workers are still unemployed? As a recent survey in Port Talbot shows that one fifth of them are still out of work three years after that exercise, does that mean that the Secretary of State and the Government do not appreciate the desolation over which they are presiding?

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that south Wales will remain competitive as a result of the regional changes. The combination of the regional incentives, the work of the agency, the advantages of the European coal and steel loans and the other packages of assistance will ensure that, as before, the Newport area and the steel closure areas will continue to attract new inward investment and jobs.

Milk

6. **Sir Raymond Gower** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cutback in milk production in Wales and in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan, respectively, from the date of the introduction of milk quotas up to the latest convenient date; how the proportionate cutback in each case compares with the United Kingdom proportion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The cutback of 10·3 per cent. in Welsh production between April and October 1984 compared with the same period last year is as much a consequence of the long dry summer as it is a response to the imposition of milk quotas. The comparable reduction in England and Wales is 9·3 per cent., and it is at present unlikely that supplementary levy will be payable. The United Kingdom reduction is 8·7 per cent. I regret that figures for the Vale of Glamorgan are not available.

Sir Raymond Gower: I appreciate that it is too soon to make a final judgment, and I accept that the drought might have caused special problems, but will my right hon. Friend take account of the fact that the figures underline the importance of milk production in many parts of the Principality, including the Vale of Glamorgan?

Mr. Edwards: I understand the importance of milk production. In the period up to October the United Kingdom was about 3·9 per cent. below the estimated dairy quota, although I judge that the gap will have closed considerably by the end of the year. The five local panels have completed their examination of special case claims and the main tribunal, which has been substantially enlarged, is considering with all possible urgency appeals against local panel decisions and the exceptional hardship cases.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that he will go to Brussels and make a special plea on behalf of Welsh dairy producers for an extra milk quota for 1985?

Mr. Edwards: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government, in considering their stand in Brussels when they receive the Commission's proposals in the new year, will consider carefully the special circumstances that affect different parts of the United Kingdom, including Wales.

Mr. Best: My right hon. Friend will know that he and I represent many farmers who have been hit hard by the milk quota proposals. Will he have a word with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and ensure that when he goes to Brussels he makes certain that no European country gets away with undercutting the quotas, so that Britain bears a fair burden of the problem and not a disproportionate one?

Mr. Edwards: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on 20 November:

"My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made it quite clear to the Commission that, with regard to the super levy, either all of us collect it or none of us do so. We shall not be in a position in which Britain keeps the rules while others do not."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 143.]

Mr. Roy Hughes: Is it not evident that there is still much dissatisfaction about milk quotas? The Secretary of State should know that from experience, bearing in mind the fact that only a week or two ago local dairy farmers stormed into his office. Why did he not keep faith with his people and at least insist on a deal similar to that obtained by the Irish dairy farmers?

Mr. Edwards: It is hard to believe that the Opposition are arguing, against the background of the CAP and CAP expenditure, that Britain should have had an increase in its milk quota. That is a remarkable revelation of the Opposition's agriculture policy.

Regional Industrial Policy

7. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on Government proposals for regional industrial policy in Wales.

10. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the implications for Wales of the recently announced changes in the Government's regional aid policies.

Mr. Edwards: The Government's new regional policy arrangements are designed to create genuine and lasting

jobs cost-effectively. The revised assisted areas map covers nearly 90 per cent. of the working population of Wales and provides support both for needy areas and for key centres of growth. Wales will continue to offer an effective level of support and a comprehensive package of advice and assistance to all qualifying firms looking to invest in the Principality.

Mr. Davies: Will the Secretary of State direct his attention to mid-Glamorgan and confirm that in two constituencies—Caerphilly, and Ogmore—and the area of Taff-tly the grant to large areas will be reduced from 22 to 15 per cent. and that they will no longer qualify for automatic grants? Given the desperate need to attract employment into those areas, how does the Secretary of State expect us to compete on an equal footing with areas in the midlands, such as Birmingham or Coventry?

Mr. Edwards: The entire Heads of the Valley area of industrial south Wales, as a coherent block, receives the most assistance available in the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is in an especially good position to compete with other areas, including the west midlands. In the southern belt, where unemployment is lower and the attractions to incoming industry are already substantial, I am satisfied that the combination of assistance available — the selective financial assistance package, the European coal and steel aids, the Welsh Development Agency package and the assistance for small firms— will ensure that it continues to be a competitive and attractive area, and that it will continue to attract a disproportionate share of inward investment.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the new arrangements command general assent, on the ground that they are likely to be more cost-effective in bringing jobs to the area? However, can he give any reassurance to the areas that have lost assisted status that they will not thereby forgo any call on EEC investment funds or other forms of aid?

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend will recall that after the downgrading of mid-Wales we had discussions with the European Commission, and ERDF assistance was later available in that area. I shall be having discussions with the Commission about the other rural areas that have been downgraded, but I can give no undertakings now on the outcome of the discussions.

Mr. Foot: What was the exact calculation of the sum that would be saved by the removal of special development area status from various areas in Wales? What account did the Government take of employment consequences when they embarked upon their policy? Have not the Government, and the right hon. Gentleman in particular, agreed to hitting even harder the areas that have already been hit the hardest? What was the exact calculation of extra unemployment at which he connived with the Government?

Mr. Edwards: I do not agree that the result will be extra unemployment. I believe that the regional package will be extremely effective. When it is combined with other Government measures, including lower interest rates and cuts in the job tax, which the right hon. Gentleman and the previous Labour Government imposed, it will attract investment. The right hon. Gentleman has taken an extraordinary position in the area which he represents, which has the highest level of assistance that is available in the United Kingdom. That assistance has been extended to the Abergavenny area, which will be especially attractive for high-tech industry. He is, apparently selfishly, begruding areas to the west of Blaenau Gwent a level of assistance that is equal to that in his constituency.

Mr. Raffan: Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that changes in regional policy will not put us at a disadvantage when they are set against aid packages from other European competitors, and will not prevent us from holding on to companies such as Laura Ashley, which has said that it might go to Holland because of the attractive aid packages on offer there?

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend's part of Wales remains an area with the highest level of assistance and— *[Interruption.]* The Opposition always hate good news. I am pleased to tell the House that Laura Ashley Ltd. is today announcing that its major new textile finishing project is to be undertaken in Newtown. Associated with this development will be a new garment-making unit in the north Wales development area. The two projects will together result in several hundred additional jobs, and the investment will consolidate and further develop Laura Ashley's British and Welsh operation. There was strong competition for the project from Holland and I am especially pleased that various authorities in Britain were able to put together a package that was attractive enough to persuade Laura Ashley to undertake the project in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: The news on Laura Ashley must be welcome, but I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he put himself into a ministerial flat spin on the issue by recklessly removing assisted status from mid-Wales in 1980. That is why he found himself in a mess, and that is what caused him to go cap in hand around Whitehall to get moneys for Laura Ashley. If the worrying £60 million cut in aid in last week's regional development announcement is not a public expenditure cut, will he tell us where in his budget he proposes to spend another £60 million?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman appears to miss the point that if an area that does not have development area status is able to compete with a development area in Holland and attract major investment of the Laura Ashley sort, it means that in areas that have development area status we shall compete extremely effectively. I am satisfied that we remain competitive in Wales and will continue to obtain a good share of the investment that will be attracted there.

Labour Statistics

8. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many unemployed people there are in Wales compared with 1979 as a total and as a percentage of the total population; how many are long-term unemployed; and what percentage of the unemployed total is the long-term unemployed total.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 8 November 1984 there were 179,643 unemployed claimants in Wales, compared with a figure of 78,297 in November 1979. As percentages of the employee population they represent 16·8 per cent. and 7·1 per cent. respectively. It is estimated that 73,334 or 40·8 per cent. of the total for November 1984 had been unemployed for over a year.

Mr. Jones: Against the background of those doleful figures, the £60 million cut in regional aid is deplorable. I expect the Secretary of State to tell us today about new jobs from Japan and the United States of America. Having told us of those terrible figures, does the right hon. Gentleman propose to surrender weakly the skillcentres in Llanelli and west Gwent? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that the loss of 230 Courtaulds jobs is a severe blow to the economy of north-east Wales? I remind the Secretary of State that in Clwyd there are 12,810 jobless people in the Flint, Rhyl and Deeside area.

Mr. Edwards: I was glad to see the MSC press notice issued on 4 December, which reported that there had been a sharp upturn in the number of jobs available in the Shotton area and that the number of job opportunities in the area was increasing. The savings of an estimated £60 million in the regional policy announcement will not occur until 1987-88. It is expected that there will be an increase in regional policy expenditure in the two years before that time. I must set those figures against the fact that Welsh industry is benefiting by more than £120 million a year from the abolition of the Labour Government's job tax. As for skillcentres, what is at present a proposal put by officials has not yet been considered by the Commission, nor have the Commission's proposals been considered by Ministers.

PAYMASTER GENERAL

Staff

23. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Paymaster General how many staff are employed in his Department; what is the nature of their responsibilities; and what is the size of the budget he administers.

The Paymaster-General (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): On 1 November there were 834 staff in post in my Department.

My Department acts as banker for Government Departments; provides the Treasury with up-to-date information on central Government expenditure: and pays public service pensions. Its administrative budget for 1984-85 amounts to £12·3 million, of which about £400,000 is recovered from other Departments.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware of the appalling suffering and inconvenience caused to pensioners by the DHSS strike at Newcastle? What effect has that strike had on DHSS payments?

Mr. Gummer: The strke has caused considerable distress. I am pleased to say that two of the unions have now agreed that their members should go back to work, and I hope that the third union will encourage its members to return. It is sad when the plight of the least able in our society is used to press home wage demands. There has been a considerable diminution in the number of payments that we have been able to make, amounting to about £500,000. I am sorry that that has happened, because we want to make those payments to the people who deserve them.

Mr. Ron Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those figures hardly deserve the appointment of someone of Cabinet rank to overseer them? Will the hon. Gentleman accept that his role in the Cabinet really rests upon his chairmanship of the Conservative party?

Mr. Gummer: As the hon. Gentleman's facts are incorrect, perhaps it would be unsuitable for me to answer his question.

Official Duties

24. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Paymaster General what proportion of the working week he spends on his official duties.

Mr. Gummer: I would expect to devote as much time to my duties as Paymaster General as is necessary to do them well.

Mr. Winnick: I must confess that that was an apt reply. Since the hon. Gentleman's main function is to be chairman of the Conservative party, does he not feel that he could have kept the Prime Minister somewhat better informed about the strong feelings of Conservative Back Benchers over student grants and other sensitive issues? When changes are made, will the hon. Gentleman not feel a sense of relief at having given up the job as chairman of the Conservative party, after all the stick that he has received?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has forecast that event so many times over so many months that I hope to continue to disappoint him year after year.

Cheques (Authorisations)

25. **Mr. Adley** asked the Paymaster General how many cheques he authorised for signature last month in his official capacity; and how much they totalled.

Mr. Gummer: Although my duties as Paymaster General include the oversight of the handling of payable orders drawn on my Office by Government Departments and others, they do not include the authorisation of cheques for signature.

Mr. Adley: In view of the answer that my hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) earlier, may I, on behalf of many of my constituents, express my thanks to my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, and, through him, the appropriate Ministers, for ensuring that pensions keep ahead of the rate of inflation? I assure him that for most of my constituents living on fixed incomes the control of inflation remains the most important priority.

Mr. Gummer: While thanking my hon. Friend for those remarks, may I point out to him—I am sure that he will agree—that it would help a great deal to keep inflation down if people did not push for wage rises above the level of inflation or for wage rises that have not been earned by better productivity?

Ministerial Functions

26. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Paymaster General if he will list the ministerial functions of his office.

Mr. Gummer: I am responsible for matters affecting the running and administration of the Paymaster General's Office at Crawley. I also hold certain offices connected with the Royal hospital, Chelsea; the Duke of York's school; the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation; and the Drouly Officers' widows' fund.

Mr. Murphy: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the broad breadth of experience that he will gain from his appointment as Paymaster General. Does he feel that there are areas for privatisation within his remit?

Mr. Gummer: I yield to no one in my enthusiasm for privatisation. On my visit next week to the computer works at Crawley, I shall consider that matter carefully. I believe it unlikely that there is scope for privatisation, because we are an efficient operation that has to be kept under Government control because we are paying out Government money.

WALES

Labour Statistics

9. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current number of men and women employed in Wales between the ages of 16 and 21, 22 and 55, and 65 years, respectively.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information is not available on the basis requested. The most up-to-date information relates to the 1981 census of population. For the age groups nearest to those requested the information was as follows:

16-20 years—104,898; 21-54 years—783,709; 55-64 years—143,726.

Mrs. Clwyd: Those people are fortunate, but what about the 27·3 per cent. of men in my constituency who are unemployed? That is the highest male unemployment rate in Wales. Surely the duty of the Secretary of State for Wales is not to come to the House and wring his hands with counterfeit anxiety, but to put pressure on the Government to change their blitzkrieg policies towards the people of Wales and their industries.

Mr. Edwards: I am glad to see that over the past past two or three months there has been a small fall in the number of unemployed people in the industrial areas of south Wales. We are beginning to see the results of the massive inward and other investment that has been taking place recently. The tragedy is that in the hon. Lady's constituency those prospects are being blighted by the continuation of a strike which she encourages.

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the protestations coming from Opposition Members representing Welsh constituencies would be a little more credible this Monday afternoon if one or two of them had been in their seats last Friday morning when an important debate on unemployment and tourism took place in the Chamber?

Mr. Edwards: I am aware that hon. Members often have important engagements on a Friday, and I should not wish to condemn them on that account. My hon. Friend is right to mention tourism. It is an industry that provides an important and growing source of new jobs.

Mr. Abse: As there are 5,500 unemployed people in my constituency, 2,500 of whom have been unemployed for more than a year, will the Secretary of State try to relieve the gloom felt in my constituency by removing the prevalent present speculation, which has arisen as a result of planning applications, so that we may know whether there is hope of early large inward investment at Cwmbran? Is he aware of our concern that the recent changes, and any regional package being considered, should in no way adversely affect the attraction of inward American investment?

Mr. Edwards: I can certainly confirm that the recent changes in regional policy in no way affect the offer to the company concerned. I confirm that negotiations are indeed taking place with an American company with a view to its setting up in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I hope that it will be possible to give news of the conclusion of those negotiations before long. There are still detailed matters to be resolved.

Bus Services (Deregulation)

11. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local authorities and local authority associations which have protested about the Government's plans for the deregulation of bus services in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Representations have been received on various aspects of the White Paper, "Buses", from more than 40 local authorities and local authority associations in Wales. With permission I shall circulate the full list in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Hughes: Can the Minister say who was in favour of the proposals? Is it not a serious accusation for experts in the transport section of the Association of District Councils to express doubts about the knowledge of the industry of those responsible for drawing up the White Paper? In view of all the public disquiet and the anxiety of pensioners, the disabled, women's institutes, and so on, not to mention local authorities, does the Minister agree that there must be more consultation before legislation is introduced?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: There is, of course, consultation. Many of the respondents have expressed concern at various aspects of the Government's proposals. Any form of change is always met with a certain amount of concern, but not all authorities oppose deregulation. Powys county council, for example, is in favour, subject to certain safeguards.

Mr. Ray Powell: Why?

Mr. Stradling Thomas: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked that question. It is because the consumer and the customer also come into this, and the Welsh Consumer Council has welcomed our proposals.

Following is the list.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITY ASSOCIATIONS IN WALES WHICH HAVE MADE REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS FOR THE BUS INDUSTRY

Associations

1. Welsh Counties Committee
2. Standing Conference on Regional Planning in South Wales
3. Welsh Office of the Association of District Councils
4. Association of District Councils South Wales Passenger Transport Region
5. Welsh Association of Community and Town Councils Ceredigion Area Committee
6. Clwyd Association of Local Councils
7. National Association of Local Councils

County Councils

1. Clwyd County Council
2. Dyfed County Council
3. Gwent County Council
4. Gwynedd County Council
5. Mid Glamorgan County Council
6. Powys County Council
7. South Glamorgan County Council
8. West Glamorgan County Council

Borough Councils and District Councils

1. Aberconwy Borough Council
2. Afan Borough Council
3. Alyn and Deeside District Council
4. Arfon Borough Council
5. Blaenau Gwent Borough Council
6. Cardiff City Council
7. Carmarthen District Council
8. Ceredigion District Council
9. Colwyn Borough Council
10. Delyn Borough Council
11. Glyndwr District Council
12. Islwyn Borough Council
13. Meirionnydd District Council
14. Monmouth District Council
15. Neath Borough Council
16. Newport Borough Council
17. Preseli District Council
18. Rhondda Borough Council
19. Rhuddlan Borough Council
20. Rhymney Valley District Council
21. Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council
22. Wrexham Maelor Borough Council

Town Councils and Community Councils

1. Cwmbran Town Council
2. Llanfoist Fawr Community Council
3. Penarth Town Council
4. Prestatyn Town Council

THE ARTS

Private Sponsorship

28. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what encouragement Her Majesty's Government give to private sponsorship of the arts; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts has recently launched an incentive scheme designed to encourage companies to look into the benefits of arts sponsorship. The first 12 winners, who raised more than £500,000, have just been announced.

Mr. Proctor: Is my hon. Friend aware of the growing concern of certain companies and corporations at the activities of the Inland Revenue "hit" squad in its office, which is examining their accounts with specific regard to sponsorship of the arts? Will he make representations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor about this and also about the general need for tax reform to encourage private sponsorship of the arts?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have not seen those representations, but I shall look into the matter. On the broader point, the Select Committee made some recommendations, which are still under consideration. I remind my hon. Friend that the Government have made some reforms, especially of the covenanting regime, which have given a great deal of help in this matter.

Mr. Pavitt: In discussing this issue, will the hon. Gentleman give special attention to sponsorship by tobacco companies leading to the sale of lethal cigarettes, which cause nearly 100,000 premature deaths per year? Will he discuss with the Chancellor the fact that a further 1p tax per packet of cigarettes would provide enough money to cover not just arts sponsorship, but all sports sponsorship?

Mr. Waldegrave: Unfortunately, the tax regime is not the responsibility of my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts.

Sir David Price: Does my hon. Friend agree that private sponsorship of the arts should be regarded as a welcome addition to support for the arts and not as a substitute for proper public patronage?

Mr. Waldegrave: I thoroughly endorse that view. We know that a range of arts have to rely on continued public sponsorship. Nevertheless, pluralism in funding is vital. That is why we are keen to see more private sponsorship.

Mr. Buchan: In view of the wise words of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) and of the Minister's reply, is it not disgraceful that public subsidy has fallen so short under the present Government that, after one of the most brilliant years in the history of the British theatre, a desperate crisis faces the English National Opera, the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester and even the National theatre itself? Is that not an indictment of the disgraceful level of funding provided by the Minister for the Arts?

Mr. Waldegrave: No, it is not. Those three situations are all different. However, it is not the fault of the Minister for the Arts that the English National Opera, for instance, is in difficulties. Arts funding under the Government has kept up with inflation at a difficult time. That has been a considerable achievement.

Eastern Arts

29. **Mr. Freud** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what is the per capita Arts Council grant for Eastern Arts; and how this compares with funding for other regional arts associations.

Mr. Waldegrave: The figure is 14·9p, compared with an average of 27·7p for other regions of England.

Mr. Freud: In view of those figures, will the Minister attempt to encourage the Arts Council to place demographic criteria high on its list of priorities when deciding future levels of funding for the eastern region?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is a formidable lobbyist for his region, but I always have to give the same answer. The Arts Council funds projects it considers worthy of funding. It does not try to spread money on a demographic basis. However, I will once again draw to the attention of the Arts Council what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Greater Manchester

30. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if Her Majesty's Government are satisfied that adequate provision will be made for the arts in Greater Manchester if present proposals to abolish the Greater Manchester council are implemented.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Lloyd: Is the Minister aware that the North-West Arts Association does not share his view? The association has written to hon. Members representing north-western constituencies, pointing out that it fears that there will be a shortfall in spending after the abolition of the Greater Manchester council and that over £750,000 of arts subsidy that is currently paid will not be guaranteed. Does the Minister accept that he is relying on the hope that Labour authorities such as Manchester will bail out Conservative authorities such as Trafford, which have no record of spending money on the arts, and no intention of doing so?

Mr. Waldegrave: I hope that both Conservative and Labour metropolitan districts will undertake their responsibilities. I pay tribute to the work done by the Greater Manchester council, some of which has been most useful. The arts budget will have considerable additional funds to help to meet the shortfall, and I am sure that if the districts play their proper role there should be no long-term difficulty.

Works of Art (Export)

32. **Mr. Robert Sheldon** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what discussions he has had concerning the export of works of art.

Mr. Waldegrave: The export control system for works of art and antiques is kept under continuous review. My right hon. and noble Friend meets the chairman of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art as appropriate.

Mr. Sheldon: Most of our artistic heritage was acquired in the 18th and 19th century when our prosperity, compared to that of other countries, was much greater than we are ever likely to achieve again. Is it not clear that the net effect of events during the next few decades is likely to be the export of some works of art that are of great importance to us? Should not there be a ban on selling a special category of works of art which we cannot keep in this country by raising the requisite money? We have no objection to people selling their works of art, but there should be a ban on the export of certain works of art.

Mr. Waldegrave: All those matters are kept under consideration. However, I take the point made in the annual report of the National Heritage Memorial Fund that Britain has greatly gained from the free trade in works of art over the years and that it would not be in our long-term interests to do away with it. We have great public collections. What is important is that we should try to ensure that private owners do not have to sell in the first place.

Museums and Galleries (Entrance Charges)

33. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what is the current level of revenue from entrance charges to museums and galleries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Of the national museums and galleries in England, only the National Maritime museum makes a general admission charge for its main collection. Its forecast gross income from charges is £353,000 in the current financial year. Information is not readily available on the national museums' and galleries' revenue from admission charges at special exhibitions and out-stations as distinct from their other non-Exchequer income sources.

Mr. Murphy: Does my hon. Friend agree that such charges could be a valuable additional source of funding for the arts? Will he therefore tell us whether he and his right hon. and noble Friend intend to encourage this movement in the future?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's policy is that the trustees of the collections themselves should come forward with proposals if they think it right to do so. They know their own markets better than we do.

Mr. Buchan: With respect, that is hardly the Government's policy. The Government are doing everything that they can to encourage museums and other institutions to charge. When opening a library in Ealing in April, the Minister for the Arts said how admirable it was for people to pay, as they would enjoy things all the more as a result. That argument, as I have said before, is the argument of the prostitute, and I wish that the Minister would disclaim it.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman makes that joke every three weeks and it never seems any more apposite. The policy is, I think, as I have stated it. Indeed, it is as I have stated it, so I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in this matter.

English National Opera

34. **Sir David Price** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking in conjunction with the Arts Council to ensure the future of the English National Opera.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and noble Friend is in touch with the Arts Council, which is keeping the situation under review.

Sir David Price: Is my hon. Friend aware that the English National Opera's financial difficulties arise largely because of its recent American tour? Is he further aware that that raises wide issues of whether nationally

sponsored companies should tour abroad, bearing in mind the risks involved? What are my hon. Friend's thoughts on this matter?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. The English National Opera's difficulties arise from an American tour and especially because of the failure of some promises in America to find money for the company. It has always been the case that Arts Council money cannot be used for touring abroad. Such tours are undertaken at the risk of the companies concerned. I understand that the tour was a triumphant artistic success, which is why my right hon. and noble Friend is keeping closely in touch.

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you have any discretion in regard to a Minister coupling questions? You will have noted that the Secretary of State for Wales today coupled two questions tabled by Conservative Members. That resulted in the exclusion of 11 out of 22 questions, most of which had been tabled by Labour Members. The Secretary of State coupled question No. 4 with question No. 17, the latter of which was tabled by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Terlezki), and question No. 10 with question No. 7, which was also tabled by a Conservative Member. At 3.10 pm Welsh Questions were delayed until after questions relating to public accounts had been dealt with. After question No. 11 had been taken we proceeded to questions on the Arts, with the result that questions Nos. 12 to 22 were not asked. Such coupling is not unusual. The Secretary of State has previously coupled five or six questions, especially when they relate to the coal mining dispute. Today, he should have coupled at least my question No. 14 with question No. 4 and he could have taken more questions with question No. 7, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies).

I do not want to delay the House unduly, but there is another important point that arises out of Question Time today. Is it in order for a Conservative Member who rarely attends the House, but when he does so on a Friday complains about other Welsh Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's latter point—it is not a matter for me. I note his point on the linking of questions. That is entirely a matter for the Minister concerned. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have noted that I called him immediately after the supplementary questions of the hon. Members who tabled questions Nos. 4 and 17.

Mr. Powell: I am very grateful.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has any grouse, has he? Moreover, all hon. Members who tabled a question that appeared on the Order Paper today were called to ask a supplementary question. We got through the whole list of 22 hon. Members, at least in supplementary questions.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

3.35 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute an inquiry into allegations of telephone tapping and interference with the mail of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): No, Sir. I am satisfied that the arrangements set out in the White Paper "The Interception of Communications in Great Britain" are strictly applied by all concerned.

The complaints about the provision of postal and telephone services are matters for the Post Office and British Telecom whose duty it is, in the first instance, to investigate any allegations of improper conduct on the part of their staff.

Mr. Kaufman: Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman been in contact with Sir Ronald Dearing following the disclosure that Sir Ronald has established that Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament correspondence has been tampered with substantially? Will he join me in paying tribute to Sir Ronald Dearing for acting so promptly and for taking these inquiries with appropriate seriousness?

The Home Secretary says that he is satisfied that no surveillance or interference has taken place. Will he categorically assure the House that he himself has approved no warrant authorising the telephone tapping of CND members and will he tell us how he is so sure that covert action, unknown to himself, has not been taken? Will he condemn and repudiate any possibility of interference with or surveillance of the CND? Will he state clearly that the CND, whatever he may think of its views, is a legitimate organisation, openly pursuing legitimate objectives, and will he make it utterly clear that the CND is not being pried into or listened into by Big Brother, or, for that matter, by Big Sister either?

Mr. Brittan: I join the right hon. Gentleman in complimenting Sir Ronald Dearing on dealing, as one would have expected, in a responsible way with the complaints made about the Post Office services. With regard to interception, I shall follow exactly the practice followed by the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), and by previous Governments, irrespective of party, in neither confirming nor denying the existence of authorised interception in a particular case, whatever the circumstances. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that I would authorise interception only in those cases where the criteria set out in the White Paper were clearly met. I have no evidence or reason to believe that unauthorised interception was carried out. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that that is a matter which would not be said lightly.

So far as the legitimacy or otherwise of CND is concerned, I do not think it is for me to legitimise it or otherwise. There is no doubt that peaceful political campaigning to change the mind of the Government and of people generally about the validity of nuclear disarmament, whether unilateral or otherwise, is an entirely legitimate activity which does not fall within the very strict criteria of the 1980 White Paper.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): In view of the sensitivity of the CND over illegal interference, has my right hon. and learned Friend received any assurance or undertaking from CND that it will not itself indulge in any illegal interference with the rights of the people at the Molesworth cruise missile site which is near to my constituency? If not, is this not another example of double standards by this increasingly hypocritical body?

Mr. Brittan: I have received no such assurance.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Home Secretary aware that there is hardly anyone in the country who believes that what occurred over the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's mail was due to some kind of administrative mistake? Is it not time for the Home Secretary to become far less complacent over this issue and to recognise his duty to defend and not undermine civil liberties? What has occurred over the mail to CND members and other kinds of operations which have taken place demonstrate how justified is the current inquiry into the special branch by the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

Mr. Brittan: I do not know that the hon. Gentleman is entitled to speak for the overwhelming majority of the country in the way that he purports. I would have reservations about accepting him as a spokesman to quite that extent. The inquiry into the special branch is a matter for the Select Committee and is proceeding in the normal way.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the general secretary of the CND earlier this year, in a speech at Malvern, called upon soldiers to refuse to obey orders which, on the face of it, would appear to be an offence under the Incitement to Disaffection Act 1934? Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that Mr. Kent was meant to be taken seriously on that occasion, or was it more of a publicity exercise? Should we view today's private notice question and demands in the same vein?

Mr. Brittan: I shall not seek to penetrate motives, but I shall try to answer the questions, as I have done.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): As the Secretary of State has said clearly that what has gone on is outside the guidelines, will he confirm also that it is outside any permission given by the European Court? If that is right, will he accept the responsibility of investigating what has clearly gone on because the investigation carried out by the Post Office has not got to the bottom of the matter?

Mr. Brittan: As I understand it, the Post Office inquiries have not been completed. Some test postings have taken place. I have said what I have had to say about the criteria and I cannot usefully add to it in any way.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): As CND appears to pursue policies which, in some respects, are indistinguishable from the objectives of the Kremlin, can my right hon. and learned Friend think of any organisation that could better be kept under surveillance?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his views and comparisons.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): Since it is known that the number of people engaged in the phone-tapping

[Mr. Ian Mikardo]

operation is not much smaller than the number of taps authorised by the Home Secretary, are we to conclude that each of those persons carries out only one phone-tap per annum? If they carry out more than that, who is authorising the others? If they are not carrying out more than that, should not the right hon. and learned Gentleman do something about increasing the productivity of the operation?

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman has shown his customary ingenuity and speculative qualities in asking that question, but it does not arise from the question asked by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that it is most unwise to leap to conclusions before the Post Office has completed its inquiry? When that inquiry is complete, will my right hon. and learned Friend at least recommend to Sir Ronald Dearing that he should publish its findings so that the full facts, and not the travesties that have been put about, are made clear?

Mr. Brittan: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that the Post Office would wish to make the position clear. It has been entirely candid about it up to now as far as it goes. When its inquiries are completed, I am sure that the same will continue to be the case.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I accept what the Home Secretary has said, but is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that nothing has changed my belief over the years, and certainly nothing said today, that CND is not a subversive organisation? The fact that an organisation says things with which many disagree does not make it a subversive organisation. But something did go wrong and to clear up the matter there is to be a report by the Post Office. That should be presented to the House of Commons. Compensation has been paid. As long as the aura of what went wrong is around, people will not agree with the Home Secretary or with me. Let us clear up the matter.

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for confirming that I put accurately the position when he was Home Secretary and under successive Governments. I entirely agree that, plainly, something went wrong. The Post Office would not have paid money if it had not. Therefore, I also agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the inquiries that the Post Office is completing into what went wrong are worthwhile and important. It is clear already that two of the things that went wrong were a Post Office machine and the CND's quality of packing.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will my right hon. and learned Friend invite Opposition Members to come forward with all the details of times, places, and so on, for the allegations so that a proper inquiry can take place rather than broad-brush smears which are too regularly becoming the tactics of the Opposition parties?

Mr. Brittan: I am sure that the right hon. Member for Gorton will decide in his own inimitable way whether and how to pursue the matter further.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Home Secretary give an assurance, if she can, that no hon. Members who are members of CND have their mail interfered with or their telephone calls intercepted.

Mr. Brittan: I do not think that I can add to what I have already said.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Home Secretary tell the House how many phone taps or mail interceptions he has authorised for supporters or members of CND? What comfort can I offer to the people in the N4 district of London, which contains the head office of CND and where both I and my constituents reside, that their phones are not also being tapped and their mail interfered with because they may or may not be CND supporters? Do any of the authorised phone taps on supporters of CND include Members of this House or any other House?

Mr. Brittan: I do not think that I can take the matter much further forward other than to repeat — which I welcome the opportunity to do — that it is not the practice of Governments — as the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South confirmed, to disclose whether interceptions have taken place, for reasons that are perfectly clear to anyone seriously concerned with these matters.

I also welcome the opportunity to make it perfectly clear that peaceful political campaigning to change the mind of the Government and the people generally about nuclear disarmament is a legitimate activity and does not fall within the strict criteria.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Home Secretary confirm that it is not within the current guidelines that he operates in respect of telephone tapping to authorise the tapping of individuals' telephones merely because of their membership of an organisation?

Mr. Brittan: That would depend on the organisation and its activities.

Later——

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like a ruling on a reply by the Home Secretary to a question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). When asked whether hon. Members' phones were tapped or their mail intercepted because they were supporters of CND or of the peace movement in general, the Home Secretary declined to give a categorical answer one way or the other. Will you, Mr. Speaker, rule on whether it is in order for the Government to interfere with the private correspondence of Members of Parliament and their constituents——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me. The hon. Gentleman put a question to the Home Secretary and received an answer.

Council of Environment Ministers

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the meeting on 6 December of the Council of Environment Ministers, at which I was accompanied by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Council expressed its sense of shock at the recent disaster in Bhopal and conveyed its deepest sympathy to the Government of India and the people affected. The Council discussed lead in petrol, other vehicle emissions, the limitation of nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere, the establishment of a Community information system on the environment and draft directives on emissions from large combustion plants, emissions from the titanium dioxide industry, the recycling of beverage containers and environmental assessment.

On lead in petrol, the Council reached agreement on a directive that provides for the introduction of unleaded petrol throughout the Community not later than 1989 or earlier if individual member states wish. The minimum octane levels of premium grade unleaded petrol will be 95 RON, 85 MON, at the pump. The octane number of any additional unleaded regular grade was left for member states to fix. Formal adoption of that directive must now await receipt of the opinion of the European Parliament.

On other polluting emissions from cars, the Council agreed that a high-level working group of officials should report by the end of January on the alternative routes available to secure further reductions in these emissions. That work will provide the Council with an assessment of relevant technologies and examine whether there should be different solutions for cars of different sizes. It will take into account energy and production costs and European traffic conditions.

A directive on air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide was agreed with minor amendments, and subject only to a parliamentary reserve by the United Kingdom. Agreement was reached on the funding and legal basis of the first phase of an information system on environmental data in the Community.

The four other proposed directives — on emissions from large plants, emissions from the titanium dioxide industry, the recycling of beverage containers, and environmental assessments were not agreed. The United Kingdom had objections to the first three, and in no case were we alone in having such objections. Denmark maintained its reservation on the fourth proposed directive.

The Council accepted a proposal by the United Kingdom that the Commission should be invited to consider, and report on, ways of ensuring that environmental concerns are taken into account in the Community's agricultural policies. I also recorded our concern that the Commission's recently proposed directive on motor cycle noise does not go far enough in dealing with the smaller-engined machines or in setting a sufficiently early date for reductions.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I should like to associate myself and my colleagues with the Minister's sentiments about the tragic and devastating accident in Bhopal. I trust that the Government are making all necessary help available to the Indian authorities. That accident serves as a timely reminder of how dangerous modern chemical plants are, and that in our constant efforts to monitor nuclear plants we must be for ever vigilant over conventional plants, too.

The Minister's statement contained many important points, and I should like to ask him specifically about several of them. In a slightly offhand manner—I know that he did not mean it that way — he talked about establishing a Community information system. That is very important. What does it mean? Are the Government and the Community now going along the same road as the Americans in arguing for assessment of environmental impact? There seems to be quite a lot of credit in that proposal.

With regard to the recycling of beverage containers, can the Minister give us an assurance that experiences in research will not be restricted to the EEC and that we shall take into account the experiences in America, where the Americans have had those schemes for many years? Also, outside the Community, there have been such schemes in Denmark and Norway.

I was puzzled by the agreement on nitrogen dioxide. Will the Minister explain why NO_2 was considered separately from other acidic emissions such as sulphur dioxide? How does the Minister justify taking NO_2 separately? Does it mean that we shall have a debate on NO_2? Furthermore, may we expect a debate on acid rain before long, as we have been promised?

I welcome the Minister's decision to ask the Commission to investigate ways of taking the environmental impact of agriculture into account in the common agricultural policy. However, we expect it to be more than a token gesture. It must be more than a cosmetic exercise because it goes to the heart of the CAP. Many people regard it as completely indefensible that we are producing for the sake of producing when we cannot even distribute that production to the Third world countries and while we are destroying our own environment.

We welcome the fact that agreement has been reached and that lead-free petrol will be available by 1989. However, the Minister omitted as much as he told us. For example, is it still the Government's intention to reduce the level of lead in petrol to 0·15g per litre by 1985? Can the Minister give us an assurance on that specific point? The hon. Gentleman also said that lead-free petrol would be available by 1989

"or earlier if individual member states wish."

I understand that the West German Government will introduce it earlier. Have the Government any idea when they will introduce it?

The key point about lead in petrol is related to new cars. There was a key omission from the Minister's statement. Without clarification on that point, I am afraid that the statement is utterly meaningless. Unless we know when new cars will be required to run on lead-free petrol, not when lead-free petrol will be available, we cannot be convinced that the Government are prepared to agree to the introduction of lead-free petrol, thereby protecting the health of a great many young people up and down the country.

Mr. Waldegrave: The reason why I had nothing to say about the type approval and about the time when new cars

[Mr. Waldegrave]

would be required to run on lead-free petrol is that we were not making that directive. What we debate is not up to individual Ministers; it is up to the Commission. There was no directive before us on that matter. That is in a separate directive, and the Government's position remains what it has always been: we shall try to ensure that there is no slippage from the date of 1989. We can hardly be blamed for not discussing it at the previous Council meeting if it was not on the agenda.

I give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that the Government intend to reduce the level of lead in petrol from 0·4g per litre to 0·15 next year, as we have always said. As to whether lead-free petrol will be available earlier, the Government believe that the oil industry and the motor car industry need the octane number, which we have obtained for them, in order to plan sensibly. If they can introduce lead-free petrol earlier—some companies are likely to do so—the Government will welcome it.

The information scheme is separate from the environmental impact assessment. The latter has been agreed, except for a constitutional reserve by Denmark, and we hope that the Danes can agree it at the next Council meeting. The information scheme, which was discussed at the previous Council meeting, establishes the Commission as the gatherer and holder of environmental information across Europe, which is sensible, and we have provided the legal basis and funding for that.

As to the recycling of beverage containers, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I met a distinguished group of Labour Members from south Wales, including the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who emphasised to me the difficulties and dangers for the tinplate industry in south Wales. I hope that they will welcome the fact that we heeded their advice and have not agreed to a directive, although we would agree to a recommendation.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about nitrogen dioxide, but the individual countries have no responsibility for the order in which matters are introduced. This directive is about the effects on health of nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere, not about acidification, and it has separate roots. I welcome what the hon. Gentleman said about the agriculture directive. The principal negotation is for the Agriculture Council, but the Environment Council must do all that it can to emphasise its importance to the Community.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Although we are gratified that the Government accepted all but one and a half of the nearly 20 recommendations of the report on acid rain by the Select Committee on the Environment, those outstanding leave grave concern in some quarters. May we have an urgent debate on the report and the Government's reply, if not before Christmas at least soon thereafter?

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is in the Chamber and will have heard what my hon. Friend has said. There will be such a debate, but the timing has not been decided.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the Minister accept that the dreadful tragedy in India suggests that we should make a much more vigorous and penetrating appraisal of modern chemical industries? That being so, will he assure the House that when the promised pesticides legislation is introduced it will serve a real and modern purpose and will offer more protection than do present arrangements?

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that legislation is primarily the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The terrible disaster in Bhopal has reminded us of the good safety record of our chemical industry. [An hon. Member: "What about Flixborough?"] Flixborough was our worst disaster; bad though it was, it was two orders of magnitude fewer than the disaster in India.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): My hon. Friend obviously agrees that the Bhopal incident was an appalling tragedy. Does he also agree that, prima facie, the tragedy could have been avoided if the same standards had been applied in India as were applied in America? Does he agree that Britain should advise its chemical companies that when they trade overseas we expect them to treat overseas lives with the same respect as they treat lives here, and that they should never set up plants overseas with lower safety standards, thus endangering lives, whatever the profits, or business may be?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend's question goes a little wider than the Council meeting, and it would be wrong for me to comment on the responsibility for the disaster. My hon. Friend's latter point was sensible. British Governments of both parties have taken the lead in the EC in considering the external effects of trade in dangerous products, including chemicals, and we shall maintain that lead.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the expressions of sympathy for the people and Government of India. However, given that in Britain there is manufactured and stored some materials that are reputedly 10 times as toxic as that which escaped in India, what steps are being taken to inform people living in the vicinity of the factories producing toluene diisocyanate of the fact that these products are being made next door to them? Is the Minister satisfied with the safety measures, and, if not, what will the Government undertake to do to reassure the people of Britain that there will be no such disaster, which would be of a potentially larger scale here than in India last week?

Mr. Waldegrave: As soon as that disaster took place, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked for an inventory of all such similar substances in the United Kingdom, and he was right to do so. My advice is that the substances are not manufactured in the United Kingdom, but are stored here. We are checking on all the security arrangements. I repeat that, terrible though the disaster in India was, it reminds us that our chemical industry has a good safety record over the years, and I am sure that we shall be anxious to maintain it.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the prospect of an early debate on the important subject of acid deposition. Can my hon. Friend tell the House a little more about the environmental data? For example, is it the case that the Government intend to extend the range of air quality monitoring stations and to feed that information to the EEC Commission? Secondly,

is it still the Government's intention to proceed with an early and comprehensive Bill to improve the measures against air pollution?

Mr. Waldegrave: On the first question, the answer is yes; we intend to extend the monitoring network both in rural and urban sites. As to the second question, we must in due course have a new Clean Air Act, because the framework directive that we agreed earlier in the year in the European Community will require it. Its timing has not yet been settled.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it true that the Government will be exempting three water authorities from the EEC nitrate pollution rules as a result of pressure from farmers who want to save money on the back of the environment? In the light of the Minister's statement, which effectively ducks the issue of acid rain, is it not fair to say that the attempts of the Conservative party conference to paint that party as green on environmental issues was a disaster, a failure and a misrepresentation of the truth?

Mr. Waldegrave: There was no substantive discussion at the Council meeting of the large plant directive, which is what I imagine the hon. Gentleman is talking about, although it is only part of the story about acid deposition. The representatives of three or four countries spoke briefly on it, and three or four countries were against the directive as presently drafted. The hon. Gentleman should remember the other side of the question. It is not only the Central Electricity Generating Board that is against the additional costs involved. We have had similar representations from the TUC.

On the matter of nitrates in water, every application for a derogation in the Community procedure will be looked at individually on its merits. There will be no question of putting at risk the health of anyone in this country.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): Does my hon. Friend agree that the effect of lead in petrol on children has been causing increasing concern in recent years? Therefore, is not the best thing to come out of this meeting the fact that the Common Market countries have agreed to follow the excellent lead given by this Government and have agreed to phase out lead in petrol in the foreseeable future?

Mr. Waldegrave: I did not expect to be congratulated by the Opposition, but the day was important for those of us in the European Community who have campaigned against lead. The Community has finally agreed a directive, which I know will be welcomed by my hon. Friend and by many people both inside and outside the House.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Is the Minister aware that several well-informed authorities in this country believe that there are no technical problems to prevent lead from being extracted from petrol at a much earlier date than 1989? Will he treat this matter with far more urgency than the Government have shown hitherto in the light of the continuing threat to children's intellectual and mental health?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman forgets that there will be a 60 per cent. improvement next year because the Government are moving to 0·15 instead of 0·4. We have to take into account, as we are often rightly urged to do by Labour Members, the employment prospects of people in the motor car industry and elsewhere. We think that the measured progress which we are agreeing, and which has achieved the unity in Europe that has been a major objective all through, is right. We have nothing to apologise for in this matter.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I generally welcome my hon. Friend's statement. When he refers to nitrogen dioxide, is he referring just to what is colloquially known as NO_2 or to all oxides of nitrogen?

Mr. Waldegrave: The directive refers to NO_2 only, and deals with concentrations at a level that may be considered a risk to health. It has nothing to do with the acidification issue.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): On the recycling of beverage containers, the Minister will be more than well aware, from the representations that we have made to him, of the importance of this matter to south Wales, and therefore of our pleasure at the lack of progress. What are the next steps? Is it proposed that the draft directive be returned in a diluted form, or will it come back in the form of a recommendation?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is up to the Commission and the Presidency to decide what will be on the agenda at the next Council meeting. Our position remains the same—that the recommendation is more suitable for this particular legislation. It is worth remembering that hon. Members say that we must go faster on every environmental issue, but the Labour party is not united on this matter.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I accept what the Minister said about Bhopal. However, is he aware that the health and safety inspectorate has for some time been operating at one third below its target? Is that not a terrible risk to take just to save money?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Health and Safety Executive is not the responsibility of my Department. I am certain that the inspectorate is working at levels necessary to carry out its statutory duties.

Sunday Trading Laws

4.7 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the deliberate flouting of the Sunday trading laws by major companies yesterday".

Yesterday several major stores opened for trading in deliberate violation of the Shops Act 1950. They did so knowingly and blatantly. This is a matter that the House should debate urgently. These stores took their unlawful action in anticipation of the enactment of a Bill which will be based on a report on which a White Paper has not yet been issued.

Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister told the Carlton club:

"Now that democracy has been won, it is not heroic to flout the law of the land as if we still struggled in a quagmire where civilisation had yet to be built."

Does that apply to Heals as well as to the National Union of Mineworkers? Does it apply to Habitat as well as to the Transport and General Workers Union? That happened yesterday and those who flouted the law have said openly that they intend to do so again on a number of subsequent occasions before Christmas. It is now after 4 o'clock, but the Prime Minister has not yet condemned this breach of the rule of law. The Home Secretary is in the Chamber today. He has not yet condemned this breach of the rule of law. The House needs to establish clearly whether there is one law for the miners and another for merchants.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the deliberate flouting of the Sunday trading laws by major companies yesterday".

The right hon. Gentleman and the House know that the only decision that I have to take is whether to give this matter precedence over the business already set down for today or tomorrow. I have listened with care to the right hon. Gentleman, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Later—

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): I did not realise that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) would raise the subject of the shops legislation, but I had intended to raise a point of order on the matter anyway. You, Mr. Speaker, and the whole House will recall that the Prime Minister is constantly lecturing everybody on the need to obey the law. May we ask the Leader of the House through you, Mr. Speaker, to advise her to come to the House tomorrow to make a statement condemning Debenhams, Habitat and so on for flagrantly disobeying the law?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Later—

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order arising from your decision on the Standing Order No. 10 application, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your decision because you are dealing with the business of the House for today, but may I seek your guidance? When will it be possible for the matter to be debated in the House?

On Thursday 29 November on Question No. 1 to the Prime Minister, I referred to the Employment Act 1980 and the Shops Act 1950. I asked the Prime Minister about double standards. I said that the Government were using their influence to ensure that the Employment Act 1980 was obscenely used by the courts and magistrates, resulting in the sequestration of trade union funds. Is it possible for the Home Secretary and the Leader of the House to consider providing time for the Shops Act 1950 to be considered seriously along with the action by business people who are openly defying the law? What sequestration can be operated against these firms for taking the liberty of flouting the law? The Government are deliberately ensuring that the courts enforce one Act but not the other. We want an explanation and a debate on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman heard what I said about the Standing Order No. 10 application. I cannot advise the hon. Gentleman on tactics, but there are such things as Adjournment debates and I am sure that Question Time will provide opportunities to refer to the subject.

Representation of the People Bill

4.10 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may be for the convenience of the House if I rise on a point of order at this stage.

On Thursday, the Leader of the Opposition inquired about how I proposed to take the Committee stage of the Representation of the People Bill. I then said that the usual channels were reviewing what aspects of the Committee stage would be suitable for discussion on the Floor of the House. However, I was unable to conclude those discussions last Friday and thus a Government motion was tabled committing the majority of the Bill to the Floor, while sending other clauses and schedules upstairs. Since then I have taken account of further expressions of opinion. Thus, I have concluded that it would be appropriate to take the entire Bill on the Floor of the House. The Government will, therefore, be moving a motion after the conclusion of the Second Reading tonight, suggesting that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to the Leader of the House for his volte face, but might it not have been for the convenience of the House if he had raised the subject not as a point of order but as a business statement? He could then have been questioned on the reasons for the change of mind and on the way in which the business is to be conducted. As the right hon. Gentleman has said, there is a motion on the Order Paper stating that only clauses 1 to 12 and schedule 1 are to be taken on the Floor of the House. We now find that all 27 clauses and all three schedules are to be debated on the Floor of the House. Surely there should have been a business statement rather than a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Notwithstanding any comments one might have about the manner of announcing the decision, perhaps you will allow me to thank the Leader of the House for coming to that decision rather than being the first Leader of the House to send a Representation of the People Bill to a Committee instead of having it taken on the Floor of the House. May I express to the right hon. Gentleman the hope that that desire for all-party agreement on the procedures for the Bill will extend further into its substance, thus making its passage easier?

Later——

Mr. Williams: May I return to the point of order that I raised earlier about the announcement by the Leader of the House? This is a matter not of propriety but of practicality which affects the way in which we are to conduct today's business.

Had the Leader of the House made a business statement, as he should have, we would have been able to ask him whether he intends to introduce a timetable motion for the Committee stage of the Bill. If he had said that his intention was to introduce a timetable motion you, Mr. Speaker, might have been influenced in deciding whether to apply the 10 minute rule today. If debates were to be curtailed in Committee you may not think that debate should be curtailed on Second Reading.

Mr. Speaker: It is not my intention to apply the 10 minute rule today because the number of hon. Members who have so far expressed their wish to take part does not justify it.

Later——

Mr. Williams: Further to my earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to pursue the matter, but, as we discovered during Scottish questions last week, when a Minister does not perform his duties properly you are put in an invidious position. It is important to know whether a timetable motion on the Committee stage of the Representation of the People Bill is to be moved. As the Leader of the House found it necessary, on a point of order, to announce his change of mind, will he come to his feet again and say whether there is to be a timetable motion for the Committee stage?

Mr. Biffen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am always happy to help the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). When I said that the Government would move a motion after the Second Reading tonight that the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House, that is exactly what I meant and no more. Of course it does not refer to a timetable.

Coal Industry Dispute (Supplementary Estimates)

4.13 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In today's Supplementary Estimates 1984-85, the note by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury states:

"The Revised Supplementary reflects token provision which is sought in respect of a contingent liability arising under an indemnity given by the Attorney-General for unrecovered costs and other expenditure incurred by the sequestrators appointed by the High Court as officers of the Court in enforcement of the Court's order in the case of Taylor and Foulstone against National Union of Mineworkers (Yorkshire Area) and National Union of Mineworkers."

In effect, that means that the Government will underwrite any costs that arise in the meantime and that are incurred by the sequestrators. Without any precedent, the Government will interfere directly in a court judgment in which they are not in any way involved.

My point of order is that there is no statutory authority in principle with regard to this issue. Do the Government intend to introduce a Bill and will they make an early statement to the House? It is outrageous that Mr. Bernard Ingham gave a full press briefing at No. 10 this morning, but the Government have not had the guts to come to the House to make a statement. I ask that the maximum pressure be brought to bear on the Government so that they make a statement to the House at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has made his point. It is not a matter for me, but the Government Front Bench will have heard what he said.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may remember that we raised a point of order about the increasing of the supplementary benefit deemed payment from £15 to £16 and that within a few hours we almost had a statement in the House. How can we get the Government to make a statement on this issue, especially as it looks like nothing more or less than political interference in a court action? It is vital that hon. Members should have the right to hear a statement and to ask questions of the Treasury about how once again it has managed to interefere in this industrial dispute.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot advise the hon. Gentleman, but the House well knows my view that it should always be told first of what is going on.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does not the use of the words

"the Revised Supplementary reflects token provision"

mean that this matter should be debated either during the debate on the Consolidated Fund or on a Supply day dealing with Supplementary Estimates? Is it not within the power of the Leader of the House to find time for a debate on this subject, particularly when he knows that any matters affecting the interests of mineworkers should be brought before the House in the current sensitive situation? Is not it an affront to our procedures for the right hon. Gentleman to fail to respond in the way expected when he knows what our orders require?

Mr. Speaker: Of course this issue is debatable during the debate on the Consolidated Fund. However, it is entirely open to the Opposition to choose the subject for a Supply Day—or Opposition Day as it is now called—if they so wish.

Commonwealth Citizens (Entry Clearance)

4.22 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for not giving you prior notice of my point of order, but it concerns something that has arisen this afternoon. You will recall that on 22 November the Government announced their intention to introduce a charge for entry clearance. I made inquiries of the Library as to the procedure that the Government intended to use, and was advised that the provision for the fee for entry clearance for Commonwealth citizens is to be achieved by a new order under the consular Fees Act 1980 to amend the Consular Fees Order 1983. In paragraph 22 of the schedule to the order, it is proposed to add the phrase "for entry certificate". I made further inquiries this afternoon and was told that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. is to consider a new order this afternoon. However I am specifically advised that the words "for entry certificate" are not included.

Will you initiate inquiries of the Foreign Office, Mr. Speaker, to find out how it intends to proceed? Many of us believe that a statutory instrument that imposes a charge on Commonwealth citizens is ultra vires. We further believe that a statutory instrument cannot diminish a right conferred by statute unless the legislation under which the statutory instrument is made expressly provides for such a diminution. The Consular Fees Act 1980 does not do so. We are advised the Parliament can never have intended the Act to be construed in a way that deprives people of a widely debated right preserved by the Immigration Act 1971, and which was reaffirmed in the House by Lord Whitelaw, as he now is, as recently as 11 November 1982. I am further advised that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. meets next Tuesday and that it would be in order for that Committee to consider a statutory instrument including the words "for entry certificate". If that were to happen I am further advised that there would be no opportunity for Parliament to express its approval, nor would there be an opportunity for any of us to pray against such an order.

Widespread concern is felt about the matter. Early-day motion 200, signed by mysef and 29 other hon. Members, expresses concern and

"requests reconsideration of the proposal made on 22 November to introduce, for the first time, a charge for entry certificates for Commonwealth citizens, and points out that refusal of an entry certificate, simply because the fee cannot be paid, would not be lawful under the Immigration Act 1971."

I should be grateful, Mr. Speaker, if you would make inquiries about which procedure the Foreign Office intends to pursue so that Parliament and others concerned about such matters have the opportunity to make representations against the introduction of a charge which we believe to be illegal and a diminution of rights conferred by statute on Commonwealth citizens and their families.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman did not give me notice of that point of order. It is a complicated subject. From what I heard the hon. Gentleman say, surely this is a matter for the Statutory Instruments Joint Committee. The Government Front Bench will have heard what has been said. The content of a statutory instrument is not a matter for me. I cannot make a decision what is in a statutory instrument.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the four Questions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Fishing Vessels (Aquisition and Improvement) (Grants) (Amendment) Scheme 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1879) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Limits of Basic and Special Awards) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—[*Mr. Biffen.*]

Orders of the Day

Representation of the People Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.27 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The main purpose of the Bill is to implement the proposals for changes in electoral law set out in the White Paper on the Representation of the People Acts, published last January. The White Paper took the form of a reply to the report by the Home Affairs Select Committee, the great majority of whose recommendations we accept. The House had an opportunity to debate the White Paper in June. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary and I then announced some modifications of the original proposals. In addition, the Bill includes a substantial number of lesser changes in electoral law. Wherever possible these changes have been the subject of consultations with the political parties and local authority associations.

The Bill has three main themes. The first is an extension of democracy. The Bill establishes the principle that British citizens may have the right to vote even if they are not resident here on the qualifying date. We are one of the few democracies which make no provision at all for our citizens to vote while resident abroad.

Secondly, the Bill seeks to ensure that, so far as circumstances permit, every person who is given the right to vote is able to exercise it in person at the polling station, or, if he cannot reasonably be expected to do so, by post or by proxy. Every hon. Member knows the frustration of the elector who is at present disfranchised because he is away on holiday on polling day. I have long thought it a scandal that the penalty for going on holiday should be to lose one's basic democratic right.

Thirdly, our aim has been to modernise our electoral machinery. Many of the features of our electoral system were introduced in the 19th century and have scarcely been changed since then. The Bill deals with a variety of detailed defects and problems which have come to light over the years and which there has not been opportunity to resolve before.

The Bill applies to parliamentary elections throughout the United Kingdom and to local government elections in England, Wales and Scotland. It does not affect local government or Assembly elections in Northern Ireland; these elections are governed by separate legislation. Nor, in general, does it affect elections to the European Parliament. There is an exception in clause 3 of the Bill, to which I shall turn in a moment. The European Assembly Elections Act 1978 gives me power to apply the provisions of the Bill to European Parliament elections through regulations. We propose to exercise this power in due course so as, for example, to give holidaymakers the right to a postal or proxy vote at a European Parliament election.

Clauses 1 to 3 extend the franchise at parliamentary and European Parliament elections to British citizens resident abroad. I believe that this change will be warmly welcomed. Many British citizens working overseas are making a major contribution to this country. It is quite wrong that they should be disfranchised for doing so.

That said, problems immediately arise in how to limit the extension proposed. Attempts to separate British citizens into groups according to their occupation, tax status or country of residence pose considerable problems. Moreover, we wish to preserve the crucial link between electors and individual constituencies. Consequently, while we are proposing to extend voting rights by proxy or post to British citizens abroad, wherever they are, we propose a seven-year cut-off point after the elector leaves the United Kingdom. That is bound to be an arbitrary period. I know that some of my hon. Friends would like to see it longer or to remove it entirely. The Government believe, however, that this first—though not necessarily last—major step represents a sensible compromise, and I commend it to the House. It would enfranchise over half a million new electors.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does that not facilitate the right to vote to those whose clear long-term intention is to leave the United Kingdom? Why should they retain the right to vote when they are leaving indefinitely?

Mr. Brittan: As I have explained, I do not think that the basis of deciding which of our citizens living overseas should be allowed to vote would be workable if it were determined on long-term intentions. That would be an idle and useless distinction to seek to make. For that reason, we have proceeded in the way that I have described.

Clause 1 allows a British citizen to qualify as an overseas elector if he fulfils various conditions.

First, he must have been resident in the United Kingdom. I think there will be general agreement that it would be wrong to give someone the vote who has never lived in this country.

Secondly, the person must have been registered as an elector. The reason for this is to provide a simple test of whether the person really was resident here at the material time. But, as we suggested in the White Paper, a person who was too young to be registered while resident here may still qualify.

Thirdly, the right to vote lasts for a period of seven years after the elector leaves the United Kingdom—or, to put it more precisely, for the duration of seven electoral registers after the register in which the elector is last included on the basis of his residence here.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The Home Secretary has said that the inclusion of a name on an electoral register is proof of residence. Will he reconsider that? The inclusion of a name merely indicates that an individual was resident at an address on one day and completed a form to that effect. Surely he cannot accept that as proof of residence?

Mr. Brittan: I do not think that that is quite right. One can never be sure that the law has not been broken. The test for registration is residence. I do not think that we are saying that the law might not be broken. The assumption has to be that the register has that effect.

Clause 2 deals with the practical arrangements. It allows a person who qualifies as an overseas elector to make a declaration, modelled on the service declaration made by Crown servants and members of the armed forces. The declaration has to be attested in a manner to be prescribed in regulations. As we said in the White Paper, this job would be undertaken by consular staff in

the overseas elector's country of residence. If—and only if — the consular staff are satisfied that the person making the declaration is a British citizen who is resident outside the United Kingdom, they will attest the declaration. When the registration officer receives a declaration which has been properly attested at the consulate, he will check that the declarant's number was in the appropriate electoral register and, if so, enter the name in the draft register or electors' lists. Once registered as an overseas elector, the person has the right to vote either in person at the polling station or, under clause 6, by post or by proxy.

Clause 3 extends the new arrangements to European Parliament elections. Both the Select Committee's report and the White Paper were mainly concerned with parliamentary elections—elections to this House. So far as European Parliament elections are concerned, the Council of Ministers is discussing proposals for a Community-wide franchise, and we and the other member states have formally resolved to renew our efforts to reach agreement in time for the 1989 elections. But it is not yet clear what form the agreement will take. It would clearly be indefensible to extend the franchise at parliamentary elections while leaving the European arrangements as they stand. That is why clause 3 gives overseas electors the right to vote at European as well as parliamentary elections. However, further primary legislation on European elections only will probably be needed if agreement is reached in the Council.

Clauses 5 to 10 deal with our proposals on absent voting. We propose to simplify and rationalise existing provisions. We propose also to deal with an injustice which provokes a storm of protest at each election—the denial of the right to vote to holidaymakers. With holidays more and more spread throughout the year, and more people taking them, it is high time for the position to be changed. We therefore propose an extension of absent voting to all those who cannot get to the poll in person, and we also propose some strengthening of the safeguards to prevent abuse. We envisage that this could enfranchise some 600,000 more electors.

Since the House debated the White Paper in June, we have received a wide range of comments on our proposal that applications for absent votes in respect of a particular election should be countersigned by someone registered as an elector, though not a member of the applicant's immediate family. Some have suggested that this safeguard is not adequate. Others have suggested that it should be removed altogether. It remains the Government's view that the principle whereby the normal way of casting a vote is to cast it in person is a sound and necessary one. But we shall certainly consider seriously comments made by hon. Members in the course of the passage of the Bill. I stress that provisions on countersignature would be in regulations made after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

As at present, two basic categories of absent voter are proposed; those who may apply for an absent vote for an indefinite period; and those who may apply only in respect of a particular election. The indefinite period category is dealt with in clause 6. It includes most of those who are in it under the present arrangements, including those who may apply because of the general nature of their occupation, service or employment. To this category are added those who qualify as overseas electors under the Bill. Clause 7 deals with the right to apply in respect of a particular election and clauses 8 and 9 deal with proxies. As at present, the Bill entitles them to vote by post in some circumstances.

The main change is brought about by clause 7(1), which extends the right to apply for an absent vote at a particular parliamentary or local election in Great Britain to all those who, whatever the grounds, cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person at the polling station. I shall say something about Northern Ireland in a minute. This provision is intended to benefit not only holidaymakers, but other voters who find themselves disfranchised under the present arrangements. As at present, there is a requirement that the applicant must satisfy the registration officer that he is entitled to an absent vote, and the registration officer has a discretion to reject the application if he is not so satisfied. The Bill also confers a power for further requirements to be spelt out in regulations.

These clauses make a number of further changes in the present provisions. First, the Bill gives all absent voters the right to chose between postal and proxy voting. The present position is that absent voters must in general vote by post; certain categories, including those who might be expected to be outside the United Kingdom during the election period, have a right to vote by proxy. Most voters prefer postal to proxy voting, but there are circumstances in which someone might want to appoint a proxy even if he or she is in the United Kingdom at election time. The Bill gives the voter a choice.

Secondly, we have not sought to re-enact — except for Northern Ireland — the provision which at present stops a postal ballot paper from being sent outside the United Kingdom. Obviously, there are many parts of the world where proxy voting is the only realistic option. That would be the case, for example, in most countries outside Europe. But for many places in western Europe and on the east coast of America, the election timetable already allows the week or 10 days needed for the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers, provided there is not undue delay in sending them out.

We live in an adult world and it seems right that the voter should again be given the choice. Of course, there can never be a guarantee that a postal ballot paper will get back in time, whether posted from somewhere in this country or abroad. It must be up to the elector to make his own decision in the light of his own knowledge of the postal services. To allow a little more time, paragraph 73 of schedule 3 extends the parliamentary election timetable by one day. This means that at a general election the dissolution of Parliament will in general be the Tuesday rather than the Wednesday just over three weeks before the poll. Paragraph 78 of the same schedule confers a power to prescribe in regulations a last day for the issue of postal ballot papers.

The third major change is that the Bill allows absent voters to vote by post or proxy at all local government elections in Great Britain, including parish and community council elections in England and Wales. This deals with a point raised during the debate on the White Paper by both the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I think that there is a widespread feeling that absent voting should be allowed at parish and community council elections, and I hope that this provision will be generally welcomed.

As it stands, the Bill does not make any major changes in the right to apply for an absent vote at a particular

[Mr. Brittan]

parliamentary election in Northern Ireland. The view we took in preparing the White Paper was that particular difficulties in Northern Ireland, including the systematic abuse of postal voting on a large scale, made it unrealistic to think in terms of making postal votes available to any new categories of elector there.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I understood him to say that no existing right of absent voting in Northern Ireland was withdrawn. One interpretation of the Bill is that it withdraws the right to an absent vote on a change of residence.

Mr. Brittan: No doubt we shall have the opportunity to examine that specific point as the deliberations continue. I should correct the right hon. Gentleman. I said that the Bill does not make any major changes in the right to apply for an absent vote at a particular parliamentary election in Northern Ireland.

There are already various differences in the law of parliamentary elections as it applies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Most importantly, the franchise at parliamentary elections in Northern Ireland is considerably more restrictive than it is in Great Britain. In Great Britain, an elector needs to be resident in a constituency on the qualifying date, but in Northern Ireland an elector must also have been resident in the Province for the whole of the preceding three months. Not all people who qualify as parliamentary electors in Great Britain—in particular, those who move into a constituency shortly before the qualifying date—would therefore qualify in Northern Ireland.

It gives the Government no pleasure to increase the scope and number of those differences, but it is right to point them out. I do not think it would be right to hold up a reform simply on the basis that it cannot at present be applied throughout the United Kingdom if that reform, for example, in relation to holiday voters, is otherwise justifiable and necessary.

Clause 12 increases the deposit to be made by candidates at a parliamentary election to £1,000 and reduces the threshold for its forfeiture to one twentieth of the total number of votes cast in the constituency.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State—the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor)—and I listened with great care to the various arguments put forward on this issue in the debate last June. Many hon. Members have raised points on it since.

Not many would argue that anyone should be able to stand at a parliamentary election without risk of penalty, even if they clearly have no prospect of support within a constituency. The cost of running elections has increased over the years, and parliamentary candidates have important and valuable rights which are properly conferred on them. They are entitled, on average, to £8,000 of free postage. They gain the opportunity of publicising their views and interests, and some candidates have abused that right for clearly commercial purposes. They have the right to exercise a veto on radio and television programmes relating to the election in which candidates take part. The activities of freak candidates have not just provided innocent entertainment; on occasions, they have been seriously disruptive.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that this will be one of the most contentious parts of the Bill? Is he further aware that it would appear to cut across established convention because substantial changes of that kind were made by all-party consensus? Does he appreciate the fact that, having set this precedent, in future other parties might make similar changes?

Mr. Brittan: This aspect may not necessarily be the most significant in terms of the changes that it makes compared with those measures giving the vote to substantial numbers of people who do not at present have it. None the less, I readily accept that this has been one of the most controversial and debated sections of the Bill. I do not believe that it is right in today's circumstances to suggest that, after a careful process of consultation, there must be unanimity before we can take any steps forward. To do so would provide an opportunity for anyone to impose a veto on all change. I believe that, on reflection, the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) would not think that that was justified.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham) *rose*—

Mr. Brittan: I must make further progress. I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) in a few moments.

The Government have no wish to be killjoys. If people want to stand at Speaker's corner or hold peaceful meetings to put across their views, that is their right. But the purpose of parliamentary elections is to give people a chance not just to air their views—however interesting or worthy—but to choose Members of Parliament. Serious candidates are people who not only have serious views, but have some serious prospect of representing the electors. That is why, in spite of all that has been said in its favour, we are not attracted by the option of increasing the number of signatures required as a substitute for the deposit.

The signatures option has serious drawbacks. It creates even more work for agents and returning officers, whose work is also being increased by other provisions in this Bill. Several hundred signatures would be necessary if they were to be even a possible substitute for the deposit as a test of potential support. The greater the number of signatures, the greater the amount of checking required and the greater the opportunity for forgery and other malpractice.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that a serious candidate is a person who not only puts forward serious views but has a serious prospect of being elected. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman therefore confirm that the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley) was not a serious candidate when, on behalf of the Conservative party, she stood as a candidate in the Glasgow, Central by-election?

Mr. Brittan: That is not a worthy interjection. The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I am talking not about any restriction on people standing for Parliament, but about the level of the penalty that should be forfeited, which has been agreed and accepted by Parliament for a long time. That is the aspect about which I am talking—no more than that.

Sir Philip Goodhart: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that a number of small parties, such as the Communist party, the Ecology party and the National Front, are unlikely to get one twentieth but may get one fortieth of the vote in some constituencies? Will my right hon. and learned Friend look sympathetically at the suggestion that half the deposit should be returned when a candidate obtains one fortieth of the vote?

Mr. Brittan: We shall have to deal with that matter when we come to consider the Bill in detail because, necessarily, any numerical provision has in a sense to be arbitrary. The Select Committee unanimously took the view that the deposit should be forfeit if less than 7·5 per cent. of the votes were secured, compared with 12·5 per cent. at the moment. In the Bill, the Government have put forward a figure of 5 per cent., which involves a considerable liberalisation of the present arrangements.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Brittan: I must make progress, and the hon. Gentleman has already intervened once.

Even hundreds of signatures would be an imperfect test. Many signatories—all experience with petitions suggests this—would sign out of general interest or often even just in order to get rid of those who ask them for their support. Moreover, it would still be possible for extreme candidates, who would obtain minimal support at the polls, to find enough highly committed supporters, supplemented by a number of simply curious people, to reach the number of signatures required.

The test for standing at elections has always been a financial one, for reasons which still hold good today and which have nothing to do with squeezing out legitimate minor parties. A number of hon. Members, I know, would agree that we need a deposit and that we need it at a sensible level, but feel that £1,000 is too much. The Government have listened carefully to their views. We accept that there is no figure that is clearly and absolutely right and that can be defended against all other figures, but the sum of £1,000 was that recommended unanimously by the Select Committee. It already represents a significant reduction from one which would fully reflect the decline in the value of money since the sum of £150 was established in 1918. That figure would be over £2,000. I do not find it surprising, therefore, that the Select Committee should have come to a unanimous view in favour of £1,000.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East) *rose*——

Mr. Brittan: The reason why the increase seems so large is that successive Governments have failed to take action for such a long time—perhaps, in truth, for too long.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Home Secretary realise that it comes as no surprise to those on the Opposition Benches that the Home Affairs Select Committee came to a unanimous conclusion? The reason is that it did not have any representatives from smaller parties which might have had a vested interest in the matter.

Mr. Brittan: Evidence was taken from people who were not represented on the Select Committee, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I welcome the opportunity to make it clear—if it were unclear to anyone—that there is no question of his party having supported the Select Committee's recommendation at any stage. I am not suggesting that it did.

The figure should be studied as part of a package with the threshold. As such, I believe that it is a fair proposition, because, as I have said, we are proposing a reduction of the present 12·5 per cent. threshold not to the 7·5 per cent. recommended by the Select Committee but to a mere 5 per cent.

Some have argued that the smaller political parties could not raise £1,000, even if they subsequently obtained the votes needed to avoid losing the deposit. I do not find that argument convincing. The interest payable to a bank on a sum borrowed for two weeks between the close of nominations and the day after the result is declared would be £6. We are also proposing—I think that this is a help—that returning officers should have a statutory duty to return deposits to those who have saved them the day after the result is declared.

Having said that, I fully acknowledge, as I did during the debate in June, that there will be different opinions on this matter which will need to be considered further. I certainly do not claim that £1,000 is a magic figure—only that, all things considered, it seems the the right one; but we shall listen with care to what is said as the Bill proceeds through the House.

Our proposal for the very substantial reduction in the threshold from 12·5 per cent. to 5 per cent. has often been overlooked by some critics. The 5 per cent. threshold, which in most seats is still 2,000 to 3,000 votes, means that smaller parties will in future have a much more realistic target to aim for. I do not think anyone can argue that it is unreasonable to expect a candidate for election to aspire to poll one vote in 20 in order to justify the considerable benefits that accrue from candidature.

I shall deal more briefly with the remaining clauses.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Home Secretary go back to the clause that he seemed conveniently to be missing when he was running through the clauses—clause 11? It creates offences in respect of overseas electors' declarations and absent voting applications. It provides a maximum fine for offences at level five—currently £2,000—on the standard scale. How does the Secretary of State intend to enforce the penalty of a fine on a person who is resident abroad and whose intention is to stay abroad?

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point, but we are talking about people who retain a connection with this country. If there is a conviction by a court, a penalty could arise. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise that point during our deliberations, I am sure that we shall have the opportunity to consider it.

Clause 13 raises various minor expenses limits to the levels which already apply to European Parliament elections.

Clauses 14 to 16 introduce a general system for the combination of elections which are held on the same day. The problem here is that if two elections coincide—as happened with the European Parliament general election and the parliamentary by-election in Portsmouth, South last June—different polling stations, ballot boxes, and so on, ought strictly speaking to be used. The Bill allows the returning officer to combine the two elections and to use the same facilities for both. We have also taken the

[Mr. Brittan]

opportunity to give permanent statutory effect to the special provisions introduced in 1979 to combine parliamentary general elections with ordinary local government elections.

Clause 17 postpones ordinary local government elections in 1986 from the first to the second Thursday in May, to avoid the last day of the Passover.

Clause 19 repeals the provisions of the Meeting of Parliament Act 1797 which require the old Parliament to reconvene in the unhappy event of a demise of the Crown after the Dissolution of Parliament at a general election. Under the Bill, polling day is postponed for two weeks if the demise occurs before it; otherwise the new Parliament meets in the usual way.

Clause 22 and schedule 2 rationalise and, where appropriate, increase the penalties available for offences under the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Clause 23 and schedule 3 make a large number of relatively minor amendments to existing law. I shall not detain the House with all of these, but just point out the ones that I think will be of the greatest interest. Paragraph 2 of the schedule allows the name of an elector who has wrongly been omitted from the register to be added nearer the time of an election. Paragraph 34 gives candidates at parliamentary elections the right to have their election communications sent post-free without having to address the envelopes. Paragraph 73 provides for the polls at a parliamentary election to close at 9 pm rather than at 10 pm. That was recommended by the Select Committee. The extra hour was added in 1969, but it is not used a great deal. According to one of the Select Committee's witnesses, it is used by fewer than 5 per cent. of the voters, most of whom would no doubt vote earlier in the day; if they could not, the Bill would allow them to vote by post or proxy. That was the Select Committee's unanimous recommendation.

Mr. Kaufman: What is the relevance of that?

Mr. Brittan: We shall come back to these matters, so the right hon. Gentleman might perhaps contain himself. The relevance is that, whatever other parties may have to say, there were Labour party representatives on the Select Committee, and that was what they voted for. The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to change his mind. We shall consider these matters as the Bill proceeds, but I should now like to bring my remarks to a close.

Mr. Kaufman: On a different but related matter, the Government said in the White Paper that they planned to arrange for polling stations to open at 7 am in local government elections. As the Bill does not include such a provision, do I take it that it will be covered by rules to be issued after the Bill becomes law, and, if so, when?

Mr. Brittan: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. This will be done in new local government election rules, which I shall make after the Bill receives Royal Assent. I hope that that will be to the satisfaction of the House.

Paragraph 82 allows the returning officer to begin counting the votes before all the ballot boxes have been received. That could produce a significantly earlier result in many constituencies. Finally, paragraph 87 gives me the power to make regulations giving the political parties the right to obtain electoral registration data in computer compatible form.

The proposals in the Bill, represent an important extension of democracy. They extend the right to vote at parliamentary and European Parliament elections to British citizens overseas and to holidaymakers. We are also—at last—dealing with the question of the deposit, and a wide range of desirable, if sometimes unexciting, changes are being made to improve our electoral arrangements. Against the background of the Select Committee's valuable recommendations, we have taken a critical look at the whole of election law, amending provisions which in many cases have not been reviewed for a century or more. This Bill strengthens our democracy. As such, I commend it to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong) I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. To avoid narrowing the debate, the Chair will call the amendment to be moved formally at the end of the debate.

5.2 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): That this is a constitutional measure can be in no doubt and we have a motion on the Order Paper calling for it to be handled as such. We are pleased that, however belatedly, the Govenment have changed their mind and agreed to move a similar motion of their own. I hope that before the end of the debate the very much sotto voce response of the Leader of the House to the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) will be reinforced with absolute clarity to the effect that the Governmet have absolutely no intention of moving a timetable motion on the consideration of the Bill. For that to be done on a measure of this kind would be an outrage.

One of the reasons why we question the Government's plans and motives in that regard is that right up to this Second Reading debate the Government have not handled this measure in a manner appropriate to a constitutional measure. As a result, it contains proposals that will have a profound and dangerous effect on the electoral process. That is the reason for our motion and that is why, if that motion is not carried, we shall vote against Second Reading.

There is no more important or precious legislation than that affecting the franchise. From the result of the exercise of that franchise all other parliamentary measures flow. I do not suggest that to proceed with a Bill of this nature the Government must in all circumstances obtain the agreement of every other party in the House. That would be to impose a veto on legislation which no Government could be expected to accept. The Government must, however, be especially careful to seek to obtain as wide a measure of agreement as possible, but in this instance they have not exercised such care. The Home Secretary referred to consultations with Opposition parties since the White Paper appeared. In fact, Her Majesty's Opposition were consulted on one matter affecting a small aspect of the Bill and on no other matter since the debate on the White Paper six months ago.

The Government ought to exercise such care, because Ministers themselves acknowledged the need for it in the

debate on the White Paper from which the Bill stems. On several items they undertook to reconsider their proposals in the light of the debate. In winding up that debate, the Under-Secretary of State specifically and categorically stated:

"We are not saying that we have reached the end of the line; these are our proposals, and we shall expect to force them through Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1083.]

The Government have gone ruthlessly ahead with the proposals that they promised to reconsider and they are now, to use the words of the Under-Secretary of State, forcing through the House a package of which many of the most important ingredients are to some extent opposed by significant elements in the House and one deeply controversial change which is opposed by almost all the Opposition parties as well as by Members of the Government's own party. Even when a proposal has wide support, as in the case of absentee voting for holidaymakers, which the Labour party certainly supports, the Government are proceeding in a manner that shows minimal regard for the electors of one part of the Kingdom.

In legislating on the franchise, Parliament must have regard to three fundamental criteria. First, does the Bill protect the right of any citizen to be a candidate in an election? Secondly, does it protect the secrecy and incorruptibility of the ballot while making it as simple and convenient as possible for electors to use the ballot? Thirdly, does it treat with scrupulous equality and impartiality all those eligible to use the ballot? Judged on those standards, the Bill fails miserably and ominously.

The Bill provides absentee votes for holidaymakers and there is no doubt that that provision satisfies a justified demand from voters which most of us have repeatedly encountered in election campaigns. At the same time, however, it does nothing to rebut the allegation that providing such a right means introducing postal or proxy voting on demand. The Government have solved the problem by ignoring it — except for residents of Northern Ireland.

In the debate on the White Paper, the Home Secretary gave an undertaking about absentee votes for electors in Northern Ireland. He said:

"I have given an undertaking to reconsider the proposals for Northern Ireland to see whether we can find a way of meeting the concerns that have been put to us. That undertaking remains."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1024.]

Those concerns have simply not been met. Nor, so far as I can see, has much genuine effort been made to meet them. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) has shown me the dossier of what passed for consultation between the Home Secretary and himself, beginning with an insulting approach from a junior Minister at the Northern Ireland Office—a characteristic example of the Government's celebrated insensitivity.

A new right is being introduced for electors in Great Britain but it is not available on equal terms to electors in Northern Ireland. Speaking of absentee votes, the Home Secretary has said today that we are living in an adult world. Apparently, that does not apply to Northern Ireland. The phrase "second-class citizens" is often fairly loosely used. The basic exercise of citizenship is the franchise. That right is now to be denied to voters in Northern Ireland on the terms available in the rest of the United Kingdom. They literally become second-class citizens.

Such prejudicial treatment of electors in one part of the United Kingdom is unacceptable to Her Majesty's Opposition. It is grotesque that a Northern Ireland elector on holiday for two weeks in Spain during an election campaign will be denied a vote, while lying next to him or her on the beach there may be a Northern Ireland citizen who has left Northern Ireland permanently and who will be able to cast a vote. Indeed, if one part of the Bill demonstrates more clearly than any other the fatuity of legislating without forethought to fulfil a dogmatic aspiration, it is the provision in clause 1 that those who have left this country, perhaps for good, should be given the right to vote for more than eight years after they have left Britain. That is what the alleged seven-year provision for expatriate voting entails.

The whole notion of expatriate voting was conceived in muddle. During the debate on the White Paper, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), with his customary acuity, asked the Home Secretary when the seven-year qualifying period would start. The Home Secretary replied:

"the seven years would start from Royal Assent."—[*Official Report*, Wednesday 27 June; Vol. 62, c. 1021.]

It now turns out that the Home Secretary misled the House, either deliberately, or through sheer ignorance. With the present Home Secretary one can never be sure which it is—although one can always be sure that it will be one or the other.

No part of the Bill comes into operation on Royal Assent. It will be triggered by commencement orders. That fact, which is apparent to anyone who reads the Bill, was made clear to me in a parliamentary answer last Friday in which the Under-Secretary of State was forced to repudiate the Home Secretary—no doubt to his secret relish.

Again, there is the question whether the electoral registers of previous years will be available so that applications for expatriate votes can be properly checked. The Home Secretary admitted to my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr that there is no legal obligation to keep out-of-date electoral registers. Furthermore, the Bill imposes no such obligation. I have made inquiries today of a number of returning officers and have found that the practice differs from area to area. Some officers keep registers for many years. One officer in Epsom believes that he has the registers for the past five or six years. However, the Bill imposes no obligation. Especially after the massive redistribution of parliamentary boundaries last year, there must be doubt whether old registers will be available in some parts of the country where completely new constituencies have been formed.

Those, however, are only the first of numerous absurdities consequent upon the decision to introduce expatriate voting. Under the Government's dotty proposals, not only former electors get the vote but former non-electors too. Children who left Britain at the age of 11 and have had no contact with this country since then will have the right to vote and to help to decide this country's future, which they may never return to share.

Indeed, the provisions for expatriate votes for children reach an apotheosis of idiocy of clause 3(5)*(b)*, which relates to elections to the European Assembly. The Bill does not refer to the European Parliament. There is no statutory basis for the European Parliament, and the Bill refers to that body as the European Assembly. The provision in subsection 5*(b)* caters to the potential whims

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

of precisely four lads — if I may be forgiven for describing so crudely the scions of noble families. The Government are meticulously providing for the contingency that under-age peers at present resident in Britain may leave the country and yet still want to vote in European Assembly elections. They have a subsection all to themselves. There are only four of them — Baron Fermoy, aged 17, Baron Wrottesley, aged 16, the Earl of Hardwicke, aged 13, and Viscount Dillon, aged 13.

zIt is touching to know that the potential absentee voting rights of those noble striplings are to be protected by their own personal legislative subsection. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of Northern Ireland electors who are deprived of holiday ballots may take the view that the Government are taking too far the doctrine of kind hearts and coronets.

However, teenage peers are not the only beneficiaries of the Government's largesse. Fugitives from justice will benefit too. We have read with fascination of the unsuccessful efforts of the police to get their hands on five British citizens wanted in connection with robberies worth £32 million, who are now sunning themselves in Spain on what has become known as the Costa del Crime. All those gentlemen will be able to claim an absentee vote, and will accordingly be able to exercise their influence on the provisions of the next police and criminal evidence Bill. Among them is Mr. Clifford Saxe, who modestly disclaims the description "Mr. Big". Speaking a few days ago from one of his two villas on the La Capellania estate at Benalmadena, he said:

"Life goes on as normal here."

The normality of life for Mr. Saxe—whether he is Mr. Big or only Mr. Average Size—will soon be enhanced by the right to vote.

So, together with the teenage peers benefit clause, we have the escaped fugitives benefit clause. Who says that the Government do not reward enterprise—especially free enterprise? Those provisions make altogether ridiculous the nonsense of the penalties laid down in the Bill for expatriate voters who make false declarations. Clause 11(1) solemnly states:

"A person who makes an overseas elector's declaration or a declaration purporting to be an overseas elector's declaration —

(a) when he knows that he is subject to a legal incapacity to vote at parliamentary elections (age apart), or

(b) when he knows that it contains a statement which is false,

is guilty of an offence."

Subsection (4) states:

"A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale."

How on earth are the authorities to get their hands on such people in order to fine them up to

"level 5 on the standard scale"

or any other level on the standard scale or on any other scale?

The Home Secretary shows no signs of taking action against the traders who yesterday blatantly broke the Shops Act in London. That demonstrates the truth of the statement that there is one law for the miner and another for the merchant. How will the Home Secretary punish those who violate the legislation from the safety of Spain or South America? This is one of the silliest innovations brought in by any Government, yet it is also one of the most obnoxious. The Home Affairs Select Committee was unanimous in rejecting it. It rightly warned that it

"might have the effect of altering the whole character of British elections."

The proposal breaches three fundamental tenets of electoral law. First, it breaches the universality of the franchise. For citizens who live in the United Kingdom, registration for the franchise is obligatory and failure to register is an offence. For expatriates, registration is optional. Secondly, it breaches the doctrine of no representation without taxation. Thirdly, it breaches the residential qualification, which forms the very basis of the franchise in Britain. However, these optional votes by expatriates might decide what Government we have.

In the 1964 general election, 84 such votes — the Home Secretary said that there might be 500,000 — located in three constituencies could have deprived the properly elected Government of their majority. It is quite unacceptable that the votes of tax exiles should decide the taxes of people working in Britain. It is quite unacceptable that the votes of people who are sunning themselves in tropical climes should decide the heating allowances of pensioners shivering in Britain in the cold of winter. That is not the only proposal in the Bill that could unfairly change the result of a general election.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Did I hear the right hon. Gentleman refer to the doctrine of no representation without taxation? I am not sure where he gets that notion from. Would he argue that nobody should be able to take part in local government elections unless they were ratepayers?

Mr. Kaufman: Not at all. They all pay taxes. Under this Government, if people buy a newspaper or a book they will soon be paying value added tax, unless Back Benchers force the Government to change their mind once again.

The proposal that I have described is not the only one which could unfairly change the result of a general election. The same is true of paragraph 73 of schedule 3, which provides that polling in general elections should end at 9 pm instead of at 10 pm, as at present. The Government, who are so lacking in compassion for the sick, pensioners and the unemployed, are distressed at the plight of polling staff. The White Paper on which the Bill is based says that the final hour of polling

"adds to an already long day for returning officers and their staff."

My heart bleeds. In a Parliament of normal length there are more than 43,000 hours. Are the Government really saying that one hour out of 43,000 is too much to spare for the supreme exercise of democracy—the choice of a Government in a general election?

Mr. Brittan: As the right hon. Gentleman is so exercised by this proposal, could he explain whether there is any problem for anyone in not being able to vote between 9 pm and 10 pm and why they cannot get a postal vote? Moreover, in view of the extreme terms in which he puts is case, why did the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs), who sits with him on the Opposition Front Bench, vote in favour of that change in the Select Committee?

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) has a perfect right to state his view in a Select Committee. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to impose some form of guilt on my hon.

Friend for stating his mind in a Select Committee, I regard that as offensive. I am saying on behalf of the Opposition that we oppose this provision.

Mr. Brittan *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way when I have finished my answer. The right hon. and learned Gentleman might be able to arrange his day on polling day to his own convenience, as candidates do, but people who go to work in my constituency—when they have jobs to go to—do not know precisely when they will go home. There are traffic jams, people get caught in buses and they are expected to work late — long after the possibility of applying for and receiving a postal vote. As I shall demonstrate, that final hour is extremely important for many people.

Mr. Brittan: The right hon. Gentleman completely misunderstands me. I was not criticising the hon. Member for Battersea—he was perfectly entitled to register his view. If the hon. Member for Battersea took that view, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that it is unlikely that he put his name to a proposal which is as monstrous a restriction of the franchise as the right hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Kaufman: I fear that, in this case, my hon. Friend and I disagree on that point.

Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones (Watford): The right hon. Gentleman has not consulted his Back Benchers.

Mr. Kaufman: Well, we have here a Home Secretary who told the House something false in June and who had to be repudiated by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department in December. We have here a Cabinet Minister who has been repudiated by his junior Minister, yet he tries to open a division between me and my hon. Friend.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the junior Minister did not agree with his right hon. and learned Friend about the need for intimate body searches when the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 was going through the House, according to something that I read during the weekend?

Mr. Kaufman: We all know that there is a terrible split in the Home Office. We shall have to live with that. The only problem is that the right hon. and learned Gentleman seeks to open a rift between me and my hon. Friend when there is a chasm between him and the Under-Secretary of State.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Get on with it.

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): He talks, that one.

Mr. Kaufman: I knew that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) had learned to crawl but I did not know that he had learned to speak.

Are the Government really saying that one hour out of 43,000 is too much to spare for voting in a general election? Evidence given to the Select Committee showed that, in the 1979 general election, 4 per cent. of the votes were cast between 9 pm and 10 pm. That might not sound much until it is remembered that one hour represents 6·7 per cent. of the 15-hour polling day. Therefore, 4 per cent. of the votes being cast in 6·7 per cent. of the time available is perfectly creditable. That 4 per cent. might not sound much until it is remembered that 4 per cent. of the votes cast in 1979 totals 1,250,000. A great many people find that final hour useful. The 4 per cent. might not sound much until it is remembered that, in the 1979 election, 70 hon. Members were elected to the House by majorities of less than 4 per cent. Removal of that final hour could affect the results in enough constituencies to change the national result. Perhaps that is what the Government want. I must tell the Home Secretary that we find this provision utterly unacceptable. I advise him that the Bill cannot expect an easy passage through the House if he insists on retaining it.

If the Bill makes it more difficult for electors to vote, it makes it more difficult for citizens to seek votes as candidates, through the increase in the deposit to £1,000. The Government's attitude on this matter utterly violates the assurance given to the House last year by Lord Whitelaw when he was Home Secretary. On 31 March 1983 he said:

> "Many people think that the deposit is unsatisfactory at its present level but the changes should, as they have in the past, be made on the basis of all-party agreement in the House. I think that that is important." — [*Official Report*, 31 March 1983; Vol. 40, c. 458.]

I believe that if Lord Whitelaw had stayed, that is what he would have done. In the debate on the White Paper, it appeared that the Government intended to adhere to the principle laid down last year by Lord Whitelaw.

The Under-Secretary of State assured the House:

> "That is why I say in all sincerity that we shall consider, in the light of what has been said today, the proposals that we have brought forward for the level of the deposit. I give that assurance to those hon. Gentlemen who have spoken". — [*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1089.]

In that debate, out of 13 Back Benchers who took part, eight opposed the £1,000 deposit proposal. Only two supported it. Of the Conservative Back Benchers who took part in this debate, two supported the £1,000 deposit and two opposed it. Yet ignoring the parliamentary opinions to which they had promised to listen, the Government insist upon driving through this increase in the cost of candidature.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): My right hon. Friend earlier told us about the characters residing on the Costa del Crime. Assuming that they would have the right to vote, as my right hon. Friend said they would, and assuming also that they have £1,000, am I right in thinking that they would also be able to stand as parliamentary candidates in any election under the Bill?

Mr. Kaufman: One assumes that they would be able to do so, if they were on the electoral register. A candidate does not have to present himself in a constituency in order to contest it. Very happily, my Fascist opponent at the last general election did not turn up at the election, although my Conservative opponent voiced many of the opinions which he would have voiced had he been present. It is true that a Government cannot accept a veto by Opposition parties, even on constitutional matters, yet on an issue upon which the Government are opposed by almost every Opposition party, as well as by some of their own Back Benchers, it is quite intolerable that they should insist on proceeding in this way. Let me make it clear——

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. I shall proceed for the moment.

[Mr. Kaufman]

The Labour party does not oppose this proposal out of self-interest. Indeed, self-interest would impel us to support it. On the basis of the proposed 5 per cent. threshold, the Labour party would have lost only six deposits at the last general election. But democracy does not consist of making it comfortable and convenient for Labour or Conservative candidates to stand and making it impossible for others with less support or organisation to offer themselves as candidates.

The Government say that they wish to discourage frivolous candidates. This afternoon we had a somewhat idiosyncratic interpretation and definition of "frivolous" from the Home Secretary, yet many of the candidates who are nominated, even though they may get very few votes indeed, are putting forward far from frivolous views. In this week's Southgate by-election there is a candidate who is advocating shifting freight from road to rail. Is that a frivolous point of view? Another candidate is campaigning for the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus. Is that a frivolous point of view? It may be that neither of these candidates will poll many votes. Indeed, I hope they do not poll many votes and that every sensible person in Southgate will vote for the excellent Labour candidate, Peter Hemming — *[Interruption.]* We may have forgotten the Conservative party's candidate before the end of the week. Nevertheless, it would be completely wrong to price minority or even eccentric candidates out of contesting elections, for it is the price which will decide.

A rich eccentric will be able to stand and will be able to afford to use all the appurtenances of candidature, including free postal delivery. A candidate without ample means will be prevented from standing by a provision that is literally a tax on democracy. These limitations on the right to vote at elections and the right to contest elections are baneful manifestations of this Government's repressive approach to the right to dissent in a society which grows less and less democratic day by day. As the symbolic year of 1984 draws to a close, what we have in Britain is a Government who mouth the clichés of democracy while suppressing the free exercise of democracy.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No, I said not now. I did not say that I would not give way later—*[Interruption.]* All right.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. As he is aware, I have a great deal of sympathy for the remarks he is making about the deposit, but before he concludes his remarks I should like him to explain to us why, if the Bill is so constitutionally important that the Committee stage should take place on the Floor of the House, there are so few of his hon. Friends sitting behind him. There are only 10 by my count at the moment.

Mr. Kaufman: I knew that I was wrong to give way. The electorate have already had one go at throwing out the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that they will take another as soon as they can.

Two weeks ago the Prime Minister made a speech at the Carlton club. Her lecture demonstrated an intellectual impoverishment and a pinched, petty spitefulness which were not only entirely appropriate to the venue, but demonstrated conclusively that the Prime Minister wrote the lecture herself. In that lecture the Prime Minister made this statement:

> "If there is a national debate and a constitutional vote about some matter, and if a recalcitrant minority says, 'The vote be damned, we are going to do our level best to stop the majority having its way', then it's no good saying 'We must seek consensus, we must negotiate'. Such a group will never consent, whatever the majority thinks, until it gets what it wants."

Only the Prime Minister's almost sublime insensitivity can have blinded her to the realisation that here, above all, she was talking about herself. For who is it, if not the Prime Minister, who shrilly proclaims, "The vote be damned, we are going to do our level best to stop the majority having its way"? Who is it, if not the Prime Minister, who will never consent, whatever the majority thinks, until she gets what she wants?

It is the Prime Minister who bans trade unionism at GCHQ in violation of the wishes of the majority of the people. It is the Prime Minister who continues to force confrontation in the coalfields, in violation of the wishes of the majority. It is the Prime Minister who insists on trampling underfoot the elected majorities in our local authorities who seek honourably to carry out the policies on which they were elected. It is the Prime Minister who this very week is steamrollering through this House legislation to abolish seven elected majorities in the metropolitan counties and the GLC because they insist on doing what their electors want rather than what the Prime Minister wants. It was the Prime Minister who, on the issue of student grants, even tried to thrust aside the wishes of the majority of her own parliamentary party.

It is the Prime Minister who, unchastened by this experience, intends, according to today's *Daily Telegraph*, at Thursday's meeting of the 1922 Committee to warn her Back Benchers not to use their own minds again. It is reported that she will tell them that they must revert to behaving like Lobby fodder instead of freely elected Members of Parliament. In this procession of repression she is now——

Mrs. Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not the right hon. Gentleman straying very far indeed from the subject matter that we are discussing?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a Second Reading debate.

Mr. Kaufman: As I was saying, in this procession of repression, the Prime Minister has now, with her faithful lapdog the Home Secretary, turned her attention to the electoral system itself. Now she asks Parliament to make it more difficult for more than 1 million voters to vote. Now she asks Parliament to make it almost impossible for candidates with minority views even to seek votes. The Prime Minister, who once gloried in the title "The Iron Lady", has now become the lady with the iron heel. It is in the assertion of the rights of a free democracy that we shall be voting against this Bill tonight.

5.39 pm

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): In a sense, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in calling me as the first Back Bencher in this Second Reading debate the natural order of things has been reversed, because the last has been made the first. I am the tail-end Charlie of this Parliament. My majority

is seven votes. On 9 and 10 June 1983, I had good cause to see the workings of our electoral system at first hand and over many hours, beginning at about midnight and going on to 6.20 am.

The first time the votes were counted, I had lost by two votes. They were recounted a number of times. The perforations were examined on about 52,000 votes on one occasion. The result was declared at 6.20 am. I was firmly of the opinion then that our electoral system was firmly rooted in the horse and buggy age. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on giving the old nag a smack on the backside and propelling it into the second half of the 20th century.

I want to draw the attention of the House to the way in which some parts of the Bill are likely to operate if it becomes law. I always go past one house in my constituency with a wistful smile, because during the election campaign the owner told me that he would not be able to vote for me on polling day, although he would be in this country, because he had an important business engagement and would not be able to get back to Leicester until after 10 pm. Much has been said about the desirability of having absent votes for holidaymakers, and that point has been taken on board, but little has been said about the disfranchisement of those who are kept out of the constituency for other reasons. I am pleased that the principle that has been enshrined in the Bill will go much further than giving votes to absent holidaymakers and will enfranchise those who, through no fault of their own, have to leave the constituency during voting hours on polling day.

I listened to the extravaganza of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), which soon left behind any pretence at keeping in touch with reality and ascended heights of fantasy which, even by the standards that he sets himself, must almost be a record. Voting hours can profitably be reduced by one hour at night. My electors were as anxious to vote as anybody else. No doubt some of them did set out at breakfast time. Although I have heard stories about many misfortunes that befell electors on the way to the polling station—one broke his leg and had to go to hospital to have a plaster applied before being taken to the polling station in a wheelchair—I have not yet heard it suggested that anybody who set off at breakfast time was still struggling to get there at 9 pm. The suggestion that we cannot profitably cut down the hours by one at night totally lacks any merit whatever.

The official mark on the ballot paper does not usually concern most people. However, during the count in my constituency at the election, my opponent asked for each ballot paper to be scrutinised in order that it might be seen that each had an official mark. That mark is put on by a machine before the ballot paper is handed by the polling clerk to the elector. When that scrutiny was carried out and about 50,000 pieces of paper were held up to the light at about 4.30 am, it was found that some 27 votes cast for me and 17 of those cast for my opponent did not have the official mark upon them. Under rule 43 of the polling rules, which every candidate in Leicester must keep in his hip pocket when he goes to the count, they were properly disqualified. If they had been added to the count, I should have more than doubled my majority.

Therefore, I read with interest paragraph 86 of schedule 3, in which it is proposed that

"the form of directions for the guidance of the voters in voting"

is to be simplified. If one compares what is there written with what appears in the existing rules, one sees that the former rigmarole has been replaced by something which is much simpler and much more intelligible, and which the vast majority of electors, when they see it in the polling booth, will be able to read.

The directions say that the elector should make sure that the ballot paper is stamped with the official mark. It also places upon the presiding officer the duty of checking the official mark and its presence on the ballot paper before the ballot paper is put into the box. Therefore, provided that that is carried out, at the next general election in Leicester, South, we can look forward to fewer ballot papers being disqualified because they lack the official mark.

While that worthwhile reform is being implemented, it might be useful to do something about the machines which make the perforation marks in the ballot paper. Some of them are antique contraptions. On polling day, not in Leicester, South but in Leicester, East, some of those machines were taken out of commission because they were not putting the perforation mark into the ballot papers correctly. No such decision on the machines was taken in Leicester, South, although, with the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that they were just as defective as the machines in Leicester, East.

It is completely unsatisfactory that the enfranchisement of members of the public should depend on whether the polling clerk is so tired that he or she does not lean hard enough on the machine to put the perforation mark in the paper. Will my right hon. and learned Friend try to ensure that some more visible mark is put into the ballot paper rather than those fine perforations, which look rather like a teabag on occasions, so that they can been seen both by the elector and by the presiding officer? In that way, we shall not have a repetition in Leicester, South, or elsewhere, at the next general election of the sort of experience that we had at the last election.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The hon. Gentleman may be aware that in the 1974 election in Carmarthen the successful candidate had a majority of three. Some 70 ballot papers were disqualified because they did not have a mark on them and they came predominantly from one or two booths. The overwhelming majority of those ballot papers were in favour of the unsuccessful candidate. The question that was raised was whether there is room for fraud in the system in small communities where people recognise which way people vote.

Mr. Spencer: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

I suggested to the Home Office that, rather than have a machine, some sort of franking mark should be put down the side of the ballot paper. To give full faith and credit to the principle that ballot papers should be seen to be genuine and inviolate, it is necessary to have some contraption that puts on a mark. The machines are kept in operation for a number of years. As hon. Members may know, the official mark put on for postal votes is different from that for voters voting in person. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to consider my point about machines and to ensure that they, like some of his other proposals, are brought up-to-date.

Much has been said about the proposal to increase the deposit to £1,000. If self-interest were the only criteria,

[Mr. Spencer]

like the right hon. Member for Gorton, my view might be to the contrary. Three fringe parties stood in Leicester, South during the last election, each of which polled less than 1 per cent. The Ecology party polled 495 votes, the Workers' Party for a Workers' State polled 161 and something that was pleased to call itself the British National party polled just over 100.

Mr. Kaufman: Two hundred and eighty.

Mr. Spencer: I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. As he would no doubt be quick to point out, those figures are many, many times my majority. Merely because two of those parties could be classed as parties of the Left is no reason why they should be kept in the political ring so that persons casting their votes for them are not tempted to cast them for my opponent. All I ask is that the political system should be fair.

It is right in principle that there should be a penalty for a failure to obtain a significant share of the vote. The only argument up for grabs is the meaning of a significant share of the vote. No one is suggesting that persons or parties should be disqualified from standing. We are merely asking for answers to the questions: what are the criteria for deciding the point at which a penalty should be exacted and what level should be set for votes not being achieved? I do not regard the argument as being about an article of faith. I take my right hon. and learned Friend's point that if we grossed up the amount to take account of the fall in the value of money over the years, we would be discussing a much larger sum. I take on board his remark about the amount of money spent in providing facilities for those who put themselves forward as candidates during a general election. However, it is all about electing someone to Parliament — it is not about a circus. If certain individuals want to take advantage of the facilities that are provided at public expense, there is nothing wrong in exacting a penalty for a failure to obtain a significant share of the vote.

It must be noted that that significant share of the vote has been considerably reduced. Naturally, I have thought long and hard about the proposals that fix the deposit at £1,000. It may be a little on the high side, but if we view it together with the other proposals, overall they are beneficial improvements which I—even if it should cost me my seat at the next general election—feel it to be my duty to support.

5.55 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I believe that very much larger principles are involved in the Bill than those stated by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Spencer). It would be a disservice to the House if we reduced the matter of dispute between us—and there are great disputes about the Bill—to the level stated by the hon. and learned Gentleman. I have no doubt that he was concerned about the matters that he raised, but he distracted the House from the major questions that we should be debating.

There was a sharp and comprehensive contrast between the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and that of the Home Secretary. The sooner that my right hon. Friend is transferred to the Home Secretary's office the better for the freedoms and liberties of this country. That must be the view of anyone judging the two speeches — not only because of the sheer merit in my right hon. Friend's speech, which is customary and normal, but because of the degradation of the Home Secretary's speech, which is also customary and normal.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman did a grave disservice to the House in not attempting to justify the way in which he has brought the measure, which involves many major questions, before us. Indeed, objections are being made to all parts of the Bill, as can be seen from the Order Paper. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a great obligation to attempt to justify what he is doing.

We must all remember that representation of the people Bills are of great importance to the House. Indeed, over the centuries they have been more important than almost any other Bill. The way in which people are elected to the House is of paramount importance, not only to the House but to the survival of democracy. After elections in the 18th century, the House of Commons would spend many hours, days and even years trying to clear up the mess of the last election or trying to stash advantages for themselves for a later election. We escaped from that over a period, but the Government now seem to be returning to some of the old traditions. Almost every week, and certainly every Session, we are presented with a Bill that helps the electoral position of the Conservative party and injures that of the Labour and other opposition parties. Not a single Session passes during which we do not have to discuss these matters. During the last Session the Government introduced a Bill that injured the finances of the Labour party. It was one of the obvious purposes of the Bill. I am not suggesting that every major proposition in this Bill is designed to assist the Conservative party and injure the other parties, but that might be the result. One of my main grievances is the procedure that the Government have followed.

The major question is how the Government have approached this important measure. Representation of the people Bills should always be regarded as of paramount importance. This Government, even before they proposed to take part of the Bill in Committee, said in their White Paper that they would bring forward a major representation of the people Bill. Even the Government admit that it is a major Bill. It was outrageous that the Government should even contemplate the idea of a major representation of the people Bill being presented to the House without all the details being examined on the Floor of the House.

I shall elaborate on the way in which the Government have gone about presenting a major representation of the people Bill to the House of Commons. The details add up to very important questions. There is the question of giving the vote to expatriates or people living in other parts of the world. It is an important principle. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton ridiculed that idea, and it will be interesting to see how the Government reply. What would have happened if that had been applied in years gone by? I am not sure whether the Home Secretary was here when one of the major matters that the House was discussing was what was to happen to the country then known as Rhodesia. If the Bill had been in operation, many people in Rhodesia would have exercised their right to decide what would happen in this country. A famous rhyme went as follows:

"True patriots we; for be it understood,
We left our country for our country's good."

Quite a lot of so-called patriots of that nature left their country, and under the Bill they would have taken their votes with them. Therefore, that part of the Bill opens up new principles, which should be examined with great care. If they are to be introduced at all, they should be introduced with some agreement with the Opposition parties, but in the case of the expatriate vote, that has not been done or even attempted.

I entirely agree with what was said today and on previous occasions by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton about the £1,000 deposit. It is a powerful case against the way in which the Government have been proceeding on the matter, which is wrong. I know that figures can be quoted and comparisons can be made with 1918. We have been able to accommodate these matters since then. It is wrong that a figure of £1,000 should now be imposed, particularly when it is imposed through a Government decision and not by agreement between all the parties concerned on how we should proceed.

There is also a proposal for cutting off the hour of voting at 9 o'clock instead of 10 o'clock. The ridicule poured on the present system by the Home Secretary does not bear any relation to the facts——

Mr. Brittan: But that is what the Select Committee proposed.

Mr. Foot: I shall come to the Select Committee in a moment. All these matters lead to the Select Committee and the right hon. and learned Gentleman, like others, might have been misled by it.

I remember the 1945 election, when voting finished at 8 o'clock. At that time, we still had a comfortable majority, but even so, at 8 o'clock there were people standing in queues outside the polling stations. Many were unable to get in, and many votes up and down the country were lost. That was remedied by agreement between the parties — by discussion. We altered the time to 10 o'clock. I should have thought that the figure of 1·5 million people voting between 9 o'clock and 10 o'clock by itself was a conclusive reason why the time of 10 o'clock should be retained. Therefore, I hope that that proposal will be altered in Committee.

There is also the issue of principle of how people in Northern Ireland are to vote on a different basis from that which will apply to people in other parts of the country. That is intolerable. There must be a uniform system throughout the United Kingdom. I do not mean to say that the people in Northern Ireland treasure the vote more than we do, but they treasure it very much, as something that protects them against violence and all the thuggery of the IRA. Their whole future depends upon the ballot box. Great honour is paid to the ballot box in Northern Ireland, perhaps even more than anywhere else, although all our lives depend upon upholding the authority of the ballot box. For the right hon. and learned Gentleman, on his own whim and without discussion with the parties affected, to say that there will be a different principle in Northern Ireland from the one that operates in other parts of the country, is insulting. It will not work. I hope that that proposal will be destroyed in Committee. At the end of tonight's debate, the Government should accept that.

With regard to the holiday provisions, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton rightly said, it is just and proper that there should be workable arrangements in that respect. However, the other measures amount to a major change in the way in which representation in the House is carried through. It is outrageous that the Government seek to introduce a measure of this character — what they themselves call a major representation of the people Bill —without the normal processes of consultation.

The Home Secretary referred to the Select Committee. However, Select Committees are not a substitute for the normal procedure. Many of us had discussions about the establishment of the Select Committees and said that one of the dangers was that some unwise Ministers who did not pay proper attention to the genuine and well-established traditions of the House would say, "We can take account of what a Select Committee says on the matter." That is the trouble with Select Committees. Governments can pick and choose. This Government pick and choose. They do not agree with every Select Committee. If they think that a Select Committee such as the Select Committee on Home Affairs agrees with them, they say that it has made the recommendation. But they did not accept all the recommendations of even the Select Committee on Home Affairs. They pick and choose. They say that they will take half a dozen of the Committee's proposals and perhaps they will be able to get them through the House.

I dare say that the old-fashioned habit of discussing representation of the people Bills in Cabinet is still preserved, but perhaps that is carrying things a bit far. When the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to persuade the Cabinet—if he had to—I dare say that he said, "We have the Select Committee on our side." Why did not the right hon. and learned Gentleman look at the normal traditions? They are even in his own White Paper. He could have read the paragraph before the one that mentions the major representation of the people Bill, which says that on all such previous occasions when there have been major changes there was a Speaker's Conference. That was not so in the old days. In the 18th century, parties would try to wrest their own advantage from their majority in the House, which might be a temporary majority. It took years to establish incorruptible processes of election in the House. It was one of the major fights for democracy. However, we are returning to those old corrupt days, when Ministers used their majority for their own purposes. Why did not the Minister stop to ask himself, "Why should there be this tradition of having a Speaker's Conference on the matter?" The reason is that he did not discharge his responsibilities properly.

Mr. Brittan: If the right hon. Gentleman hastens to import motives to people, which I would not do in this case, I should tell him that the position is clear. He must be aware that the way of handling these matters by a Speaker's Conference has been subject to an enormous amount of criticism, most cogently by Mr. Speaker Selwyn Lloyd, who, after he was involved in such an operation, came to a firm view as to its unsuitability as a means of handling these matters today.

Mr. Foot: That is a new principle that has been enunciated. Mr. Speaker Selwyn Lloyd may have said that in an off-beat comment, but is it Government policy that we have no more Speaker's Conferences? If that is the Government's view, they should have said so in a proper declaration. We should have been told when they introduced the Bill that the reason why the Government would not have a Speaker's Conference was that they mistrusted Speaker's Conferences. That should have been

[Mr. Foot]

stated clearly if it was the Government's view. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have his opportunity to say that he believes that Speaker's Conferences are not the proper way to deal with these matters and that that was the Government's decision although, carelessly, they have not announced it until this moment.

Mr. Brittan: The right hon. Gentleman is mistaken. I have said publicly that I do not believe that a Speaker's Conference is the most appropriate way. As the right hon. Gentleman is so enthusiastic about Speaker's Conferences, will he explain why, when he was Leader of the House in 1969, the extra hour's polling time was introduced, contrary to the recommendation of the Speaker's Conference and against the wishes of the Conservative Opposition at the time?

Mr. Foot: The Secretary of State had better take a little more time to check his facts. So far from it being the case that the Labour Government believed it wrong to have a Speaker's Conference to deal with such matters, and so far from us having adopted what the right hon. and learned Gentleman now calls the "Selwyn Lloyd" principle—that one pushes Speaker's Conferences to one side because they are not fit to deal with such matters—the Labour Government insisted on a Speaker's Conference to deal with the most critical representation of the people Bill that we have had to deal with, which related to Northern Ireland. We said that it must go to a Speaker's Conference because we believed that it would then command much more support in the House and throughout the country, as events proved.

The Opposition have never accepted the doctrine that Speaker's Conferences are not fit to deal with such matters. The right hon. and learned Gentleman, in a document presented to the House, explained how Speaker's Conferences were used to do so previously. Even if some believe that a Speaker's Conference would not be the best way to do it, what has happened on this occasion proves the case. Instead of introducing a measure that could have commanded universal support because it had been examined properly, the Government have made the grave mistake of saying that they will not have a Speaker's Conference, but that they will take instead portions of a Select Committee's recommendations. That is why not only the right hon. and learned Gentleman but the House of Commons is in such a mess.

Mr. Brittan: The right hon. Gentleman talks about a mess. Does he believe that the 1969 Government were wrong to reject the recommendation of the Speaker's Conference, which had decided against extending polling hours? The 1969 Government insisted on that change, against the wishes of the Conservative Opposition. If the right hon. Gentleman is so keen on Speaker's Conferences, he has some explaining to do now.

Mr. Foot: I did not notice that the right hon. and learned Gentleman apologised to me at the beginning of his remarks. I was not Leader of the House in 1969. I was performing the functions, which I am now performing, of contributing to debates from the Back Benches. I should be happy, for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's benefit, to look up everything I said then, and treat him to a full survey of it on a proper occasion.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is the Minister and should be responsible for such matters. He made the wholly unjustified charge that I was opposed to dealing with such matters by a Speaker's Conference, but I have already given him a clear example that in the Parliament when I was responsible for those matters I said that the House could deal with them properly only by having a Speaker's Conference and letting everyone from different sides give evidence. Such a procedure now would have provided a real chance of getting the Bill through the House of Commons.

The Secretary of State has failed in his duty to the House. He has produced a squalid little measure that may have advantages for the Conservative party, but which has not been thought out properly. He may discover that, as with the trade union legislation introduced by the Government—which is designed to injure the finances of the Labour party—some of the measures in the Bill, which are designed to assist the electoral processes of the Conservative party, will not succeed. The debate on the Representation of the People Bill, which includes major changes, should have been introduced in an entirely different way. If the House of Commons becomes bogged down in constitutional procedures, the responsibility will rest with the right hon. and learned Gentleman and with the Cabinet who were foolish enough to listen to his advice.

6.14 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Contrary to what we have heard in the debate from Opposition Members, most people will welcome the Bill. Its proposals show that the Government are sensitive to public opinion, and I am glad that they have been introduced. In a democracy it is desirable that electoral arrangements should have consensus support from the parties generally, and I am sorry that the Opposition parties have not seen fit wholeheartedly to welcome the proposals. The amendments on the Order Paper show that they are very much out of touch with public opinion.

I was a member of the Joint Committee that considered the consolidation of the several Acts relating to electoral law which became the Representation of the People Act 1983. We were responsible for consolidating the law, not for making new law. Our biggest problem was deciding how the requirement for urgent messages to be conveyed to the returning officer by telegram should be dealt with following the abolition of Post Office telegrams. However, it was apparent during our consideration of that consolidation that the existing electoral law was badly out of date and that changes were necessary. I am glad that the Government delayed for no longer than was necessary following the publication of the report from the Select Committee on Home Affairs and the Government's answer in the form of a White Paper.

Although I welcome the Bill generally, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will forgive me if I devote some of my time to concentrating on ways in which the Bill can be improved in Committee.

It is right that those who, by their decision or that of others, live and work overseas for a time should not be deprived of their votes. It is unfortunate that the Opposition attach disreputable motives to those United Kingdom citizens who spend time abroad, when many of them do so in the service of the country.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said, some believe that the right to vote in such circumstances should not be qualified by a time limit. It is argued that, as United Kingdom citizens, such people still have close contact with this country even after many years. But those who argue that have forgotten that votes are given not for Governments but for candidates. Due to the processes of electoral registration, the limit of seven years could sometimes be extended to more than eight years from the time when the individual went overseas. We must ask ourselves whether, after such a long period, it would be likely that someone would still have a close connection with his previous constituency and whether he or she would be likely to return to that place. For that reason, I believe that there should be a time limit, and the limit specified in the Bill of seven years is by no means unreasonable.

If an election takes place during the summer — my right hon. and learned Friend said that the period during which people take holidays has spread — many people are likely to be prevented by their holiday arrangements from voting. Justice demands that they should not be deprived of their vote through no fault of theirs. The greatest difficulty lies in the definition of those circumstances in which a postal vote should be allowed, and this is obviously a problem with which the Home Office has had to grapple. I am concerned about the wide latitude written into the Bill, which seems almost to provide for a postal vote on demand. The numbers seeking to take advantage of the new provision may be considerable, and the extension of the postal vote provision can be, if we are not careful, an invitation to abuse. It should be noted that the absent vote has been extended to local government and to parish council elections, where the majority of people tend not to use their vote. It is not difficult to imagine that this will encourage abuse when combined with the widening of the absent voting provision.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be so critical of the extension of the postal vote to parish councils, where the polls are generally much higher than they are for district and county council elections, and where the total exclusion of postal voting has been unreasonable.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood me. I am by no means opposing the extension of the postal voting provisions to parish council elections, but the turnout varies considerably, and in many parish council elections the vote is extremely small. I know of parish council elections where it has been well under 20 per cent.

Penalties are available, and the Bill provides for those penalties to be increased where such abuse is detected, but detection and enforcement, although they may exist, may in reality become almost imposible. The requirement that anyone applying for a postal vote should have to obtain the counter-signature of another elector provides effectively no protection at all. I hope that, at the very least, the Bill will be amended so that the declaration needs to be made in front of a Justice of the Peace. This should be considered in Committee.

It has already been argued in the debate that the candidate's deposit should be replaced by an increase in the number of signatures required on a candidate's nomination paper. The figure of 500 signatures has been suggested, but it is interesting to note that the Ecology party, which has been in touch with hon. Members has suggested that the figure of 100 might be more suitable. This may reflect the difficulty with which that party might be faced in obtaining 500 signatures.

However, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, in many instances people are prepared to sign nomination papers without giving any commitment to candidates. Therefore, the need to obtain 100, or even 500, signatures will not provide any great obstacle. A financial deposit has been traditional in this country, and there are good reasons for continuing with it, although the exact figure is open to question, and again this is an appropriate issue to be considered in Committee.

Schedule 1, part III, concerns municipal elections in the City of London, and I am surprised that it has not been mentioned already in the debate. I shall refer briefly to certain aspects of the procedures there. I strongly believe in the importance of tradition and I support the City's right to retain its ancient traditions. However, tradition ceases to be a virtue and becomes a threat when it becomes incompatible with democracy. One of the great strengths of Parliament arises out of the fact that it has combined a respect for tradition with a willingness to change its procedures when it has been obvious that that has been demanded. Unfortunately, this has not always been such an obvious feature of the City of London.

The danger of electoral abuse is greater in the City because the wards have remained unaltered since medieval times. For example, there is one ward with only just over 30 electors, while another has over 2,500. To be an elector in the City, one needs to be neither a resident nor someone who works there, because partners may vote in those wards where their firm has its offices. Despite the Bill's intentions, a partner may vote more than once in a local government election in the City because each ward is a separate electoral area. Just as one of the partners in a large stockbroking or accountancy firm can vote more than once, so he can appoint a proxy to vote in each of those wards where his firm has an office, regardless of whether or not he works in the City.

Although I understand that the Home Office undertook to look at the question of applications for personal votes by power of attorney, no provision relating to the power of attorney has been included in the Bill. At present, there is the unsatisfactory position that all the partners of a professional firm in the City of London can appoint one of their members as attorney to apply for postal votes on behalf of each of them.

There are several reasons why this matter is important at this time. The abolition of the Greater London council will mean that the City will be a unitary authority and the only local government authority that those living in the City can look to for the provision of services. Many changes are taking place in the City at the moment, involving the takeover of firms, which I feel are tantamount to the opening of a Pandora's box for future elections. I wonder how many people are aware that elections to the Court of Common Council in the City can, in the case of some wards, be controlled by a very small number of individual firms.

Years ago, changes in the City's electoral practices would have been easier to implement than they are today.

[Mr. Waller]

Today they will be easier to implement than they will become in the future, and I hope that, during the passage of the Bill, some essential reforms will be introduced.

It is right that electors should not be deprived of a vote because they are living abroad or are on holiday. It is obvious to me and, I think, to most people in the country that a deposit of £150 is completely out of date and more suited to the last century than to this. I look forward to the early passage of this legislation, and to its improving our form of democracy.

6.27 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I agree with a number of the anxieties that have been expressed by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) about the Bill in its present form. I think it a thousand pities that the Government, whatever may be our view as to the absolute validity of a Speaker's Conference, did not have the benefit of such a conference before the Bill was introduced. There is no substitute for it in the form of a Select Committee. A Select Committee is not capable of delivering to the House or the Government the agreement of the several parties represented here. That is so for one reason that is worth stressing: individual hon. Members do not sit on Select Committees as delegates or representatives of their respective parties, and it will be an ill day when we hold them, in the deliberations of a Select Committee, to be committing their respective parties.

The Bill, in its major provisions, undermines some of the most fundamental characteristics and principles of parliamentary representation, and notably three. The first is the significance of place or locality. The second is the importance of uniformity throughout the country. The third is the importance of simultaneity of voting. I shall take those points briefly and then consider how they relate to the Bill.

The House is a geographical representation of the kingdom. We come here sent from our respective places. We do not have a mass poll of the citizenry to elect a Government or a Prime Minister: instead the electorate of the several places send one person to Parliament, to use his discretion on their behalf. That is one of the profound characteristics of the House of Commons. It is at variance with the principles on which other deliberative assemblies are founded; but it is certainly something that goes to the roots of our parliamentary democracy. Indeed, it is the reason why the House of Commons has its name. It is the House of the "communities" Indeed at times in the middle ages it was called the communitas communitatum—the place where all the communities, through their representatives, gathered together.

As for the principle of simultaneity, that does not perhaps have so long a history. Indeed, in the days before the ballot Act it was not uncommon for elections to last not merely for several days but for several weeks. Yet I do not think it can be controverted that since the prevalence of the ballot, and certainly since universal franchise has prevailed, simultaneity is one of the essential characteristics of our elections and is the principle that gives validity to the composition of the House of Commons as determined at a general election.

It requires only a moment's thought to see the importance of the simultaneous vote by the whole electorate in person—in principle—and upon the same day. Events happen, things are said, promises are made and broken during the course of an election campaign, that influence and sway large bodies of the electorate. If a substantial proportion of that electorate can be shown to have voted before such and such an event occurred, doubt is inevitably cast on the outcome of an election in which not all electors have been voting in the same circumstances, in the same position and upon the same proposition. Therefore, simultaneity is an essential validating character and quality of the principle of election, whereby on one polling day the whole nation goes to the polls—in principle—in person.

I accept that to some extent we have modified that principle in the provisions hitherto made for absent voting. We have made provision for absent voting, notably in two important areas. The first is where a person, by removing from one place to another, is unable to exercise his vote in the only place where, by reason of our emphasis upon locality, he can do so. That is a very important aspect of the absent vote hitherto. The second involves what I might almost call the compassionate consideration—that those persons physically disabled from going to the poll should nevertheless not thereby be prevented from voting.

Although those modifications to the principle have been made, the principle remains important, and we should be exceedingly jealous and careful of any extension of that proportion of the electorate that votes at a different time, in different circumstances and faces different facts, indeed what one might almost call a different world, from the rest of the electorate.

The third principle has already been mentioned, and it is that of uniformity. All Members of Parliament, who are equals one with another, should be elected by an electorate constituted and qualified in the same way, and having the same rights, the same opportunities to cast their votes. Indeed, the unity of the realm, which is expressed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, ultimately depends on the unity of the electorate.

All those fundamental characteristics of a valid electoral system are undermined by the Bill.

The principle of locality as well as of simultaneity is undermined by the provision for overseas voting, whereby a person who had a connection seven or eight years ago with a locality is held to be on an equal footing with those who still reside there, who hear the candidate's speeches, who know the circumstances of the area and who have, during the past seven or eight years, lived through the experiences of that locality. That is a serious breach in the integrity of our electoral process, and we should seriously qualify it or reconsider it before we allow the Bill to reach the statute book.

Even more serious, certainly quantitatively, is the principle of absent voting by choice which is now introduced for the first time. One has only to read the staggering wording of clause 7(1) *(a)* to understand that that is no exaggeration. It states that the registration officer shall grant an application for an absent vote if

"he is satisfied that the applicant's circumstances on the date of the poll will be or are likely to be such that he cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person at the polling station allotted".

I do not know whether to call that arbitrary or ad lib. From the elector's point of view, there is virtually no limit to the grounds upon which he can argue that it would be inconvenient to the degree of impossibility for him to turn up at that place on that day. We have already had the example of a business man who was unable to return to his

home before the poll closed at 10 pm. Does a business man say to the registration officer 10 or 20 days, or even more than that, before the date of the poll, "Look, I'm a business man and I occasionally make trips to London. For all I know, I might have to make a business trip on the day" —*[Interruption.]* Does the Under-Secretary of State wish to intervene?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I am sorry that I appeared surprised. I would happily have left my rebuttal of what the right hon. Gentleman has said—so far as I am capable of rebutting it—until later. But he might recall that it has been possible since the 1940s for those who think that they might be away on business to obtain a postal vote.

Mr. Powell: I do not quite think so. That is the case where the nature of a calling or occupation is such that the contingency has to be reckoned with; but we are dealing here with something different. After all, even the limited opportunities still to be left for the electors in Northern Ireland will allow them to consider the character of the occupation of the peron concerned. But there is an immense range of other circumstances in which anyone can legitimately claim that he might well find it inconvenient or impossible to get to the polling station on a given day. There is always an invalid aunt in Halifax —as all who have been candidates will know, our key workers tend to have invalid aunts in Halifax who take it into their heads to die during the last stages of an election campaign. That is surely a ground upon which the applicant's "circumstances are such that he will be, or may be likely to be," unable to go to the poll. His aunt is a close relative and ill, and he argues that, in case of bad luck, he had better have a right to vote—an absent vote "just in case". So on the one hand there is an open invitation and a menu card for absent voting, on the other there is an extraordinary responsibility placed on a registration officer when the definition is so wide.

The Home Secretary may say, "Don't you worry about that, because I am going to put a much closer definition into the regulations." I hope that he will not say that, because it would not do. It would not do for the House of Commons to pass something such as clause 7(1)*(a)* on the understanding that after the Bill is passed the words will be narrowed and defined in some unforeseeable way, perhaps by regulations subject to affirmative or—who knows?—negative resolution.

Therefore, we are confronted with an inadmissible and indefinite extension of the potentialities of absent voting. In many a constituency that scope is sufficient to cast grave doubt on the validity of a particular outcome that might be crucial to the composition of the House and so to the nature of the Government.

I come to uniformity. The Home Secretary says that there are respects in which the electoral law in Northern Ireland is not identical with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. So there are and when a Bill that has just gone to the other place receives the Royal Assent, a further extension will have been given to that variation, over the —parliamentarily speaking—dead bodies of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself. The Home Secretary quoted part of the Representation of the People Act—section 1(2)—which creates in Northern Ireland a residence qualification different from the residence qualification in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Incidentally, it is a United Kingdom Act passed by this House: let there be no question of it being a relic of the Stormont Administration in Northern Ireland; it is something that the House thought it right and appropriate to enact and apparently thinks it right and appropriate still to keep on the statute book, though that perhaps should now be debated again in view of the great importance that I am at this moment stressing of uniformity of qualification and of electoral process in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Two things are happening in the Bill. First, a new opportunity to vote is being created in the rest of the kingdom but that opportunity to vote is being withheld from my constituents and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. That is one thing that is happening. But something more atrocious, which I cannot believe that the House will suffer, is also happening. A right to vote which is already possessed is being withdrawn silently by means of omission from a list in clause 7(2). Without any paraphernalia or publicity, the right for a person removing from one place to another to cast his vote during the validity of that register in the place where he is registered is being silently withdrawn in Northern Ireland.

I cannot believe that there can be any justification for that in the circumstances of Northern Ireland, or on any other grounds. Indeed, I have reason to suppose that this is a conclusion which the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Home Secretary has come to with considerable hesitation. I rely much on expressions that have fallen from him at various stages, both in correspondence and on the Floor of the House.

We are told that in Northern Ireland there is abuse of the electoral process, that there are many electoral offences committed there, and that we must not open a wider field for the commission of those offences. Well, we are talking about absent voting either by post or by proxy. Now, I have not heard it seriously stated that widespread serious abuse can occur in voting by proxy. In effect, therefore, it comes down to voting by post.

I concede that postal voting for the disabled or for the sick is open to abuse—not only in Northern Ireland. Not only in Northern Ireland are certificates given lightly, collected and filled up batchwise to confer votes upon people who might, on a strict interpretation, not be entitled to vote by post by reason of physical disability.

Still, I concede that it is possible for evilly minded and militarily organised people, as in some areas of Northern Ireland those persons are, to abuse the availability of ballots in the homes of those who have been certified to be physically disabled.

I do not deny that. However, in what circumstances could the most fantastic organisation—evil no doubt, determined no doubt—abuse ballot papers sent to the new addresses to which persons removing have gone either in a distant part of the same constituency—that is possible under our Ulster election rules—or in another constituency 50 miles, 100 miles, 200 miles away? It is unthinkable that the facility which is being taken away from Northern Ireland is one which could seriously be the subject of abuse. That simply cannot be argued.

As for the absent voter, if an address has to be specified —the address will be specified in the list of postal voters that has to be published by the registration officer —the degree of organisation necessary to commandeer the ballot papers from the various addresses to which they

[Mr. Powell]

have been posted in the crucial period so as to ensure that intimidation is brought to bear in filling them up is beyond all imagination.

So, what the right hon. and learned Gentleman finds himself doing — I have chosen my phrase carefully because I cannot bring myself to believe that he would regard what I have described as just or justifiable — is refusing to confer a new right and withdrawing an existing right, both of which, whatever might be said of other voting rights, cannot imaginably be the subject of widespread abuse.

As in all matters, the ultimate guarantee, the ultimate safety net, for the people in the Province where I represent a constituency lies with this House. This House is the ultimate safeguard of all minorities, of whatever kind they may be, in whatever part of the country they may be. It is to this House, before the Bill passes, that we confidently look to see that an injustice is not imposed upon a part of the United Kingdom which has all too much reason, real or imagined, to consider itself the victim of injustice. It is to this House that we appeal.

6.46 pm

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): It is always challenging to follow the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I was interested in his remarks about the need for uniformity throughout the kingdom. I remember a debate some years ago about the extension of the laws governing homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in Northern Ireland, and the right hon. Gentleman spoke fervently in favour of differences in practice across the United Kingdom. I think that he used the phrase "rich diversity" and said that the differences should be cherished.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Not only did I vote, first, in Scotland and then in England for the repeal of those laws, but I never concealed in Northern Ireland that that was my view.

Mr. Parris: I must have misunderstood the tenor of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks in that debate, which I attended throughout.

It is encouraging to be told by the right hon. Gentleman that my constituents voted for me rather than for the Conservative party. I should like to believe that. It might be true for some. At least I shall encourage my constituents to believe that there might be some difference between voting for me and voting for the Conservative party if I vote against Second Reading tonight.

I was determined to do that before I heard the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). To say that he overstated the case would be an understatement. The right hon. Gentleman so overstated the case that I was all but convinced to change my mind.

It is not fair to suggest, as the right hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) suggested, that the increase in the deposit to £1,000 is part of the Conservative party's plan to improve its own voting figures. I disagree with the increase and I shall say why later. I do not think that there is any sectarian party purpose in it. The Labour party would probably stand to gain most from the disappearance of the small fringe parties. I do not think that the Conservative party would gain anything. It is more likely that we would lose something, because sometimes fringe parties enable our candidates to squeeze through.

When the parliamentary deposit was set at £150, it was a large sum. It was an enormous sum. It was intended to prevent people who were not of substantial means and could not be confident of achieving a substantial vote from standing for Parliament. That was not right then, and the fact that a custom is old does not necessarily make it a custom that we should want to follow.

The deposit was set in an age when money talked in politics even more than it does now. Money talked in the running of a politial party, in the securing of a candidature and sometimes in securing a seat in Parliament. That was an age when poor men did not stand nearly so often for Parliament. It was much more difficult for them to do so and there was no prevailing belief that they should. Society took a robust view of the political advantages that money could buy. It is no accident that no attempt has been made over the intervening years to maintain the deposit at that high level. It is not due to inattention that we have allowed the financial penalty for electoral defeat to diminish. The diminution has come with increased sensitivity about links between wealth and political power. I am sorry that in some senses the Bill goes back on that increased sensitivity.

The passage of time has eroded the financial value of the penalty and my right hon. and learned Friend is right to remind us of that. However, I think that it is a good thing that the value of the penalty has been reduced. The Bill undoes and reverses that and at one stroke restores all the inequity which was inherent in the theory on which the penalty was based. As I have said, not everything that is old is right. That there should be a heavy financial penalty for failing to secure many votes is offensive in principle. Whether "many" is defined as 20 per cent., one eighth or one twentieth of the votes cast does not alter the principle, which remains offensive. To reduce the requirement from one eighth to one twentieth lessens the extent of the damage, and it would be wrong not to acknowledge that. I am grateful for the reduction, but it does not alter the bad principle and much damage will be done by its application.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): My hon. Friend, like many others, has in mind the way in which the deposit will have an effect on candidates of legitimate fringe parties and on those who wish to put across minority points of view. Is he aware that one of my Nottingham colleagues experienced something quite different? He found that there was a deliberate plan to deceive by candidates standing as the "official" something, the "local" something or the "genuine" something. That is a growing practice. The "official" candidate seeks to take the title of the Conservative, Labour or Liberal candidate by putting an adjective in front of the party's title. He is seeking to deceive and to split the vote. That cannot be right. I believe that an increased deposit will help to stop that practice.

Mr. Parris: If there is a good chance of securing the defeat of a Conservative candidate by such means, those who engage in the practice will be capable in many instances of raising the £1,000 to enable them to do so. There have been attempts to deceive and, on the whole, they have not been successful. Indeed, they have been remarkably unsuccessful. Against remedying that practice

must be balanced the damage that my hon. Friend rightly concedes will be done to many genuine fringe and smaller parties.

With respect to my right hon. and learned Friend, I do not think that it was right for him to go through his speech, which was not short, without mentioning the general principles or the practical consequences of this measure for many of the smaller fringe parties. Damage will be done especially to those individuals and parties to whom and to which our constitution is arguably rather unkind. There are stirrings in the electoral undergrowth. There are movements among those who form the political equivalent of the small business enterprise to which my party is rightly wedded. I have in mind political ideas and parties that have only recently started. Imagine the fuss if the Government proposed penalties in the form of forfeiture of bonds to be imposed upon new and small businesses which failed to secure a given number of customers within a prescribed time. If Tesco, for example, were to call for such an imposition on every small corner shop which entered the market, would we be on Tesco's side? In political terms we are, perhaps, the equivalent of Tesco.

It is inherently likely that a political movement will start from a base of less than one eighth or one twentieth of electoral support. By punishing a political party for risking that test, the Bill may prevent many movements from even starting. Would the Labour party have started and risen to supplant the Liberal party without the resources of organised labour on which to draw? The Labour party had to run the risk of lost deposits. Was its dependence on organised labour a healthy one? Should we encourage dependence of that sort?

Mr. Mellor: When the £150 deposit was introduced in 1918, it was the equivalent of about nine months income for someone on the national average wage. If it was intended to stifle the Labour party, it was not very successful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate and some, inevitably, will be disappointed. It would be helpful if those seeking to catch my eye, including the Minister, reserved their interventions and incorporated them in their speeches.

Mr. Parris: The Labour party succeeded despite that level of deposit. It succeeded because it had the resources of organised labour on which to draw. Small minority parties are not in that position. I do not see how a small party can possibly field a credible number of candidates if it must risk a penalty of £1,000 in each constituency. We all know that it is necessary to fly the flag, even in constituencies where there is not a chance of succeeding. That is accepted in a great political party such as the Conservative party. It is even more important for small political parties to fly the flag than it is for large ones. One of the criticisms that is most likely to be levelled against small parties is that they are not even fielding enough candidates to form a Government if they should succeed in every constituency in which they have placed one of their candidates.

Contesting seats when there is not a ghost of a chance of winning them is one of the ways in which a small party shows that it is serious. The Bill will stop small parties from doing just that. If the Bill is enacted, small parties will be able to say with some justice that they are not fielding a credible spread of candidates because we passed a law that prevented them from doing so. That argument and that sense of grievance, which I believe will sustain the argument, will prove a moral weapon in the hands of minority parties that my right hon. and learned Friend will be unwise to ignore. He is giving fringe movements a better case for extra-parliamentary action than they have ever been able to make for themselves.

I do not know whether my right hon. and hon. Friends see this as I do, but I have always felt it a cause for satisfaction that in this country the Communist party, the National Front or the Socialist Workers party can and do field candidates. A cause for even greater satisfaction is that they regularly and visibly fail to attract much support. No longer will we be able to say that. Their spokesmen will be able to say that their parties are not rich enough to test the electorate's support or to get their message across. I fail to see that this will be adding strength or authority to our constitution.

I have not spoken to any representative of the National Front, because I cannot find that organisation listed in the telephone directory. I do not know how much the Bill, if enacted, will cost it. However, I know that we shall never again be able to challenge it to explain the derisory number of votes that it attracts at elections. It will have a good answer once the Bill is enacted.

The Ecology party, which wrote to a number of us, fielded 109 candidates at the 1983 general election. It hopes to field 300 at the next general election. It will lose a fortune. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether we need to do this to small parties. I cannot speak for organisations such as the Ecology party, but I imagine that they hope to move from being single-issue organisations, which attract a small but respectable following because of public feeling on those single issues, to becoming broader parties with fuller manifestos. It is not uncommon or wrong to enter politics on the back of one central issue and to mature and evolve from that. The first stage is inevitably a minority one. My right hon. and learned Friend will, perhaps unwittingly, kill such movements at birth.

It is neither wrong nor unhelpful to field candidates on one issue as an end in itself, as a way of testing and demonstrating public feeling on that issue, and not so much as a launching pad. It is a way of showing the mainstream parties that they should take an issue more seriously, and they do so in the hope that they will. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has failed to persuade any of the major parties unequivocally to follow its line so it would not be surprising if it decided to contest a few seats.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): The Labour party unequivocally follows its line.

Mr. Parris: My hon. Friend suggests that the Labour party unequivocally follows its line. I believe that it equivocally follows CND's line.

CND candidates might attract 5 or 10 per cent. support, and that would be a success for them. However, they might attract less than 5 per cent. support, and that would be a failure for them. This measure would prevent them from testing the water in that way, and that would be a pity.

I wish to say a word on behalf of Bill Boakes and Screaming Lord Sutch. This aspect has been hugely exaggereated by some of the killjoys among us. Joke

[Mr. Parris]

candidates—we should be honest; some of them are joke candidates—rarely stand at general elections and, when they do, they regularly fail to affect the result. They often stand in by-elections and receive much publicity. Doubtless, they irritate some people; but I can assure my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that they give some of us a certain amount of pleasure and light relief. They are not nearly so costly to the taxpayer as is sometimes imagined. In fact, they rarely make use of the free postal facilities. Those candidates who make use of the free postal facilities are rarely those who are most costly to the taxpayer. Any candidate who can get his party together to the extent of printing between 30,000 and 50,000 leaflets and putting them in envelopes has already demonstrated his seriousness in a way that I should have thought was satisfactory to my right hon. and learned Friend.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary mentioned abuses. I question how widespread those abuses are. I agree that the candidate should be serious, but I question whether a £1,000 deposit is the right way of testing a candidate's seriousness. Bill Boakes and Screaming Lord Sutch do us little harm on the whole and may sometimes do us some good. By-elections can be very dull, and voting for one of the joke candidates is perhaps a courteous and elegant alternative to spoiling the ballot paper or abstaining. Those institutions—such gentlemen have become institutions — provide a safety valve. Voting and standing against the mainstream parties are useful facilities, especially where the success or validity of a democratic institution is popularly questioned. The fact that so few British people vote or stand against the mainstream parties is a helpful sign, giving us cause for self-confidence and providing us with a way of testing the acceptability of our democratic institutions. We should not lightly abandon that. Joke candidates rarely succeed in picking up more than derisory, facetious or protest votes, and that provides us with some comfort. Why take away the opportunity to test the water occasionally?

I support the first-past-the-post system. On balance, I believe that it is the best system, but we must admit that the first-past-the-post system bears harshly on minority parties. Already, under our system, a small party takes root and achieves electoral breakthrough against all the odds. Why stack the odds even further against small parties and add to the sense of injustice they undoubtedly already feel? We discount the votes achieved by losing candidates. Why fine them as well? The smaller the party, the larger the sum of deposits it stands to forfeit in a general election.

By this measure, my right hon. and learned Friend adds significantly to the arguments already circulating in favour of state funding for political parties. That—it is another debate—would be a bad move. Unwittingly, my right hon. and learned Friend adds to their grievances and brings forward the day when changes to the electoral system or the means of funding parties will be more powerfully canvassed. The fact that tiny parties and eccentric individuals are able to stand for election under our system is a safety valve. It is a seed-bed for new movements and ideologies, and sometimes a source of light relief. There is no great abuse to be remedied. The fact that such candidates regularly fail is a signal and ground for comfort, not for disquiet, among the rest of us. Why change all that? Why make any change at all? Sometimes, I think we seem to have lost our sense of fair play, political self-confidence and, occasionally, humour.

7.4 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) is right about many aspects — for example, the arguments for reforming the electoral system will be more powerfully canvassed. I point out to him that it is not that the electoral system discriminates against minorities but that it chooses arbitrarily between minorities. The electoral system takes that minority which is the Conservative party, enjoying only minority support, and gives to it the power of the majority — just as it took previous minority Labour parties and made them into majority Governments. That is the crucial failing of the electoral system.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, West was right in what he said about deposits. He demonstrated that the Home Secretary not only had failed to bring about the degree of all-party agreement which his predecessor clearly envisaged but had failed to secure agreement within his party on the desirability of proceeding with this step. There was a vivid demonstration of that failure not only in this debate but in the earlier debates on the White Paper. The Home Secretary would have to admit that there is genuine misgiving among Conservative Back Benchers and a number of other hon. Members who are seriously putting the arguments against this large increase in the deposit.

The Bill has many good features and some bad features, of which the deposit and the exclusion of multiple registration are two. In some ways, the Bill involves the curtailment of the freedom of individuals to stand for Parliament. Today's Order Paper, with its reasoned amendments from several parties, clearly demonstrates the lack of consensus between the parties which is desirable if we are to get a major Representation of the People Bill through Parliament. When the Government canvassed the prospect of sending the Bill upstairs to Committee, I was appalled to think that, for the first time in our history, we were to consider such a Bill upstairs. I am glad that the Government backed down from that proposition in their announcement this afternoon. I hope that that is a sign that the Government will embark again on the road which Lord Whitelaw set out for them—to achieve the maximum possible all-party agreement when considering representation of the people measures.

I shall consider some of the specific issues in the Bill, going roughly in order through the Bill. I agree broadly with the Government and not the Labour party on the issue of overseas voting. I disagree with the Labour Party's reasoned amendment on this issue. The Labour party seems to suggest in the way it advances its arguments that there is something faintly disreputable about working abroad while a British citizen and still seeking to take some part in this country's affairs. Dealing with an earlier piece of legislation, Lord Glenamara, when he was Leader of the House, used the phrase "the lotus eaters" to describe those who lived abroad, yet sought to have some part in our country's affairs.

The people who live abroad may include the inhabitants of the "Costa del Crime" and those who stay abroad for tax reasons. Why should guilt by association be brought into this matter?

The category of those who live abroad includes people who work overseas for commercial, voluntary, charitable and international organisations. In many cases, they are serving the best interests of this country or the country to which they have gone. They may work for the United Nations, the Council of Europe or the EEC. They may work in trade or for world development organisations. They may be missionaries or church workers in overseas countries who have a genuine interest in this country and intend to return to it when their work is done.

Mr. Corbett: Are not those people in the category of workers overseas on relatively short-term contracts entitled to proxy votes?

Mr. Beith: They are, on this condition: if they can afford to maintain a residence in this country, they can have a vote. What a paradox that makes of the Labour party's argument. The Labour party is saying that those people who, while working abroad—either because their contract is short or because they have a great deal of money—can afford to keep a residence in Britain shall have a vote, but those who cannot afford to maintain a residence in Britain but still intend to return to Britain shall not have a vote. The case of a missionary or church worker is a classic example. Such a person finds himself in a different economic position from that of an employee of a Government organisation or a diplomat who has a right to vote under existing legislation. That missionary or church worker has every intention of returning to this country in due course. His work overseas is not particularly remunerative—he does not want it to be so; there is a great deal of self-sacrifice in his choice—but he retains an interest in this country's affairs. Indeed, the affairs of this country may have a considerable bearing on the work he does in the country to which he has gone.

One cannot travel abroad at the moment to developing countries without being made aware of the interests of British citizens overseas. We had a debate on overseas aid a couple of weeks ago on a Liberal motion. Threats to the British Council and the BBC overseas service, the British citizenship laws and how they will affect the children of people working abroad and many other issues came up in the House. I therefore believe that it is reasonable that people working overseas but who intend to return should be able to vote. It is difficult to arrive at a satisfactory definition, but I do not believe that the Government have done a bad job on this issue.

The Liberal party would like to see EEC citizens given the right to vote in whichever EEC country they reside in. We see it as part of the nature and character of the EEC. The proposals contained in the Bill are a way of ensuring that they retain some civil and political rights while working elsewhere in the EEC and those rights should be given to people who work in the rest of the world.

I broadly agree with the Government's proposals for absent voters. It is wrong that people should be unable to exercise their franchise because they are on holiday. The timing of a general election is often not known in advance. It is no fault of people who find themselves on holiday when the election is called. There is an anomaly and unfairness in the present position, which we shall remove if we extend postal votes to holiday voters. At present, if a person works in one of the occupations where he can claim that the general character of his work is such that he may not be able to be present on polling day he can claim a postal vote and ensure that he is regularly on the list for a postal vote.

The effect of that, in my experience, is that many business men, farmers or people in that type of work can register postal votes and have a postal vote even if they are on holiday. They claim that they have to travel to other parts of the country, go to markets or see customers, but an ordinary working man who is paid a wage at the end of the week after working in a factory may go to the same place on holiday as the business man—if he can afford it—but find that he has no basis upon which to claim a postal vote. Those in generally better-paid occupations have that right. I again believe it right that the Government should move in that direction.

The definition may not yet be strict enough. We must consider the definition at a later stage to see whether we can make it tighter and clearer to avoid having postal votes on demand in all circumstances. In principle, I believe that the Government are right.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): Without derogating from my hon. Friend's argument in favour of postal voting, may I ask him whether he agrees that it is more difficult to ensure the secrecy of a postal vote than a vote in the polling booth? Does he agree that the instructions to postal voters should go further than at present to make it clear to people that they need not reveal their vote?

Mr. Beith: That is so. My hon. Friend gives sound advice. Elderly voters may feel that they have to fill in the ballot paper in the presence or sight of the person who brings it to them. The Government should be made aware that such difficulties arise. There is a case for tightening the definition and improving instructions to postal voters. I know that my hon. Friend agrees that the anomaly of the holidaymaker being denied his vote should be dealt with despite the difficulties.

I also welcome the fact that the Government have accepted the pleas that many of us have made in the House for a long time to extend postal voting to parish council elections. Those of us who have seen the extraordinary phenomenon of an invalid being carried into a polling station to vote in a parish council election protesting that he has already voted by post in a district council election for the same candidate will realise how absurd the present law is. We are determined that we will not lose a single vote, so we force Liberals to carry elderly ladies into polling stations to ensure that they can cast their votes in parish council elections even though the returning officer has rightly deemed that they should not be required to do so for the district council elections in the same place on the same day. Thank goodness we can end that anomaly.

The National Association of Local Councils, of which I am the vice-president, welcomes the response and help that the Government have given on that matter. The association believes that other matters relating to parish councils should be considered. It welcomes some clauses, but it wholly opposes clause 15, which provides for the postponement of parish and community council elections, but no other local authority elections, if the ordinary day for the parish elections coincides with the general election or a European Assembly election. Why should parish council elections alone be postponed when they land on that day when the Government are making express and

[Mr. Beith]

more permanent provisions for local and parliamentary elections to take place on the same day in other parts of the Bill? We must consider that again, because it is an unreasonable limitation.

I have mentioned a number of matters where I believe the Government have done the right thing, and I come now to where they have made a deliberate omission—the issue of multiple registration. People have the right to be registered in a number of places and thereby to choose where they will cast their votes on polling day. At present, one can be registered in respect of a number of residences. It is one of the points where the essential qualification is money. Money talks at several points in the Bill, and this is one of them.

A person with two, three or four homes can be registered in all of them and can choose on election day where to vote. That has an impact in coastal constituencies, Wales, Cornwall and other parts of the country which are sought after for holiday homes. Many people will choose to transfer their vote according to what they see as the political position and they are people from whom the Conservative party solicits support. It sends election literature to a holiday home which says, "Do not use your vote in London; use it where you have your holiday home."

There is a further anomaly. Were there to be by-elections on the same day in all the places in which a person was lucky enough to own a second, third or fourth residence, he could vote in every one. People could cast five votes for elections to the same Parliament on the same day. Conservative Members are shaking their heads, but that is the law.

A person, however, cannot vote twice in the same general election. Even that presents difficulties, because the policing of dual voting is difficult. There are a large number of multiple registrations which makes it that much more difficult. If the parties want to police the dual voting in a general election, they have to take the numbers of persons voting in several places, know in which other places a person is qualified to vote and is registered and during polling day check between constituencies whether that person has cast his votes in both constituencies. That is difficult to do. It is only the political parties that are likely to go to the trouble of doing that. Returning officers concentrate on whether any offence has been committed within their jurisdiction and constituency.

The policing of the existing legal restriction against voting twice in a general election is made more difficult by the proliferation of multiple registration. All the parties are aware of that. The Conservative party, the Labour party and my party all gave evidence to the Select Committee and said that multiple registration for parliamentary elections should be abolished.

The Select Committee members were unanimously in favour of making a change. The Committee specifically recommended in its report that multiple registration for parliamentary elections should be ended and that it should be a criminal offence knowingly to seek registration in more than one constituency for parliamentary elections.

What pressure, what reconsideration and what backstairs influence have led to the recommendation not being implemented? It is a glaring omission from the Bill. If some of the comments I have heard made sotto voce from the Conservative Benches are anything to go by, it may be that, unlike Conservative Central Office, there are still some influences in the Conservative party who believe that multiple registration is worth hanging on to because it confers an advantage on those people who have several homes and who are more likely to be Conservatives than to belong to other parties because of the financial position which is required to enable a person to own a second home. I feel that consideration has entered into this decision.

I am not in the least convinced—I had days of argument and pages of correspondence with the Minister on this—by the standard obstacles that have been trotted out by the Home Office. If the Government had had the political will to carry out the Select Committee's recommendation, which was supported by all the parties that went before it, it would have been done. It has not been done, and for the wrong reasons.

The subject of deposits has been a major feature of the debate. What is the purpose of the proposal to increase the deposit to £1,000? It cannot be a standing instruction on the part of the Home Office Ministers that all licence fees and charges should be regularly updated, given what has happened to dog licences over the years. There must be a wider purpose. We are told that eccentric or fringe candidates and parties should be discouraged. That reminds me of the comments of Bernard Levin in *The Times* in February this year:

> "Next, it is contended that the proliferation of eccentric candidates tends to bring the election process into disrepute, a charge which, when I first read it, had the unprecedented effect of rendering me incapable of speech for nearly half an hour; beside the Hattersleys and Healeys, the Proctors and Dickenses, Screaming Lord Sutch was a model of dignity and political uprightness, and a . . . sight funnier into the bargain."

In quoting that passage, I have omitted an unparliamentary adjective. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, West also seemed to suggest that the Government had lost their sense of proportion and their sense of humour if they regarded some fringe candidates as so much more reprehensible than some of those who come within the mantle of respectable politics.

The Home Secretary referred to people who were "not serious" about their candidature. That is most worrying. If the definition of seriousness is based on the possession of £1,000, in addition to whatever funds are required to mount a serious campaign, the Government are saying, yet again, that money talks and that their definitions are based on how much money people have. That is no definition of political seriousness. A deposit of £1,000 could not possibly distinguish between those who are serious and those who are not. It merely distinguishes between those who can produce £1,000 and those who cannot. That is the beginning and end of the effect of an increase in the deposit. In any case, why should we seek to deter individuals or groups from putting their ideas to the voters?

Two reasons have been seriously advanced. One is that the postal facilities cost money, but the record shows that fringe candidates have not used that facility. A very large number of fringe candidates stood in the Chesterfield by-election. I am tempted to say that one of them was elected, but he had the benefit of being the Labour party candidate at the time. Virtually all the candidates outside the three main parties, including all the commercial ones, made no use of the postal facilities and that has been the tendency in all elections with large numbers of fringe candidates.

The other argument has been the ability of a candidate to prevent others from appearing on television. If that is a problem, it can be addressed in other ways by reference to rules governing the appearance of candidates on television. If it is widely felt that the ability of one candidate to prevent others from appearing is improper, that power can be removed without removing the individual's chance to stand as a candidate.

I believe that it is wrong to allow any group to say that it has been denied, on financial grounds, the right to put its views to the voters. I am pleased that the Communist party, the National Front, the Socialist Workers party and other groups can submit their views to the voters and thus reveal that they do not enjoy widespread support and that they are on the fringe of the British political system and the views of the British electorate. I want that to continue. I do not want them to be able to say that they have been denied the opportunity to put their views to the electorate. That is why I object to the increase in the deposit, which will affect all those groups and others such as the Ecology party, Mebyon Kernow, Plaid Cymru and so on.

The impact on my party is minimal. In the last general election we lost only half a dozen deposits. The Labour party lost 119, so it is bound to be concerned about any increase in the deposit. The problem for a party such as mine is rather different. It is a matter not of losing deposits but simply of putting up such a large sum for the course of the election campaign at a time when one needs the resources to mount the campaign. Across the country, that means a total of £650,000 locked up in the returning officers' coffers for the duration of the campaign. It is as though the sequestrators have been sent in to take the funds of the Government's principal opponents — that is, Liberal candidates—for the duration of the campaign.

The Home Secretary said rather grandly earlier in the debate that anyone wishing to stand in an election could easily borrow £1,000. Clearly he has no trouble with his bank manager. He looks like a man who has no trouble with his bank manager and he stands for a party which looks as though it has no trouble with its bank managers. I represent a party which occasionally has such trouble. That is understandable, as my party does not enjoy the heavy financial backing provided for the Conservative party by companies and individuals and for the Labour party by the trade union levy. That is a serious limitation which would affect the party at precisely the time when its resources were most stretched. If there are two elections in one year, as there were in 1951 and 1974, one enters the second campaign while still paying off the costs of the first. We do not intend to let that stand in our way, but it is an additional limitation and it is hard to avoid concluding that the Government wish to place such limitations on their political opponents.

I believe that the collection of signatures is a perfectly viable alternative. When these matters were discussed in 1969 that suggestion was made by the very person who has just been elected chairman of the 1922 Committee. I hope that he will stick to that line in the debate on this measure. We are not talking about a "bus stop petition" when one gets people in the town centre to sign their names, or indeed any names that come into their heads. The electoral roll number would have to be written beside the signature and that information would be checked. A certain amount of organisation is required to assemble 100 or 500 signatures of registered voters in a constituency who assent to the nomination of the candidate. Indeed, the procedure could be strengthened. It could provide that the signatory must support the nomination of the candidate. That is a significant test of organisation, whereas a deposit is merely a test of financial resources.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is no procedure to check that the signatories are the people they are supposed to be? The checking procedure merely establishes that the signatures correspond to names appearing on the electoral roll, which is not necessarily the same thing.

Mr. Beith: The same applies to the limited number of assentors currently required. Nevertheless, those names are published in the public notice setting out the names of the candidates and their supporters. If that practice were known to be followed, anyone whose name had been used without consent in support of a candidate could challenge it, so there is a means of checking. I believe that the signatures alternative is perfectly viable and I do not see why the Government should reject it.

If the Government reject the signatures alternative, they must draw back from their £1,000 proposal and look for a figure commanding wider support among the parties. It is clear that there is opposition to the £1,000 proposal not only from every Opposition party but from many Conservative Members. The Government will have to move on this aspect if they wish the Bill to have a relatively smooth passage.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to the Carlton club lecture in which the Prime Minister spoke of a minority defying the result of the vote and persisting in their own wishes. She was, of course, describing herself. That is exactly her position. She is a representative of the minority defying the wishes of the majority of the electorate who voted against her. When I heard the right hon. Member for Gorton put that point so vividly and effectively, I thought that he had seen the light and that conversion had come at last, but he did not allow me to intervene to clarify the position. He left an ambiguity which led me to suppose that, like some of his hon. Friends, he had begun to accept the absurdity of the system which allows the Prime Minister to pretend that she represents the majority when it is clear from the election results that she does nothing of the kind. She represents a minority that, if put to the test of any poll, would be shown to be getting smaller by the hour. The reason why the right hon. Lady is able to make that claim is the ultimate absurdity—the absurdity about which the Government have done nothing in this so-called Representation of the People Bill. I return to the words of Bernard Levin in *The Times*:

> "Such is the proposed Representation of the People Bill, of which it can be safely said that the matter of improving the people's representation never so much as entered the heads of the Conservative and Labour politicians who took part in the discussions that led to the Government's White Paper".

There is substance in those words. It never entered the Government's head to ensure that the votes cast under all the procedures in the Bill should bear some relation to the end result of the election.

The utmost care is taken to ensure that the votes are cast in the correct manner. The votes are cast in secrecy. We have today discussed how to ensure secrecy in postal voting as well as in the polling station. The returning officer seals up the ballot box and applies sealing wax to it. Carefully guarded, it is taken away in a police car.

[Mr. Beith]

However, from the moment the box is opened, sense and accuracy are thrown to the wind. One might just as well treat the ballot box as if it were one of those boxes of raffle tickets which are placed in front of hon. Members at constituency functions and out of which we have to draw one or two winning tickets. That would be as fair as what happened at the last general election—which was that we ensured that it took 32,800 votes to elect a Conservative candidate, 40,000 votes to elect a Labour candidate and 339,000 votes to elect a member of the alliance. We should bear in mind that each of my hon. Friends represents 339,000 people.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I represent 20,621 Liberals, and I believe that I represent them very well indeed. Will the hon. Gentleman please take those people from his numbers?

Mr. Beith: I shall leave that to the judgment of the said Liberals when they vote at the next general election. I should be very surprised if they were to transfer their allegiance to the hon. Gentleman. All hon. Members seek to give the most effective representation to all their constituents, regardless of party. The fact remains that the end result of the general election wholly distorts the wishes and intentions of the voters and, because the Government have failed to change the system, they have failed to ensure that people will be any better represented as a result of the passing of the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): We are all anxious that all shades of opinion should be represented in this important debate, including the views of the minority parties. The debate has now lasted for three hours, and only eight hon. Members have had an opportunity to address the House. I make a plea for brevity.

7.33 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): I shall not follow directly in the footsteps of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) with regard to our system of voting in national elections. My hon. Friends know where I stand on that issue and I shall not add to the burdens of my hon. Friend the Minister by dwelling on it.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) is not in his place. He resorted to a position of principle in arguing against the Bill. I never thought to hear the right hon. Gentleman advocate modification of principle as a principle to follow, but that was the basis of his attack. It is nonsense to say that the significance of place, the principles of simultaneity or of the uniformity of the make-up of the electorate in each of our constituencies are points of principle that should inhibit the Government from pressing on with the Bill. Military men, diplomats, people working away from home, people with second homes, students, the very old and the infirm all drive a coach and horses through the argument of principle on which the right hon. Gentleman relied. This evening at least, my hon. Friend should not be deterred in any way by the right hon. Gentleman's arguments.

I welcome the Bill. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have waited for it for a long time. I am delighted that the Government have now brought it forward. It is a sign of the continuing concern and commitment of the Conservative party and Government to the proper operation of our constitutional system of parliamentary democracy.

I do not share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) for the happy-time candidate or the very small party. A general election is a method of electing representatives. It is not a soap box on which anybody—however well founded his point of view or support may be—may make his noises. If a group has made sufficient headway between elections in gaining support for its cause, it will not flinch from the £1,000 deposit. That sum is affordable by any party with a reasonable base, particularly against the new threshold of 5 per cent. advocated in the Bill.

In German elections, the 5 per cent. rule has become well established. Under the German additional member system, a party gets no additional members unless it achieves over 5 per cent. of the electorate. That is a much more important threshold.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is a different matter.

Mr. Rathbone: Very different — and much more important than the 5 per cent. threshold for losing one's deposit. However, I believe that the comparison is worth making.

There is one point on which I hope my hon. Friend will be able to put my mind at rest. I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend and the Home Office should consider whether there is a basis for reducing the increase—if that is thought necessary by the House—and building in, in addition to a lower increase, some form of signature support. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, a bus queue of signatures is not envisaged. I am thinking of registered names — probably registered names of those who support the candidate — being applied to the canditature in anticipation of a general election long before that election is called. I have in mind a year-by-year list of supporters.

There is an alternative that might be considered. In Holland and Belgium, I believe, there is a national register of all parties. A fee is paid for registration, and thereafter all candidates for registered parties can stand without further cost. Perhaps we, too, could have a national register. There could be a substantial registration fee and nominal fees in the constituencies, or an insubstantial registration fee and larger fees in the constituencies. Either way, we would have some validation of all the parties with national support. That suggestion might be worth considering, if the Government have not already considered it.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome unequivocally the extension of the franchise through the granting of votes to those who take their holidays at election time and the inclusion of British citizens registered overseas. With regard to the former group, many people feel that the advance in the Bill is long delayed. Somewhat unusually, the last election was timed to take place in a holiday period. That being so, I am sure that no hon. Member failed to bump into people who were frustrated because they were going on holiday between the time when one called and shook their hand and the time of the election.

However, I question the value of the seven-year limitation. The Government seem to be adopting a somewhat picky attitude to a valuable step forward. We could look across the Channel and take a lead from our

French friends, who take a positive stance on democratic involvement. Hon Members might have studied what appertains in France. There are six ways in which a French man or woman who lives abroad can register back in France. Some are by reference to where they lived originally and some give them a completely open choice of any commune of more than 30,000 inhabitants. I believe that that encourages the French abroad to participate in what is going on in their country and to vote accordingly.

It is also worth looking across the Atlantic and noting that the United States guarantees the constitutional right to vote of those who live outside the United States, subject only to two conditions: first, proper registration within that person's state of residence; and, secondly, that the person has a valid United States passport, national identity card or other national registration card. That is a timeless and basic threshold. I doubt the relevance of the time limit. As soon as some people leave these shores, they lose interest in what happens here, so seven years is too long. Other people, however, can spend almost a lifetime abroad and still be as interested in what happens here as when they left. Their interest might be for better or for worse. As has been said, an increasing number of governmental actions in different countries touch on the citizens of those countries, wherever they live. That is especially true in the European context.

As to the postal vote, to which that matter is indubitably tied, the validation of the vote as suggested in the Bill is either too liberal or not worth it. If the signature must be validated in applying for a postal vote, should it not have the same seriousness of validation as, for example, an application for a passport which, though important, is nothing like as important as the means by which we use the democratic vote. If that is not thought necessary, we should do away with it altogether. I am not especially worried in regard to what has been said about that being an open door to the miscasting of votes.

The delay in the application of the Bill to voting in Europe is, I hope, indicative of the Government's intent to adopt for the United Kingdom a system of voting for the European elections which is the same as that which will be used in other countries. I am glad about the Government's recommitment to a search for such a system. With that expectation in mind, I warmly welcome the Bill and wish it well.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's brevity.

7.42 pm

Mr. Sean Hughes (Knowsley, South): I shall confine my remarks to the increasing of the deposit as, despite the Home Secretary's appearing to suggest that the Bill does not raise any serious difficulties, this is a serious issue. One of the aspects of modern politics that I find most disturbing is the growth of authoritarianism and the suggestion that there is no alternative theory of politics. That is dangerous and nonsense because clearly there are alternatives, irrespective of whether we like them. I therefore cannot agree that people should be prevented from testing support for their alternatives, however bizarre or eccentric they might be.

The Government must accept that people are entitled to express what the Government might regard as a minority view which is opposed to theirs. I hope that all of us, whatever our party affiliations, concede that point. That means that people who want to poke fun at us, those who want to say, "A plague on all your houses" and those who think, like De Gaulle, that politics is too serious a matter to be left to politicians should be allowed to say what they think and to test support for it. The Home Secretary and the Minister said in the White Paper debate that elections are serious affairs. Of course they are. But I believe that an electoral system is weakened when it appears to be afraid of what major parties deem fringe, frivolous or joke candidates.

The one argument that I must consider is that advanced by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who fear the peddling of obnoxious doctrines such as those propagated by the National Front. A civilised society has a right to protect its members from the offence and anguish caused by such groups, but surely the way to do that is rigorously to apply and, if necessary, strengthen such legislation as that relating to race relations.

As we developed into a democracy, there was an understanding that we should avoid giving electoral advantage to those with wealth. That is the classic reason for introducing a maximum in election expenses in constituencies, even if national parties can get round it. A large election deposit clearly breaches that principle, even though it was introduced to regulate what are termed freak candidates. However, I have never understood where the oracle that defines that classification is.

If I understood him correctly, the Home Secretary said that nobody argues that there should be no deposit if a candidate clearly has no support in a constituency. How can such support be demonstrated before polling day? It certainly cannot be demonstrated by possession of £1,000. I realise that the official administrative costs of elections have been transferred from the candidate to the State, that one free postal delivery to each elector and the free use of school meetings have been provided, but everyone knows that the use of public meetings and even the free postal delivery is as nothing compared with the use of television —and which of the many fringe candidates at the last general election were able to use television? The criteria on which the electoral rules have been formulated have broken down.

In the White Paper debate, the Under-Secretary of State emphasised at column 1087 that parliamentary candidates have the right to send an election communication post-free at a possible cost to the public of £8,000. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to that. Of course candidates have such a right, but it is no more than theoretical for many. It is like my constituents right to send their sons to Eton or dine nightly at the Ritz. Most minority candidates cannot exercise that right for the simple reason that they have not the money to do so.

The Minister also argued in the White Paper debate:

> "The reasoning that led to the introduction of the deposit in 1918 is as valid now as it was then."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1087.]

That deposit was £150. However, the Home Secretary told us that the 1918 deposit would be more than £2,300 today. If the Minister believes what he says, why has he not proposed a deposit of £2,300? If he argues that that figure is too high, why has he stopped at £1,000? Does he not realise that all but the very rich will be deterred by the sum

[Mr. Sean Hughes]

of £1,000? Does he accept what I said in the White Paper debate, that the £150 was snatched out of thin air in 1918? The premise was wrong in 1918 and it is wrong today.

The Home Secretary has said that the figure chosen is bound to be arbitrary and a matter of judgment. He promised that he and the Minister would listen carefully to views expressed in the White Paper debate and that they would reflect on those views before preparing the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to that promise of consultation. In the White Paper debate, the majority of right hon. and hon. Members, including Conservatives, Scottish Nationalists, Liberals, Labour and Plaid Cymru, opposed the increase in the deposit. No doubt the Home Secretary and the Under-Secretary listened carefully, reflected upon it and then proceeded to do what they intended to do in the first place. Yet again today the Home Secretary has assured us that he will listen to what we have to say, but he should realise that we have no reason to have confidence in his words.

The Under-Secretary of State, in his speech on the White Paper, made the astonishing comment that my contribution was a class-biased analysis. Nothing could be further from the truth. He missed the point that I referred to the original debates in 1918, hoping to demonstrate that the premise upon which the deposit was introduced was faulty. There have long been Members of this House who have spoken out against the introduction of financial barriers for those who might stand for election to this House.

If my references to the 1918 debate failed to move the Under-Secretary, perhaps he will listen to an extract from the 1858 debate on the removal of the land qualification for Members of Parliament. The parallel is quite astonishing. Mr. Walpole argued that one of the reasons for that qualification was that

"it would prevent speculative candidates coming forward and putting their opponents to unnecessary expense".

He continued by saying that he believed that on the whole

"much good would be gained by leaving elections perfectly free to those who might be willing to offer their services, and by allowing constituencies to choose such candidates as they might think best able to represent them in Parliament".

Yet in the debate last summer the Home Secretary poured scorn, as he did again today, upon what he considered to be fringe candidates. Referring to recent by-elections, he declared that most of them had no serious interest in, or the remotest chance of, being elected to Parliament, which, after all, is what an election is about.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) adhered to that point of view. I ask the Government to consider the position of my hon. Friend who represents the northern part of my borough, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk), who at the last election got 64·5 per cent. of the vote, the Conservative candidate getting 20·17 and the alliance candidate getting 14·8. Did the Conservative or alliance candidates have a serious interest in or the remotest chance of winning in Knowsley, North? I wonder how many right hon. and hon. Members first fought seats before coming to this House in which they had no realistic chance of winning. Was that exercise frivolous, a freak or a joke? Or is it only frivolous , a freak or a joke when they do not belong to the major parties?

Undoubtedly there are those who do not feel that political parties are putting forward what they believe to be the overriding issue. While taking part in a political system they might have no realistic ambition to serve in Parliament. Their aim is to change the climate of political debate, to raise an issue that they feel is neglected or to test the strength of public feeling for what they believe to be a priority. I may not like attempts to make elections one-issue affairs, but I cannot share the anti-libertarian point of view which proclaims that they have no right to do it.

I am reminded, as I bring my remarks to a close, of the public meeting addressed in the last century by John Morley. He asked his audience to vote for him the following day, only to hear somebody shout, "I'd sooner vote for the devil". Morley replied, "Quite, but if your friend declines to stand, will you consider voting for me?" It would not be for the want of £1,000 that the devil declined to stand. The problem is that there are a great number of decent people who cannot be classed as devils but who should have the right to stand. Perhaps the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary should borrow the slogan of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport: keep it low, or you might live to regret it.

I believe this House is diminished if people are prevented from seeking election to it on the ground that they cannot get together £1,000 for the deposit. I believe that society has the right to order its electoral affairs, but a civilised society can surely find a basis on which this can be done other than the vulgar test of ability to pay. During the Third Reading debate in 1858 to which I referred, Sir George Lewis felt that

"the real safeguard lay in the choice of the electors".

I believe that that argument has stood the test of 126 years.

7.54 pm

Mrs. Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Looking round the Chamber, I can see only one other person who was with me on the Select Committee that looked at this matter. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) shakes his head. We looked at this matter over more than one session and went into it in very great detail. There was a great deal of unanimity across the political floor about the report that was finally submitted to the Home Office.

I wish warmly to welcome clause 1. The view expressed from the Labour Front Bench was rather snide, and it distressed me. The view was that if people choose to live abroad they must lose their vote, but people do not always choose to live abroad. Many of them have no choice. They go to work abroad and may be employed abroad for many years. Teachers are employed abroad on exchange contracts. Other people go to live abroad for health reasons. We must not forget that if pensioners go to live abroad for health reasons they already stand to lose the uprating of their pension.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) rightly says, so many people who live abroad —one comes across many of them when one travels— passionately care about what is going on in this country. It is not true to say that they have no further interest in this country. Many of them will return to live in this country after having worked abroad throughout their working lives. They have every right to want to be involved in the election of a Government which will choose by what laws they will live. I, too, like my hon. Friend, am not very happy about the seven-year rule. If the French Government can arrange for their citizens working abroad

to have a vote, why cannot we? It is very strange that if an EC official is working abroad for this country he will not be able to vote in this country and will be unable to vote in EC elections, either, as a British citizen. He will not have a vote in the country he lives in and he will not have a vote as a British subject. That seems to me to be wrong.

Turning to clause 12, we considered for a very long time whether the deposit should be increased from £150. I felt sympathy tonight for the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) who was on the Committee and who then considered that it was right and proper that the deposit should be uprated. During the 19th century——

Mr. Corbett: Would the hon. Lady allow me to speak for a moment on behalf of my hon. Friend?

Mrs. Knight: No. The hon. Member was not on the Committee.

Mr. Corbett *rose*——

Mrs. Knight: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in deference to your remarks, I am trying to make a short speech. The hon. Gentleman was not on the Committee. This is a matter not of argument but of history.

During the 19th century, all administrative costs were shared between the candidates. The deposit was introduced in 1918. I do not believe that very much was said then about depriving people of the right to stand at an election. It was acknowledged that a deposit was fair. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) that it was not a question only of selecting people who had money. That did not come into it. The point was that it was a safeguard against candidates who added to the cost and complexity of an election, with no serious prospects of gaining sufficient votes to win.

If it was possible for people then to raise £150 to show their seriousness and if we were to ask for an equivalent amount today, we should be asking for well over £2,000. The Committee felt that this was quite wrong and that a fair and reasonable judgment of the amount would be £1,000. This would put up the deposit because, as everybody knows, £150 in 1918 was a very different matter from even £1,000 today. What makes any hon. Member think that we are less capable of raising the money to back what we believe in than our forefathers were in 1918?

There has been a steady increase in the number of persons standing for election. Many hon. Members have fought, as I have, six candidates at a time. I am proud to say that I gave them all a jolly good beating. Hon. Members may well say that they should all come, and that it is curtailing democracy not to allow them to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West will read this debate and I am sure that he must acknowledge that many small parties have a small basis of interest. All hon. Members, whether Labour, Liberal or Conservative, have to represent all their constituents and all of their interests. An hon. Member may have 40 members of, say, the Ecology party in his constituency. Let 40 letters arrive on any hon. Member's desk and he will take a great deal of notice of what is said.

During the debates in Committee I remember vividly hearing about a small builder who wanted the advertisement that standing for Parliament would give him. He would get £8,000 worth of publicity for £150. That is a good bargain. That man took advantage of the free post that he was allowed and that free post asked people, not to vote for him, because he had no intention of standing for Parliament, but to vote that he was the best builder in the business and certainly the best in the district. People were asked to come and hear about him at his meeting in the town hall. That is another thing that candidates are allowed. They can have free use of a publicly funded hall when they fight an election. Anyone who seeks to use the electoral machinery to advance his business or pursuits has got it made. It is an extraordinarily good bargain for £150. I am not so worried about the right to veto broadcast transmissions, but there is no question but that that builder boosted his work by using the methods available.

The Government are being a little over-generous in fixing the percentage of vote at one twentieth before a deposit is lost. Labour Members may not disagree. We heard some rather strange suggestions in the Select Committee. Sir Robin Day came along with a marvellous system of a sliding scale. He said that a candidate who polled less than 1 per cent. of the votes cast should forfeit his entire deposit, somebody with between 1 and 2 per cent. should forfeit a little less, and so on. We put that point to the officials and they were horrified at the number of recounts that there would have to be if money were involved with such tiny percentages. We did not think that that was a good scheme to adopt. I tremble to think of the number of recounts that would be necessary if that system were adopted.

Some people have put forward the idea of a greatly increased number of signatures—between 100 and 500 — on nomination forms instead of increasing the deposits. At the moment we need only 10 names and addresses of people on the electoral register. One should consider how easy it is to get signatures by standing outside a supermarket. Anyone will sign almost anything that is put under his nose, particularly to get rid of the person who is asking for the signature. Each of those 100 or 500 names would have to be checked by the electoral returning officer. If only one was wrong, the nomination would be invalid. If there were no increase in the deposit, more and more people would stand at each election. We could have eight, nine or 10 candidates in a constituency. In one constituency 5,000 names might have to be checked, and that would take a long time.

I am worried about some of the inaccuracies of electoral registers, particularly in the inner cities. Some places have multi-registration and there are piles of voting cards inside every hall. It is easy for personation to take place. In one ward alone some 800 names on the list had no right to be there. There was no check whatever on deaths. It is amazing that the electoral returning officer said that it was not possible to find out who had died. Surely everyone who has canvassed in an election must know how distressing it is to knock on someone's door to find out that a polling card has just been received for a husband who died six months earlier.

Sometimes a death can have occurred three or four years earlier, yet the name is still on the electoral list. That is wrong. It should be possible for arrangements to be made to remove the names of those who have died from the list, particularly since the registrar of births and deaths usually works from the same place as the electoral returning officer. It was not even the deaths column in the papers that I thought the electoral returning officer should

[Mrs. Knight]

look at, but the in memoriam column, because some people on the register had been dead for so many years, but still had the vote.

I thought, as no doubt other hon. Members do, that it was filling up form A in October that gave one the vote. Not a bit of it. We discovered that the electoral returning officer would send someone to see Mrs. Jones of 15 High Street if she did not return her form. The officer would say that she had been there for years and must have forgotten to fill in the form. If Mrs. Jones had gone to Tesco or was dead nobody would know. The electoral returning officer would put her on the list, just in case. There should be some way in which the registering of names which should not be on the register is stopped. In particular, deaths should be checked. The Committee was worried that there seemed to be more concern about leaving people off the list who might have had a right to vote than about putting people on who had no right at all. There should be a clearer use of form A so that only those entitled to vote should be able to do so. I hope that the Government will consider that point.

8.7 pm

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): I agree that there should have been a Speaker's Conference. The Scottish National party was not called to give evidence before the Select Committee on Home Affairs and the consultation that has taken place since publication of the White Paper had been derisory. Opportunities to deal with some of the matters which now distinguish the contesting of elections have been lost. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes) touched upon that.

Under the Representation of the People Acts restrictions are laid down, first, on deposits, which is touched on by the Bill, and, secondly, on candidates' expenses. As practical politicians, we all know that there has been a switch in campaigning techniques and that what matters is the amount of money disbursed on behalf of candidates collectively at central or national offices in support of an advertising or election campaign and access to the television and other media. The Bill does not attempt to deal with such vital areas.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) referred to the problem of multi-registration. She may remember, although she may care to forget, that at the time of the Scotland Act 1978 and the proposals for the 40 per cent. on the referendum, many of us brought up that very point.

Fair television coverage is probably more important to the smaller parties than to the larger parties which, naturally, have a substantial share. Those who represent parties that operate outside England — and I say that specifically — are not permitted access to the United Kingdom media during election campaigns. Yet the news and documentary programmes are transmitted in Scotland and Wales as though the reports on the election were entirely English. We obtain a share of the television and radio programmes in our home countries, but we are not given additional coverage to compensate for the lack of United Kingdom coverage. The Home Office should have included a provision to adjust the arrangements to provide a fair expression of opinion. I am highly critical of the Home Office for not doing so.

Like the Liberals, in a better year than 1983 we would not expect to be affected by substantial deposit losses. However, I accept that we suffered considerably in 1983. I had warned the Liberals about counting how many deposits they were likely to save, although we did exactly that in 1974 and had to eat our words at a later stage. A matter of principle is involved. The democratic process should be open to all.

The problem with fringe candidates has arisen largely from by-elections, especially those which have been the subject of considerable media coverage. Some candidates stand purely for notoriety.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that the real problem for all opposition parties was the accumulation of funds that must be locked in during a campaign. The Scottish National party would have to find £72,000 — money that could be better deployed during a campaign. Candidates have to put up a substantial amount of money. If someone is serious about fighting an election, that is only a small proportion of the liquid funds required for the production of leaflets, posters, and so on.

The Home Office may not think it a serious matter. Compared with other parties, the Conservative party is exceptionally well funded. It obtains money from various sources as well as its own members. It receives substantial donations from industry—something that is not available to parties such the SNP. It has been rumoured — although it is probably a huge exaggeration — that Conservative central office spent about £15 million, which is about £20,000 per candidate. There is a general limitation of £4,000 to £5,000 per candidate, dependent upon whether a candidate is a borough or county candidate and taking into account the size of the electorate in the area. Financing elections is a serious matter. Most other countries provide funds. That is now happening in the European elections. Either the House must set a restriction on the amount of money available for central expenditure or it must provide cash for the political parties to extend the democratic process. Other countries have had to make that choice, but it is avoided in the Bill.

The Bill provides for forms to be published in different languages. Specific provision is made for the Welsh language. My right hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) has drawn my attention to the fact that there is no provision for Gaelic. Those who speak Gaelic should have ballot papers in their language. If provision is made for the Welsh language, it is fair to make similar provision for the Gaelic language. We hope to table an amendment to that effect in Committee. I am raising the matter now to give the Minister time to consider it.

I find the whole process extremely disappointing. There has been insufficient consultation, the Government have been unilateral about the measure and there has been no willingness to consider the impact of the legislation on others. I suspect that the intention to extend the franchise has been calculated to ensure that the Conservative party does better from it than other political parties. Indeed, it is better organised to do that. It is reprehensible that the Government should seek to extend the franchise to those who do not pay the rates of taxation usually paid by most of us.

I hope that the House and the Government learn from the debate and that when we return to review the law

relating to elections we will do so by means of a Speaker's Conference in which all political viewpoints can be represented on an equitable basis.

8.16 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I give a general welcome to the Bill. Some parts of it are important and welcome, especially that relating to votes for holiday-makers. That is a long overdue reform that will eliminate the previous glaring injustice. As I am conscious of the need for brevity, I shall not dwell on that point.

The most contentious part of the Bill is the proposal to raise the deposit to £1,000. I am sure that we all begin from the premise that important principles of democracy are involved—being able to stand as a candidate and being able to vote for one's choice of candidate. It is vital that there is a proper framework of rules in the interests of all involved in the democratic process. At the same time, it is necessary to be aware of possible detractions to the electoral process, to the campaigns of serious candidates and to the involvement of those electors choosing between serious candidates, by the interventions of those who may not necessarily be serious candidates.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) kindly allowed me to intervene in his speech when he referred to the increased number of signatures and the checking procedures. In theory, there is much to be said for the alternative of a greater number of signatures on a nomination paper. However, I can envisage some practical difficulties. There is the difficulty of obtaining a large number of signatures—100, 300, 500 or whatever the figure. That might be a physical impossibility, especially for candidates who have only single figure support. How on earth could such candidates achieve that number of signatures, which would involve serious intent by those signing? That problem might be more insuperable than finding a given sum of money. Returning officers have to scrutinise nomination forms, and one signature might not be exactly the same as that on the electoral roll and this would invalidate the whole form. I expect considerable trouble from that.

Following a local election in Caerleon, adjoining my constituency, there was a prosecution of a student who had organised a bogus candidate and a bogus campaign, including bogus signatures on the nomination paper. That came to light only because neither the candidate nor his supporters turned up at the count. Indeed, they had not been seen during the campaign. That does not fit the criterion which, in other circumstances, was fairly described by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, of seeing the names published on the notice poll. Those names were published, but not challenged, and the problem came to light only during the count.

Much has been made of the responsibilities that devolve upon candidates. At this stage I do not think that it is necessary again to talk about free postage, the free use of public buildings and all the other facilities that were so well covered by previous speakers. However, I should like to touch on a small aspect of the matter—advertising, even commercial advertising, which has gone on and could still go on with the deposit at its present level of £150. It is a small investment to secure £8,000 of postage advantage for advertising purposes. I have seen candidatures for advertising purposes at local elections in Cardiff and we have all seen it happen in parliamentary elections. It could happen with people who want to set themselves up as candidates, whether it is the builder mentioned earlier who does not want to use another form of advertising, or other categories of person who are not allowed to use forms of advertising.

There is a considerable area of potential abuse that we cannot ignore in regard to persons who have no genuine political motivation offering themselves as candidates, who would be horrified if they were actually elected. That is to say, they would be horrified if they had an idea of how to do or wanted to see done properly the job of an elected representative. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has proposed a compromise figure that is not prohibitively expensive. On balance, it is the right figure, and we should accept it.

A part of the Bill that has not been touched on much today is clauses 14 to 16, which deal with what elections may or may not be held on the same day. I thought that I might quote several local examples to develop the arguments but, in the interests of being brief, I merely say that considerable consideration must be given in Committee to these clauses and to exactly what elections may or may not be held on the same day because of the confusion that there might be for at least part of the electorate.

Is democracy served by having a general election on the same day as any other election? I include even the elections for the European Assembly, although they are on a fixed date. If we move the date of local elections, they would all be treated in the same way. Would it matter if the elections for the European Assembly were on a different date from that used by the Europeans? It is doubtful whether there is a great community of interests affecting British voters voting for the European Assembly, nor is there any great enthusiasm for the elections. However, I give full credit to the media for this. Every news bulletin before the election in June 1984 had a lead story predicting that we would stay top of the apathy polls, and thus the media helped to achieve the actual turnout figures. Possibly it would be appropriate to go back to the previous system of direct nomination.

The polling day arrangements referred to in clauses 14 to 16 require careful consideration in Committee but, in general, I look forward to the completion of proceedings on the Bill and its becoming law.

8.24 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I am sure that many right hon. and hon. Members are pleased that the Committee stage of the Bill will be taken on the Floor of the House so that we can develop the arguments about the clauses. Thus, we shall not waste time talking about detail on Second Reading.

As the Committee stage will be taken on the Floor of the House, there will be an opportunity for all parties to be represented, so minority parties will be able to give their points of view on the clauses. I should like to stress that, because hon. Members can see that the Benches alongside me are void of members of the alliance. Worse still, the debate has been going on for just two minutes short of four hours, and not one Member representing the Social Democratic party has spoken. When they are in the Chamber, we shall have to remind members of that new party of new-found principles on elections to be here for the Committee stage.

I should like to thank the Government for getting rid of the anomaly whereby people on holiday cannot vote at

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

elections. Many people in my constituency and in the Labour party will welcome a change that widens the franchise. There was also a silly anomaly about postal voting in parish elections. It was difficult to explain the situation to people when one visited them in their homes to discuss the election.

There is also a clause relating to people living, as opposed to working, abroad being able to vote in a general election, although they have been abroad for six years. I have grave doubts about the intentions of the clause. I am sure that many hon. Members will want to debate it further in Committee. The Home Secretary said that people who go abroad might want to retain the link between themselves and their constituencies. However, a sizeable majority of those who live abroad might like to retain the link between dodging taxes and political parties that allow them to dodge taxes. I understand that people who are working abroad on things such as foreign aid projects, or even for the British Council, in different parts of the world might benefit by the clause, but many who do not want to pay rates or income tax in this country will also benefit. Some people do not live in this country and are not affected by Government fiscal policies.

I should like to refer to the raising of the deposit from £150 to £1,000. When I was a candidate I had to borrow £150 because my political party did not have it, due to boundary changes, and I did not have it because I was a working miner. There is a great danger that the raising of the deposit to £1,000 will benefit only those who are better off than others. That is not my only objection to the raising of the deposit. Many people who are deemed to be joke, freak or crank candidates will be prevented from standing for Parliament. At a general election, that is not a major problem anyway. It is not true that the raising of the deposit will get rid of such people.

At the general election, a candidate in Finchley, which is the Prime Minister's constituency, stood for law and order. He got 37 votes, which was 0·1 per cent. of the total vote. Someone standing against the Prime Minister on the question of law and order has every right to do so and to be taken seriously. At the 1979 general election, when the right hon. Lady was Leader of the Opposition, and at the 1983 general election, when she was Prime Minister, she promised that there would be a reduction in crime, but now we see that crime on our streets is increasing daily. Thus, people have every right at elections to stand on such issues.

The increase to £1,000 would also prejudice those who wish to stand in by-elections. In the recent by-election in Stafford a Mr. C. Teasdale stood as the candidate "soon to be unemployed". He recorded only 210 votes, but I suspect that many more than 210 people have been made unemployed in Stafford since the by-election. A candidate who wished to stand under the banner "soon to be unemployed" should be allowed to do so. In the Chesterfield by-election, a Mr. D. Cahill stood as the candidate for reclassifying some newspapers as comics. That was a worthy platform. Had I not been a member of the Labour party, I should have been sorely tempted to stand on such a platform. At the same by-election a Mr. J. Davey stood for no dental charge increases. If one considers the increase in NHS prescription charges and dental charges since 1979, that person could not be described as a crank.

We should give such people the right to stand for election. Democracy is not just a matter of voting—it is about the right to stand up and be heard. It is about the right to stand for election if one believes strongly in an issue. The increase from £150 to £1,000 will deny democratic rights to many people. If Bill Boakes and Screaming Lord Sutch wish to stand for Parliament, they have every right to do so. Having sat in the House for the past 18 months looking at Conservative Members, I can only say that it is a great pity that some of those other candidates did not win.

8.31 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): On 9 June last year the votes of 77·5 per cent. of the registered electors in the parliamentary constituency of Corby were counted. In some constituencies the turnover was higher, but Corby was in the top bracket of turnouts during that election. However, although relatively high, the turnout was not high. We must ask ourselves why the turnout in a British election is lower than that in elections in most other countries.

There are three artificial barriers to voting in this country, which the Bill should try to correct. There has been wide agreement during the debate that the Bill will provide a major improvement in the law by allowing those on holiday to vote. There is no doubt that in almost every constituency the turnout would increase by at least 2 or 3 per cent. if those people were allowed to vote.

The second barrier is the fact that the register is endemically inaccurate. I regret the fact that too little provision is made in the Bill to improve the position. The criticisms made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) and other hon. Members are extremely important. It is wrong in principle that we cannot correct the register during its lifetime.

The third major reason for our low turnouts is related to the remarks of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). He referred to the desirability of simultaneity—the fact that votes should be cast on the same day between the same hours, not over a prolonged period. The way to meet his objections is to enable the register to be updated constantly. We live in a country where the population is so mobile that within a short time of the creation of the register in September it becomes inaccurate. By June last year, when the register was nine months old, thousands of people had moved to other constituencies. Many of them had moved considerable distances, and it became extremely inconvenient for them to cast their votes in the constituencies where they were registered.

There are two ways of dealing with that. One is to allow more voting by post, and in so far as the Bill allows that to happen, I do not criticise it. However, a better way, which I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to examine even more closely than he has already studied the problem, would be to institute a rolling register that could be brought up to date constantly. If that were introduced, people would not have the inconvenience of having to travel hundreds of miles because they have failed to register in time for a postal vote. If a rolling register could be organised—I see no reason in principle why it should not, and would be sceptical of those who produce technical objections to it—it would solve the problems mentioned by the right hon. Member for South Down.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister to consider carefully all that has been said about the deposit by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall not support any suggestion that it be raised to £1,000. I regret the fact that an artificial hare has been introduced into the debate by way of the suggestion about collecting signatures, as though those who object to a £1,000 deposit were under any obligation to produce an alternative means. The mischief caused by superfluous candidates is too minor for the action that is prognosticated in the Bill, and I shall be unable to support it in due course.

I hope that my hon. Friend will consider more closely what the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said about multiple registrations. It must be wrong in principle to allow people to register in more than one place. If my hon. Friend says, as I am sure he will, that they pay rates in both places, my short answer would be to let a person pay rates in only one place. Although such objections may be superficially attractive, they do not undermine the fundamental principle, which is that the ballot should be cast once only. The best way to ensure that is to allow people to register in only one place.

I welcome the fact that the franchise will be extended to those who reside abroad. I hope that in due course my right hon. and learned Friend will reconsider the seven-year restriction, which is entirely artificial. We need a declaration that the franchise is open to all British subjects, wherever they are——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Indefinitely?

Mr. Powell: Yes. I look forward to debating the Bill more fully in Committee. It is a good Bill, but it could have gone much further, and I hope that we can amend it and make it better.

8.39 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): What we have heard in the past four and half hours or so is evidence enough that this subject should have been considered by a Speaker's Conference and not dealt with by a Select Committee. This is the first experiment of a Select Committee dealing with such a serious and fundamental subject for Parliament and I am afraid that it is not a success. My party tried to give oral evidence to that Committee, but was unable to do so, and I am glad that even at this late stage I am able to put our case. I hope that the Government will seriously consider the various representations that have been made from their own side as well as from Opposition Benches expressing misgivings about various aspects of the Bill.

Even at this stage, will not the Government consider whether they really wish to go ahead with the Bill when instead we should be having a major look, through a Speaker's Conference, at the whole problem of our electoral procedure? Since the war, there have been massive changes in technology, which should be taken into account by a Speaker's Conference. Other changes have brought in the mass media as they are now. There are the activities of the opinion polls, which can have a great effect. All these changes should be seriously considered, and that is a job for a Speaker's Conference, and not for a Select Committee.

Much attention has been focused on the £1,000 deposit. I have an interest to declare in this, because my party loses far too many deposits. Although the threshold at which the deposits will be kept is to come down to 5 per cent. of the vote—I am glad that the Government did not accept the Select Committee's recommendation of 7·5 per cent.—the £1,000 deposit will be a barrier to my Plaid Cymru fighting all the seats in Wales. There should not be a financial barrier such as this. It is a sort of means test and means tests should not have a part to play in our process of democracy.

Conservative Members have said that candidates add to the cost of election, but so will overseas registration. I cannot see the justification for the £1,000 deposit. The other argument that was put was that since £150 was accepted in 1918, it should be more by now, but that presupposes that £150 was right in 1918. After all, 1918 was a very different time to that in which we live now. We should not be taking the principle accepted then as necessarily being applicable now.

Some hon. Members have referred to the possibility of having a list of supporters, rather than assenters for nomination. If we moved to having, say, 100 people who were willing to designate themselves as supporters, that could be considered as the use of their vote in the election. That would sort things out niftily. It would make sure that those who were assenting really, were willing for that candidate to stand. It would also make sure that those who were standing had to look for people who positively wanted them to stand.

However, why should not people stand in an election, even if it is on only one issue? If they feel that strongly about an issue, they have the right to put their point of view to the electorate. If, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) said, there have been instances when Joe Knight, plumber, has advertised his business in electoral literature, there must be other ways to control such practices. Already, the Post Office is most careful about what it is willing to send through the free post.

In any case, the fringe candidates are not the candidates who make massive use of the free post. Often, they do not have the money to print the leaflets or the hands to put the leaflets into envelopes and write the envelopes. It will be difficult for Plaid Cymru with the £1,000 deposit, but other smaller parties, such as the Ecology party, will be even harder hit. The Ecology party has a valid point of view to put forward. At the moment, it may be a minority party but its appeal may grow.

When my party first fought an election in my constituency, we had only 600 votes. That was a deposit well lost but we now have over 52 per cent. of the votes. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas), we lost our deposit in 1966, and won the seat in 1974. Parties can grow from small bases and we should not be in the business of taking a steamroller to crack small nuts in case they grow up into big oak trees that may threaten the Government. I hope that the Minister will think about this. These may be small nuts, but none the less they have a role to play in our elections.

I appeal to the Government to reconsider the £1,000 deposit. It may be that, when they consider what has been said tonight, they will feel that it is appropriate not to press on with the increase to £1,000. I hope that they will decide, even if they do not keep the deposit at £150, to raise it to a somewhat lower level than £1,000 as this will allow more candidates to stand.

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

In another debate, I have already described the iniquities that can arise from the abuse of the postal vote system. I welcome postal votes being available to those who, through no fault of their own, are away when an election is called, particularly as we have no set dates for elections and people cannot be expected to read the tea leaves. Nevertheless, there are shortcomings and possible abuses. I see nothing in the Bill that tries to solve those shortcomings.

One of the shortcomings which has already been spoken about is second homes. I support the comments made by the hon. Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Edgbaston. We need much more accurate registers, because that is the basis of the election. One of the inaccuracies that we should get rid of is the second home vote, which in some constituencies, such as Anglesey, has caused considerable contention. Some have suggested that it may even have affected the result. I do not think that it has done so but it is still a possibility, and we should be doing away with it now. If there is to be a postal vote, it could be used to enable the elector to vote in the constituency in which he is registered.

I share the grave misgivings about extending the vote to overseas residents, that have been expressed by many hon. Members. However, if we are to extend the vote to such people, the right to vote should not last for seven years but for a shorter time. As this is representation without taxation, should not such overseas residents pay a fee, as we are concerned about the cost of elections? They could pay a substantial fee of £1,000 as a contribution to the costs, as many of them could afford to pay such sums.

The amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and myself refers to election expenses. Since the war, there has been a massive change in the impact of centralised propaganda, through radio and television, as opposed to constituency propaganda. We limit the amount of expenditure in a constituency to £4,000 or £5,000, but we allow what is the equivalent of £20,000 a constituency on central expenditure, as the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) said earlier. Surely this is making a mockery of the system of controlled expenditure. We should be looking at this problem, but we are not.

I move on to Welsh forms. The provisions in clause 21 will take out section 199 of the principal Act. Will the Minister assure me that all the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1967 which will apply to this Act will reinstate all these provisions?

There are other points that I hope will be made in Commitee. There is the question of opinion polls during elections and of the results being announced in a way that influences the outcome. There is also the question of how spoilt papers are dealt with. The Government's response to the Select Committee on that, on page 24, is quite inadequate. I am sure that there are ways of overcoming that problem. There are also issues concerning the rights of parties to check voters as they go in to the polling station. The usage of such rights varies considerably from area to area, and there should be some guidelines for that. There is also the problem of access to booths for disabled people who want to vote themselves, but who cannot get up or down stairs.

We should examine many such issues, but they are rightly matters for Committee. The main principles under consideration concern the right of people to stand for election. The House should ensure tonight that we do not in any way fetter it.

8.49 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I welcome the Bill, because it will give many more people the right to vote. Indeed, that is one of the most encouraging aspects of the Bill, as the right to vote is one of our last democratic rights.

I welcome the extension of the franchise, particularly to those living abroad. It is right, however, that they should not have the vote after seven years. Indeed, I had hoped that the period might be shorter than seven years. But seven years should be the maximum.

However, it is unfair that those working abroad are at present unable to vote, particularly if they have a home in Britain. If they pay their rates, why on earth should they not have the right to vote?

Incidentally, the Eurocrats should have had the vote before—they will now obviously have it—as they are working abroad.

I am unhappy that Irish citizens should still have the vote here when we are still waiting to have the vote in Ireland. However, I know that we shall obtain it. There must be some sort of fair system between the countries.

It will now be easier for absentee voters to vote, but of course people should not be able to vote on demand. I very much agree with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) that there should be no automatic right. The person involved must justify the need for his vote, and it will obviously involve his employment. I am particularly concerned about the meaning of "indefinite period". I think that there should be an annual renewal. Obviously service men should not have to apply each year and should get the vote as of right. But for others there should be this annual review.

The basic criterion is that anyone eligible for a postal vote must, under clause 7(3)*(a)*,

"prove that he cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person at the polling station allotted . . . to him".

Therefore, it is of great concern to me that the special list kept by the electoral registration officer should be up to date and properly checked. The address must be checked, and I believe that after a certain time that person's right to vote should be automatically extinguished.

In June 1983, a few weeks after I was elected to the House, I tabled an early-day motion calling for the right to vote to be extended to all holidaymakers. In conjunction with the *Leicester Mercury*, a major campaign was launched. We must not now lose that franchise. That is why the Bill is welcome. Up to 2 million people will benefit from extending the vote to holidaymakers, and that could affect many seats. In June 1981, there were 1,337,000 United Kingdom holidaymakers and they may now be entitled to the vote. If the election had been held in October 1981, the figure would have been 513,000 United Kingdom holidaymakers. Therefore, those people will now need to apply well in time, giving the address to which the ballot paper is to be sent.

Indeed, I was reassured to discover that those going abroad will have to pay for the expense of sending their completed ballot papers back to the United Kingdom. As we all know, the application must be furnished 11 days

before the poll. As my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) said, under the Bill it would seem rather easy to obtain that vote. I am concerned about that, and I should like to see counter-signatures introduced as quickly as possible, so that there cannot be any electoral abuse. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will make it clear that the fine for abusing the system is £2,000, and I hope that the word will be spread, so that people realise that they cannot take advantage of the system.

Some people have spoken about multiple registration, and the risk of taking advantage of that system. When I was at university in London, I had two votes. I had a vote in the constituency of St. Marylebone and a vote in Dorking, where my parents lived. I was on the electoral rolls for both constituencies becaused I lived in the student hall of residence in one constituency and at my parents' home in the other. It is not particularly easy to vote twice —not that I would wish or try to. Nevertheiess, it is a sad fact that at present there is no such thing as a secret ballot. If the electoral registration officer so wishes, he can look at the form and see a number that relates directly to my name on the electoral roll. Although I want to see genuine ballot papers, it is unfortunate that the ballot is not truly secret. But perhaps we can develop that futher in Committee.

Many people are offered proxy votes. As before, the proxy vote will be available, but those using it cannot be told how to vote. They know only that they may vote on behalf of the person away.

I am glad to say that in Leicester, East the machines marking the ballot papers were found to be faulty and were taken away in time. However, in Leicester, South the machines were not taken away and many votes had to be declared invalid.

Several hon. Members have mentioned polling hours, including, in particular, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I was not convinced by his argument that the booths should stay open for that extra hour. I should be interested to know how many people vote before 8 am. I imagine that many vote then, but the elderly, in particular, do not enjoy going out to vote between 9 pm and 10 pm on a dark October night.

It is a matter of great regret that the Bill does not deal with personation. In Leicester, East I have evidence that personation occurred. I am afraid that there was a motto among some of the ethnic community, "Vote early, vote often." That worries me. However, personation can be avoided by ensuring that polling stations are properly policed. In Leicester, I hope that the police will be on duty throughout the day at each polling station and will not just move around on a rota. Thus, I regret that there is no provision about personation.

At the general election, in Leicester, East the turnout in some areas was as high as 80 per cent., and it was more than 65 per cent. in the city council elections in May 1983. I believe, therefore, that we need identification cards and other similar provisions to ensure that the right people vote and can prove who they are. I very much hope that polling cards will be properly checked and not collected, as they are in certain multi-occupied flats, and then used as some form of identification.

I also regret that the franchise is not extended to business voters. I believe that in 1959, or later, those who paid substantial rates had the right to vote, and I should like to see that right extended again today.

I accept that we do not want frivolous candidates, but some candidates are good independents with a true message. We should increase the number of assenters supporting such candidates so that they can prove their worth. The figure could be as high as 250 to 500. If so many people were assenters, a true message would come through. This is not a survival or self-interest plea on my behalf. The Indian Workers Association candidate in Leicester, East, Mr. Ratilal Ganatra, obtained 970 votes and my majority was 933. He received more than 500 votes. His 500 assenters would have supported him; otherwise they would not have signed the form. I cannot accept that people sign anything just because it is put in front of them.

I warn the House that even if the deposit were £1,000, it would not deter certain public relations companies from putting forward a candidate. I shall not name anyone, but we might remember the Warrington by-election and a drink called vodka. Such a candidate could still stand.

I recommend that the electoral deposit be about £250 and that no more than 500 assenters be required. We should do away with the other criteria. If we establish a fairer franchise, more people will take part, we shall have a fairer system and the democratic process will be respected.

9 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made an exceptionally serious point when he laid down three criteria. The first was the right of any citizen over voting age to stand for election. It is offensive for this House, individually or collectively, to say that in certain circumstances we shall so arrange matters that some citizens of these islands will be prevented from standing for election to Parliament. The whole idea of parliamentary elections is that that judgment belongs to the electors individually and to the electorate collectively. Without that freedom our parliamentary democracy is diminished. If we restrict the right to stand as the Bill proposes, we risk more people saying, "In that event I shall not bother to vote."

One of the gravest criticisms of the United States of America is that, although 90 million people voted in the recent presidential election, about 83 million people did not because they were not registered. About half of the citizens of the United States who were otherwise eligible to vote could not be bothered, for all sorts of reasons, to have their names put on the electoral register.

I take exception to being lectured by the Association of Chief Police Officers of England and Wales and Northern Ireland about who can and who cannot be candidates. Recently the association poked its nose into political affairs. In written evidence on 18 February 1980 to the Home Affairs Committee on the law relating to public order which sat in the 1979-80 Session the association had the effrontery to say:

> "The Association has no doubt that there is need to consider a more realistic level of deposit for Parliamentary Elections which would have the effect of considerably reducing the field of candidates, many of whom would appear to be contesting seats unjustifiably."

That has nothing to do with any police officer in this land either before a Select Committee or anywhere else. The police officers can demonstrate their feelings when they go into the polling station and use their vote. We do not need to hear from them about what we should do.

[Mr. Robin Corbett]

The deposit of £1,000 is far too high. Whatever the Government say, it is a test of whether a person can raise the cash. Some people will find it easier than others to get their fists around £1,000. That is no way to decide who can stand for Parliament and who cannot.

A better proposition, to which reference has already been made, is to beef up the number of assenters required. The report of the Home Affairs Committee, in paragraph 75, got it wrong and to some extent misled the Government. It said:

"An elector might quite casually agree to give his signature in these circumstances not because he intended to vote for the candidate but merely in the belief that he ought to be allowed to stand."

That is no proper judgment for that Select Committee to make. How dare anybody even suggest that electors are so casual and careless that they will sign anything merely to get people off the doorstep. Electors are not that casual about parliamentary elections.

There is no argument about holidaymakers having votes, but there is a difference between those who have demonstrated that they have gone abroad to live and those who have shown that they have gone abroad to work. Nationals of many other countries who go abroad on holiday receive their ballot papers and are able properly to place them in ballot boxes in embassies or high commissions in various countries. Why cannot we use that system? Most British holidaymakers go to Spain, which is not a million miles away. Individuals who are sufficiently concerned to seek a vote when on holiday would be prepared to avail themselves of the opportunity to vote at embassies or high commissions. I hope that the Government will take that on board.

9.5 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said, the Bill is fundamental. It snaps at the very heels of our democracy. It challenges the essential freedom of the individual. Even the Home Secretary dismissed the possibility that Members might be capable of free thinking. Such is his respect, or lack of it, for the freedoms which we hold precious. He described the differences between my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) and the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), as fundamental. My hon. Friend and right hon. Friend merely demonstrated the free-thinking abilities of hon. Members, especially those who have the honour to serve on Select Committees.

I express my support for the arrangements which are being made for holidaymakers. However, I must express opposition to the principle that those who reside abroad should have the right to vote for seven years. It seems that many of those who are leaving our shores in present conditions are doing so with the intention of staying away. They sometimes talk about leaving a sinking ship as if they are trying to avoid facing the problems that confront us all in our modern society in modern Britain. If they feel that they can opt out, surely we have the right to remove from them the right to vote. I hope that there will be some new thinking on this matter when the Bill is considered in Committee.

The arrangements that are proposed for deposits are an attack on our democracy. Individuals who represent minority parties and minority lobbies will lose the right to stand as candidates. The Bill will prevent many Ecology party candidates from standing throughout the United Kingdom. There may not be much sympathy on the Government Benches for the Ecology party, but that party, which represents the Green movement in British politics, is a growing one. Although it may put a candidate against a Labour candidate, the very presence of Ecology Green candidates in constituencies throughout the United Kingdom has an influence on thinking generally on the libertarian left of British politics.

The Ecology party candidates influence the way in which we develop political strategies at party conferences. The greater the vote that the Ecology party attracts and the greater the vote that Green candidates attract, the more likely it is that they will have an effect on the politics of institutional parties. That is all being put at risk.

The Green movement in Germany—admittedly, it used a form of proportional representation—was able to attract to itself a substantial part of the vote. In doing so it had a direct influence on the development of social democratic environment policies in Germany. That is a healthy development. I might not go as far as supporting proportional representation, but we should ensure that wherever possible minority parties have the opportunity to stand, if only to influence our deliberations.

I believe that the 500 signatures principle is acceptable. If the Home Secretary is confused about the bureaucratic problems that might arise in town halls because of the need to check names, why not charge £20 or £30 for the privilege of having one's nomination form checked? There is a great deal of difference between £30 lost and £1,000 lent which one cannot afford to borrow. Charging for checking would be a far more acceptable principle.

The Bill proposes that the time of closing polls should be moved from 10 pm to 9 pm. The Home Secretary said that that was a necessary move, although he dismissed the value of the 1,300,000 people who might be affected by that decision. The right hon. and learned Gentleman does not recognise the fact that many people in the industrial north and other industrial areas vote before they go on shift at 10 pm. They will have to rearrange their day to enable them to vote earlier. That may well disturb their sleeping patterns. An unnecessary pressure is being exerted on them.

9.10 pm

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which extends the right to vote to people who have chosen to live abroad and have no more than a tenuous connection with a United Kingdom constituency, while limiting the opportunity to vote of people permanently resident in the United Kingdom."

As every hon. Member who has participated in this debate has said, this is an important and constitutional Bill. Its centrality to our democratic process has been clearly evidenced by the wide range of issues raised in the debate and by many of the speeches which had a philosophical bent and clearly addressed themselves to important matters of principle. It is therefore essential, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, that the Bill and its provisions should have the widest agreement.

The Government would like it to be thought that that is the case, and they have attempted to present themselves

in the guise of guarantor of civil liberties, the protector of the electoral system and the advocate of democratic rights and representative government. According to the Home Secretary's speech, the Government want to be seen to be impartial, disinterested and, in effect, honest brokers. That is not the case, and the Home Secretary seemed to be aware that he was flying under false colours. That is probably the explanation for his shallow and shabby speech in support of Second Reading. The right hon. and learned Gentleman smiles rather cynically and benignly, but to give no more than a simple recitation of the explanation of the clauses of this important Bill was a shabby performance. Such a performance has probably never been given in this House by any other Home Secretary of any party.

The Government are not impartial, disinterested and honest brokers. The Tory Government have failed adequately to consult all the other parties represented in the House. Important matters in this Bill should have the widest possible measure of agreement and should be the product of all-party consensus. Instead, at the behest of the Tory party the provisions are foisted on the House, the political parties and the country. That will mean, as I am sure the Home Secretary has already realised, a long, difficult and hotly contested discussion in Committee. The fact that that stage will be taken on the Floor of the House will make for even longer, more contentious and more difficult proceedings. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State will give the guarantee sought by all Opposition parties that such a constitutional measure will not be guillotined.

It is not surprising that the Tory party should have taken this attitute, because we are talking about an anti-democratic Government. That has been clearly demonstrated by the Government's policies and actions during the last 18 months, and the previous five years. We cannot accept the Government's protestations of sincerity and impartiality when they have been responsible for the greatest assault on democratic principles and practices and the greatest erosion of our civil liberties for decades. That is certainly true of the Government's attacks on local authorities and trade unions and the increasing powers they have given to the police.

The Government's anti-democratic institutions and sentiments are clearly illustrated by their proposal to increase the deposit at parliamentary elections sevenfold to £1,000. Why is it necessary? Why do it? We had the arguments adduced in June and today by the Home Secretary. First, he said that many candidates do not belong to any of the major political parties. So what? It is not yet a crime not to belong to a political party. Political parties do not have—although some of us may wish to believe that they do—a monopoly of political wisdom and they should not have the monopoly of access to the political system.

The Home Secretary then announced that many of the so-called fringe candidates are not, in any event, serious. That is for the electorate to judge, not for the Home Secretary. It is not for him to determine the seriousness or otherwise of individual candidates. Many of those candidates who are clearly fringe candidates and who do not gain many votes are, nevertheless, extremely serious in their motivation, their objectives and the message that they are putting before the electorate. Moreover, many of the most serious, dedicated and determined parliamentary candidates representing the so-called fringe parties are accidentally poor. That is true of those who in previous years stood in favour of votes for women, and as independents for the abolition of capital punishment, and of those who stood in recent general elections for the Welsh and Scottish Nationalist parties and the Ecology party.

The Welsh Nationalist party lost 24 deposits at the last general election, which cost it £4,800. Under the Government's proposals, it would have still lost all 24 deposits even with the lower 5 per cent. threshold but that would have cost it £24,000. The Ecology party fared even worse. All its 63 candidates lost their deposits. It cost the party £9,450 at the last general election. Not one of those candidates attained the 5 per cent. threshold that will be necessary to retain the £1,000 deposit. If these proposals were in effect, they would cost it £63,000.

The proposals will be a major inhibiting factor for independents and small parties. There is no evidence that the frivolous candidates are poor and the serious candidates are rich. Many of the richest candidates are the most frivolous and the most offensive. They will not be deterred by the proposal of a £1,000 deposit.

The Home Secretary then came forward with the argument that, in any event, the fringe candidates have no chance of being elected. That may well be the case, but how does he know? Is that, in itself, a good reason for deterring them from standing? That is what he said today and in June.

It is no good reason to deter candidates from standing, because, irrespective of their other merits, they have no chance of being elected. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton and other hon. Members have said, if that were to be the criterion it would apply to many Tory candidates in many constituencies, not least mine and those of Liverpool, Riverside, Bootle, Islwyn and Glasgow, Central.

The Home Secretary then resorted to a patronising and offensive argument that fringe candidates confuse and distract the electorate. That is patronising and offensive not just to the fringe candidates but to the electorate whom the Home Secretary underestimates. Conservative Members tend to cite Chesterfield with its record 17 fringe candidates as an example of where such a proliferation of candidates distracts and confuses the electorate. All those 17 candidates lost their deposits. None of them sufficiently distracted or confused the electorate to stop my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) being elected as everyone expected that he would be.

Conservative Members resort to the argument that some candidates stand only for commercial reasons. I accept that there is some substance in that argument. There is abuse. Some candidates wish to stand for the free publicity that arises from being a parliamentary candidate, and for the commercial benefits that might accrue to their businesses and enterprises as a result.

If that is so, a higher deposit would be no bar. Such people would be prepared to pay £1,000 for that commercial advantage. If that is such an abuse, there are other ways to deal with it rather than imposing a deposit which will inhibit and prohibit serious, worthwhile, committed and dedicated candidates.

Many candidates and their parties are deeply offensive and some of my hon. Friends may be sympathetic to the notion of an increased deposit for that reason. There are candidates with policies that none of us could support or abide, but it is for the electorate to humiliate and dismiss

[Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk]

them and to show that such candidates, be they from the Communist party or the National Front, have no semblance of support in this country. It is extremely important that people representing such offensive views nevertheless have access to our democratic political system, that it is not blocked off for them and that they do not feel that there is no outlet even for racist and minority views in our political system.

In any event, money should never be the key to access to our political system. The Conservatives constantly attempt to make money the key to everything. They are already doing it for access to education and they are trying to do it for access to the health system, but money must not become the key to access to our democratic system.

The same disregard for democratic principles is evident in the Government's treatment of Northern Ireland electors. The Bill provides that residents of Northern Ireland cannot have an absent vote sent to an address abroad or for a specific parliamentary election under the same terms and conditions as citizens in other parts of the United Kingdom. More important, it provides that in future residents of Northern Ireland cannot have a postal vote if they move from one constituency to another. Those provisions are wrong in principle. We cannot and should not make distinctions between British citizens within the United Kingdom. As the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) said, as Members of Parliament we are all equal and we should be elected by the same means, under the same rules and with the same opportunities for citizens to vote for or against us.

If there is a problem of abuse, it must be dealt with, but to restrict democratic rights because there is abuse is to concede victory to those seeking to undermine the democratic process because, in effect, it allows them to set the terms of our electoral system and to determine the laws by which our elections are conducted. That cannot be tolerated and it is inexcusable for the Government to suggest that it can. It is an anomaly and a gross injustice in the Bill that we shall attempt to put right. Members of the citizenry in Northern Ireland are already second-class citizens in many respects, certainly in many aspects of the criminal justice system. We cannot accept that they should also be second-class citizens in terms of their democratic rights and their ability to cast votes in parliamentary elections within the domain of the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Member for South Down made an appeal to the House on behalf of his constituents. That appeal has certainly been heard by Labour Members and we shall respond to it. I hope that Conservative Back Benchers will also regard it as their right and duty when considering the Bill in the House and in Committee to give every citizen in the United Kingdom the same rights, duties and opportunities as the Bill provides for those in Great Britain.

It would seem that the Government are extending our democracy at least through the proposals to enable expatriate or overseas electors to vote in parliamentary or European Assembly elections. However, that is not so. First, the Government, as one would expect, have had regard to their narrow party advantage in enfranchising about 600,000 Britons living abroad. No doubt that is why the Government have gone beyond the Select Committee's recommendation to restrict the extension of the franchise to British citizens living and working within the EEC.

Secondly, it is no advantage to our party system to allow to participate in it those who have no commitment to it and no future in it. We accept that there are many people working temporarily abroad who intend to return and who still feel an emotional, political, social and physical commitment to this country and have a future here. However, the vast majority of those who are enfranchised by the Bill and who will take advantage of the opportunity to cast a vote are emigrants, tax exiles and indeed, criminals.

There is no reason why those who have emigrated from this country, those who have washed their hands of it and want nothing more to do with its social, political or economic institutions, should be given the right to participate in our elections. There is no good reason why those who are evading their dues and responsibilities in terms of the taxes that they are expected and obliged to pay should have any right to participate in our democratic parliamentary processes. There is certainly no reason at all why we should go out of our way to extend the opportunity and the right to vote to those who are living on what my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton, described as the Costa del Crime and who are sought for criminal offences committed here.

Moreover, it cannot be to the advantage of our representative parliamentary democracy, which is based upon single-Member constituencies, simply that more people should be able to vote before the campaign has ended. It cannot be to the advantage of our representative parliamentary democracy that more people will vote who have little or no contact with Britain, its politics or its political parties. It cannot be to our advantage that there should be more people entitled to vote who have no knowledge of the candidate and no wish — still less opportunity — to see, hear and argue with those candidates.

Certainly, it would be of no advantage to our democracy to allow tax exiles or criminals to determine the outcome of elections in particular constituencies or indeed —as has been said, it could have happened in 1964— the outcome of a general election. There is no justification for enabling people with no future in this country and no commitment to it to influence either specific results or the outcome of general elections.

Some semblance of an improvement in our democratic principles and practice would seem to be effectd by means of the proposals in the Bill which make changes in relation to the absent vote, and in particular, to those who are on holiday. All parties accept that it is manifestly unjust that people who through no fault of their own are on holiday when an election is held should not be able to vote. As candidates, we have all met people who had booked their holidays well in advance of the election or who had no choice in the matter of when they took their holiday. Thousands of people are involved, especially now that the taboo on holding elections in the late spring or early summer seems to have been broken. We all know constituents who have expressed shock, who are bitter and rightly angry, especially when it is not their fault and cannot be avoided because we, unlike other countries, do not have fixed dates for elections.

The anomaly and injustice is now being put right. That is to be welcomed but it is only a small move. It is the only real extension of substance of our democracy in the Bill. Its relative triviality must be set against the background of the Government's attack on civil liberties and democratic

principles in other respects. When we are asked to debate the matter, approve the Government's proposals and welcome the Bill, we must not forget, nor should we allow our constituents to forget, that this is the same Government who have interfered in local democracy by imposing rate capping on elected local authorities. We must insist that this is the same Government who are attempting to eliminate democratically elected Labour-controlled councils and, in London, to substitute an elected Labour council with Tory placemen. We must set this trivial gain against the Government's attack on an individual's right to belong to trade unions at GCHQ. *[Interruption]* Hon. Members who are now dissenting were not present to hear the Home Secretary present himself as the great saviour of democratic principles and civil liberties. If he intends to pretend to the House and the country that he is extending our democracy and safeguarding our liberties, it is right to draw attention to the fact that he is also a Member of the Government who have trampled on more democratic rights and taken away more civil liberties than any other party or any other Government in the past decade or more.

It behoves us to draw attention to the Government's offensive against trade unions and internal trade union democracy. It behoves us to draw attention to the fact that the Government are trying to weaken the link between the Labour party and its trade union sponsors and supporters. We must set the small democratic gains in the Bill by the side of the erosion of civil liberties and of individual privacy to be found in some parts of the Data Protection Act 1984 and, more importantly, as a result of the increase in police powers to stop, search, arrest and detain law-abiding citizens under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

We must place these small democratic gains in the Bill by the side of the new powers that are given, by omission, to the police in the current coal mining dispute, during which the Government have stood by calmly and silently while a national police force with paramilitary powers has, de facto, been created. These are powerful reasons for not being prepared to take the Tories on trust. They are powerful reasons for suspecting their pretence to be the protectors of democracy. They are powerful reasons for our cynicism at their impartiality when wanting to change electoral law. They are powerful and overwhelming reasons why my right hon. and hon. Friends should vote against the Bill reciving a Second Reading.

9.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): After several minutes of generalised all-purpose rant from the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk), I hope that I shall be forgiven for returning to the subject of the Bill. In June, in the debate on the White Paper, I said that democracy depends on getting right the broad principles and the mechanics. This Bill is about getting those mechanics right, and I believe it is a major step towards achieving that aim. On that basis, I commend it to the House.

The Bill contains three very important proposals which many will believe are long overdue. First, it contains the proposal to extend the vote to Britons living overseas. What is surprising about that is that it has taken so long to come about, not that we are bringing it forward now.

The second proposal is to extend postal votes. Surely none of us wants to go through another election with large numbers of our constituents disfranchised as a result of holiday arrangments into which they entered in good faith without knowing, and having no reason to know, that there would be a general election.

The third proposal is, I recognise, the most controversial feature of the Bill: to restore the credibility of the deposit by fixing it at a more suitable and sensible level.

We should not ignore other changes which are brought about by the Bill. While not so central as the three that I have mentioned, nevertheless they are important. I would mention the extension of absent voting to parish and community council elections. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) in his place, as I remember that this has been a favourite topic of his for some time. I hope that he and other hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome it.

There are changes in expenses limits and changes which make combinations of elections on the same day easier. There are changes to simplify the election timetable, to deal with the difficult issue of the demise of the Crown during an election period, to update the penalties for election offences, to make it easier to add names to the election register after a notice of election has been published and to allow an unaddressed and free delivery service to be provided rather than each envelope having to be addressed before it can be part of the free post. There are also changes of importance to political parties which have computers to allow for the provision of magnetic tapes and floppy discs containing electoral register information, instead of just the hard copies as at present. These important and useful reforms are contained in the Bill.

I want now to say something about consultation, as this has been a controversial issue in some quarters. I am not sure that many of the points that have been made are entirely fair. Perhaps I could briefly trace the history of this measure. The Select Committee on Home Affairs decided in July 1982 that it would consider the Representation of the People Acts. The Select Committee gave this matter careful consideration, as is entirely typical of that estimable Committee, and it reported in April 1983. It did a thorough job and came out with 22 firm recommendations, 18 of them unanimous—a figure not to be forgotten when one considers what is to follow. Among the dignitaries on the Select Committee was the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs), now an Opposition Front Bench spokesman but then a Back Bencher, who was free to think rather different thoughts from some of those that have been voiced today by the Labour Front Bench.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): That is wrong.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman says that I am wrong. If he wants me to deal with the matter now, I am willing to do so. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he was absent when some of the votes were taken, I hardly think that it is a particularly good defence. If he has a better point than that, I shall of course give way to him.

The Select Committee in the other place which considered the matter reported on uniform procedures for the European Parliament in a report published in January 1983 and recommended that votes should be given to British citizens resident in the European Community for a period of 10 years. Its consideration is also relevant to matters contained in the Bill.

[Mr. Mellor]

In October 1983, the Government announced their intention to bring forward proposals in this Session of Parliament and embarked upon a period of consultation during which my right hon. and learned Friend sent letters to each of the leaders of the parties represented in this House asking them if they would kindly submit answers to questions on matters under consideration for inclusion in the Bill and making it clear that, as well as obtaining written responses, my right hon. and learned Friend was only too willing to arrange meetings at which these matters could be more extensively discussed. Every invitation extended for a meeting that was accepted resulted in a meeting being held and the matters being thoroughly discussed.

As a result of those discussions, a White Paper was produced in January 1984 which set out the Government's thinking. Seven consultation papers were produced: two in January 1984, dealing with the extension of the franchise and absent voting; three in February 1984, dealing with the electoral registration timetable and the free delivery of candidates' election communications in the election campaign; one in August 1984, dealing with penalties; and one this month, dealing with the availability of the register of electors. All of those were widely distributed to obtain opinions.

As well as Ministers being available for consultations with the parties, Home Office officials were available to continue discussions with officials of all of the parties represented in the House, as well as others who wished to see them. We had the debate in June and we now have the Bill.

Having regard to the careful procedure that I have outlined, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), with the greatest respect to him, had a difficult furrow to plough when he said that we had not handled the Bill in a manner befitting a constitutional measure. What more, by way of consultation, would it be reasonable to expect any Government to have embarked on than the careful list that I have suggested?

It has become a feature of one or two Opposition spokesmen — on the basis that other people may not know the facts — to say that there has not been consultation and that the Government have sought to ride roughshod over the Opposition, when really the Opposition have shown precious little interest in putting their views forward.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman obviously has a crystal ball, because I was about to couple his name with that point. The hon. Gentleman has complained in rounded terms. The Scottish National party responded in one letter to the invitations sent by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. After that, it attended none of the meetings at which consultation papers were discussed. We have heard nothing more from the SDP, nor have any papers been forwarded from the Scottish Office suggesting that anything was raised with it that should have come to us.

Mr. Wilson: Is the Minister not aware that we wrote to the Secretary of State for Scotland? Our main complaint was in relation to the agenda for the changes. Indeed, if the hon. Gentleman had listened to my speech, he would know that I pointed out the need to reform electoral law on the overall expenditure of political parties and the electronic media, radio and television. He has not attempted to deal with those important facts.

Mr. Mellor: That is an attempt to get round the point. The hon. Gentleman is agreeing entirely with the point that I made. His party made one response at the end of last year. Since then there has been nothing, and now we are blamed for no consultation. It does not make sense.

I, and I believe many hon. Members — not just Conservative Members—believe that overseas voting is one of the major innovations of the Bill, and long overdue. The right hon. Member for Gorton made an attack that was at least witty, although that of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North was not. That attack was a travesty of the position of hundreds of thousands of British citizens who, as part of their service to the companies which employ them and to the nation, spend part of their working lives overseas. They are as much British as we are. It is no good the hon. Member for Knowsley, North engaging in animated conversation with the right hon. Member for Gorton. As he has made a charge, he should listen to my reply. Among those hundreds of thousands of people, I dare say, are some of his constituents. There are no class barriers to working overseas these days, as anyone who has travelled on a plane to the middle east will know only too well.

The right hon. Member for Gorton talked about underage peers, escaped fugitives and tax evaders. That might have delighted some of the groundlings on the Labour Back Benches, but those who usually admire the quality of his argument felt that he fell sadly below the level of the bench. It is an extremely difficult proposition to try to oppose what is manifestly a sensible proposition.

The hon. Member for Battersea was absent in embarrassment from the debate on the White Paper. I am not sure that it is an improvement for him to be embarrassed in person now as a result of what he said on the Select Committee which his colleagues on the Front Bench, on which he now sits, have scattered to the four winds. It is a dereliction of an argument that we should have an argument that people who live overseas are tax dodgers and so should not vote. Apart from anything else, it is inaccurate; but that is no surprise. Since when has paying tax been a qualification for voting in British elections? Are we suggesting that those in receipt of supplementary benefit and pensions should be disfranchised? I hardly think so.

Had the right hon. Gentleman's point about back registers been true, it would have been a point of substance. However, back registers are kept. We have managed to contact many electoral registration officers, who say that they have back registers for the relevant period. If they do not, back registers from 1948 have been kept on behalf of the Home Office by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Therefore, there is a complete record upon which voters overseas could make claims about residency in a certain constituency to gain a vote for seven years.

The right hon. Gentleman strongly criticised our decision to move the close of poll at a general election from 10 pm to 9 pm. Again, it is one of those matters that the hon. Member for Battersea was content with during the Select Committee consideration——

Mr. Dubs: I was not there.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman keeps saying that. He does not show himself in his best light by saying that. He should take his duty as a member of the Select Committee with great seriousness. Knowing him, I am sure that he did. Why does he not admit that he held a different view two years ago? That would do him a great deal more credit than trying to pretend that he was not there. If he had been, there would have been a Division on every proposal to which his hon. Friends now take exception.

We gained the unanimity for which we were all looking, yet we are now told that party advantage is involved. None of the Labour representatives on the Select Committee saw the matter in that way. Rather than the asseverations of the right hon. Member for Gorton, they preferred the rather more dispassionate and objective evidence of Dr. David Butler—the great panjandrum on these matters—who said that on his analyses of the 4 per cent. of the public who vote between 9 pm and 10 pm, there was no party advantage either way.

In so far as any one is incommoded by the decision to move from 10 pm to 9 pm for the close of poll, the aim of our arrangements on postal votes is to ensure that people can obtain a postal vote if, for some reason, they cannot attend the poll between 7 am and 9 pm. Whatever else troubles the House about the proposals, I hope that the removal of an hour from the polling day will be viewed as relatively insubstantial.

The debate was made more memorable by the involvement of two of the most distinguished parliamentarians of our time—the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) and the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). I am sure that I speak for all who participated in saying how glad we were that they spoke in the debate.

The right hon. Member for South Down took issue with the provision about postal votes in a wider basis. I am glad to say that not many other participants took that view. As I said at the outset, it must be accepted that we can no longer maintain the present distinctions between people who are away on employment and those who may be away on holiday or because of urgent family business. Most people recognise that even though that may constitute an open invitation—a menu card for postal voting—once a decision has been taken to extend and widen the availability of absent voting facilities, it is difficult—without piling anomaly upon anomaly — to create another category of availability of postal votes. It is far better to say that we have reached a point where there are a large number of good reasons why someone should want to vote by post and to acknowledge and accept that by making one qualification, which is what we do in the Bill.

I am, of course, grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for putting with such clarity the issue that faces us and recognising that not everyone reaches the same conclusion. However, the alternative of continuing with our restrictive view of postal votes is no alternative—and certainly not a route that I would want to take.

Anyway, we must bear in mind that the present arrangements on postal votes are based more on people's willingness to accept the rules than on anything that the framework of law imposes. If someone is prepared to tell a lie about where he is, there are no penal sanctions, and he can get a postal vote if the electoral registration officer believes him.

Of course, we understand the real difficulties that are faced in Northern Ireland. It gives us no pleasure at all to seek restrictions in voting procedure changes in Northern Ireland that do not apply in Great Britain, but the alternative that faces us is either to add to the difficulties of electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland or to refuse to bring forward changes in the rest of Great Britain that we feel are long overdue in a context where the electoral process, whatever people may say about malpractice, is nothing like the same as that which prevails on the other side of the Irish sea.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Are the Government then willing to go case by case through the possibilities of malpractice which might be raised by the arrangements proposed to be made in the rest of Great Britain and, if they do not appear to be substantial in Northern Ireland, not to stand in the way of the extension of those facilities to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Mellor: Absolutely. I was going to say that I took the right hon. Gentleman's point about the removal of the right for a postal vote in Northern Ireland. There appears to have been a misunderstanding. The fact is that that right was removed with no fuss in January this year in relation to the European elections. Our intention to do the same in this legislation was expressed in the consultative document issued in January this year. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that in Committee we shall want to look again at those matters with great care. I accept the sincerity of his view. I say again to Northern Ireland Members present that it gives us no pleasure to make these restrictions. We do so in good faith. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be available to deal with some of those matters in Committee.

I was a little troubled that the official Opposition appeared to be jumping too willingly on the bandwagon. I thought that they would have had discussions with their opposite numbers in the Social Democratic and Labour party of Northern Ireland——

Mr. Dubs: Never.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman, who is not having a good evening, says, "Never." I do not know why he says that, because surely that is a reputable group. It wrote a letter to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, in response to the consultation exercise, saying:

> "We have expressed the view to the Secretary of State that the electoral process is under direct threat in Northern Ireland because of the extent of electoral abuse which is being organised by extremists. In our view, that situation requires immediate and radical action to protect the citizen's right to vote. Your letter contains no proposals related to this problem, and shows little appreciation of its urgency."

Since then the Government have introduced the proposals to deal with the difficult issue of personation in Northern Ireland. The restrictions proposed in the Bill will be fully considered in Committee.

I should like to refer to the speech by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent. I can understand that he wanted to shore up the flimsy structure of the Opposition's case against the measure. His eloquence was considerable, and it is a privilege to participate in the debate with him. However, no amount of eloquence could disguise his somewhat mean-spirited approach to the Government's proposals and particularly towards my right hon. and

[Mr. Mellor]

learned Friend who, I suspect, he will find to be a more formidable figure than emerged with any clarity from his speech.

The right hon. Gentleman made three points. First, he suggested that it was part of the promotion of the narrow sectional interests of the Conservative party that the Bill was being introduced. I say once again — it bears repeating—that it is extremely difficult to equate that with the fact that the Bill contains the acceptance of 15 out of 22 recommendations of an all-party Select Committee of the House. Two of the seven that were not accepted are still under consideration because they relate to the public order law review that is going on.

The right hon. Gentleman lent his name and reputation to the suggestion that there has been no consultation. I do not suppose that he did so in the clear knowledge of the consultation exercise that I outlined, but I should be interested to know what consultation he believes could have gone beyond that. His answer might well be the Speaker's Conference, and he challenged us in round terms about why the Government had thrown it over. We accept that several important changes in electoral law this century have been preceded by a conference of all the parties, meeting under the chairmanship of Mr. Speaker, but it is widely accepted that the Speaker's Conference has not been a satisfactory method of taking electoral law out of the political arena.

The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but perhaps I could quote two people to him. The first is Dr. David Butler, who said:

> "It is hard to see the virtues of a Speaker's Conference . . . They have not been good bodies, producing reports that command intellectual respect."

Your distinguished predecessor, Mr. Speaker, Lord Selwyn Lloyd, said after his experience — which he plainly did not enjoy — of chairing the 1972 to 1974 conference:

> "We were too large a body . . . it was difficult to assemble the necessary evidence . . . I was glad that no attempt was made to set up another Conference while I was Speaker."

Mr. Foot: Some of us have always believed that Select Committees should not have the final word of advice to the House of Commons on such matters. When the Government submitted evidence to the Select Committee, did they say, "We wish to make it clear that this is a substitute for the Speaker's Conference?"

Mr. Mellor: It was not necessary to do so. Before the right hon. Gentleman waxes too lyrical about a Speaker's Conference, he should be brought face to face with some of the facts that did not appear in his eloquent and passionate attack on the Government. He quoted to us the Labour Government's adherence to a Speaker's Conference, but I remind him of what happened in 1969 when there was a Speaker's Conference on a representation of the people Bill introduced by the Labour Government. The Conference recommended that the age for voting should be reduced from 21 to 20. What did the Labour Government — those respecters of Speaker's Conferences—do? They pushed through, in the teeth of opposition in the House, a voting age of 18.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It should be 16 years.

Mr. Mellor: I am glad to discover that the representative of teenagers is as eloquent as ever. I was not referring to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent. Although the Speaker's Conference suggested that there should not be another hour of polling, the Labour Government imposed that extra hour. That is hardly good evidence of the Labour Government's adherence to the principles of a Speaker's Conference. Is it not rather hypocritical and canting to suggest that the Government should have had one in this case?

Mr. Foot: Is it not true that, much more recently than that, a major issue of changing the franchise was referred to a Speaker's Conference by the Labour Government? Is it the Government's policy not to have a Speaker's Conference on this matter, and when was that policy decided?

Mr. Mellor: I have just said that we are sceptical of it because of the way in which the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues played ducks and drakes with it. I should have thought that that was a straightforward matter.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said, there is no magic about the figure of £1,000 for the deposit. It is not as iniquitous as has been suggested. It emerged from the Select Committee, and the Labour party—in the person of its deputy leader — gave evidence to the Select Committee, proposing a figure of £600 with the threshold to remain unchanged. Our figure of £1,000 and a threshold reduced to 5 per cent. is not as outlandish as it has been made to appear during attacks in this debate. We are in no sense firmly wedded to a figure that would be unacceptable to the House, but we shall not be driven from it by people who said one thing a year ago and who are saying something completely different today. We shall consider carefully the many things that will be said in Committee.

This Bill, in place by the next election, could enfranchise as many as 3 million people. We estimate that, even on a cautious assessment of take-up rates, at least 1 million more people will vote next time who, without the measure, could not do so. This is a principled and important Bill which promotes the health of our democratic system. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 293.

Division No. 43] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo	Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Anderson, Donald	Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Ashton, Joe	Buchan, Norman
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Caborn, Richard
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Campbell-Savours, Dale
Barnett, Guy	Canavan, Dennis
Barron, Kevin	Carter-Jones, Lewis
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Beggs, Roy	Clarke, Thomas
Bell, Stuart	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Benn, Tony	Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Coleman, Donald
Bermingham, Gerald	Conlan, Bernard
Bidwell, Sydney	Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Blair, Anthony	Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Boothroyd, Miss Betty	Corbyn, Jeremy
Boyes, Roland	Cowans, Harry
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*	Craigen, J. M.
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	Crowther, Stan

Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Nicholson, J.
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey

Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wainwright, R.
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Ian Lang.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 204.

Division No. 44] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*

MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, David
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powley, John
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Ian Lang.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Nicholson, J.
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parris, Matthew
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.

Wilson, Gordon	Tellers for the Noes:
Winnick, David	Mr. James Hamilton and
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*	Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Michael Cocks.]*

Committee tomorrow.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the motion relating to Ways and Means may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Representation of the People Bill ('the Act'), it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the charging on and payment out of the Consolidated Fund of—

(i) any expenses of any returning officer for an election of parish or community councillors which are attributable to the postponement of the election under the Act; and

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums charged on and paid out of that Fund under any other Act;

(b) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act; and

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

Resolved,

That any Act resulting from the Representation of the People Bill may repeal section 103(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (vehicles used for conveyance to or from the poll exempted from duty etc.)—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Local Government

10.26 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): I beg to move,

That the draft Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 22nd November, be approved.

In this order, the Government seek the approval of the House for the cancellation of the GLC and metropolitan county council elections that would otherwise be held next May.

Despite the controversy which surrounded last Session's paving Bill, both Houses of Parliament agreed that it was right to put on the statute book what is now part II of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 — provision to suspend these elections subject to the approval by both Houses of an affirmative order to this effect. In other words, both Houses accepted the Government's view that it makes no sense to hold elections to councils which, if Parliament enacts the Local Government Bill, would only have 11 months to run. Never before has a whole council been elected for a term of less than a year.

Right from the outset, the Government made it clear that the order bringing part II of the paving Bill into force would not be made until this House had approved the main principle of abolition by giving a Second Reading to the Local Government Bill. This we did last week by a majority of 135.

The main purpose of this order is therefore to suspend these 1985 elections and to extend to 1 April 1986 the term of office of the existing councillors of the seven abolition authorities.

In the most unlikely event—that is the view which is now widely recognised as realistic — of the main abolition Bill failing to reach the statute book, the elections would be reinstated as swiftly as possible. Section 1(2) of the paving Act provides power to reinstate the elections by order, also subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. I have already given the House a firm commitment, which I am happy to repeat, that, if the main Bill falls, that order would be introduced as soon as it was practicable to do so. However, the House may share my view that, given the Government's clear manifesto commitment and last week's substantial Second Reading majority, that is most improbable. I am in no doubt that the Bill will be enacted. In those circumstances, it would be unnecessary and contrary to precedent for elections to the abolition authorities to be held next year.

This order will bring part II of the paving Act into force on 1 February 1985. Part II comprises two sections— section 2, which is concerned with the ordinary elections to the Greater London council and to the metropolitan county councils, and section 3, which is concerned with the quorum for meetings of those councils.

With effect from the coming into force of this order, section 2 of the Act suspends the ordinary elections of councillors of the GLC and MCCs and extends until 1 April 1986 the term of office of serving GLC and MCC councillors. Any councillor elected to fill a casual vacancy will likewise serve until 1 April 1986.

Section 2(3) adapts the rules for the filling of casual vacancies.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In the event of there being a whole range of casual vacancies on the GLC, for example, may we have an assurance from the Secretary of State that the Conservative party will actually contest them?

Mr. Jenkin: I think that if the hon. Gentleman and his friends were so unwise as to engage in another series of electoral stunts they would meet with exactly the same debacle as last time, so I would not advise him to embark on that course.

The effect of section 2(3) is that a by-election to fill a vacancy arising on or after 1 October 1985 will not be held unless, when the vacancy occurs, the total number of unfilled vacancies exceeds one third of the total number of members. That is entirely in accordance with the normal rule that vacancies are not filled within six months before an election, although in this case, of course, the council will disappear.

Finally, section 2 amends the provisions made in the Local Government Act 1972 relating to the years in which elections to metropolitan district councils are held. This is a purely consequential amendment. The effect is to ensure that the cycle of metropolitan district elections continues undisturbed by the suspension of the metropolitan county council elections. The corresponding provisions of the 1972 Act in relation to the Greater London council are repealed by section 2(4).

I may be asked why 1 February has been chosen as the appointed day. The answer is that that allows a reasonable time for both Houses to give their approval to this order, while giving three months notice of cancellation of elections, which is sufficient time to avoid abortive expenditure and unnecessary work.

The cancellation of the 1985 elections was one of the major issues of debate during the passage of the paving legislation and I do not propose to repeat the arguments today. The reasons are simple. It would be a waste of expenditure and quite unprecedented to hold elections in circumstances where the councillors so elected would serve for less than a year. After much debate, both Houses of Parliament took this view. Indeed, it was reflected in the comments of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), whom I do not see in the Chamber, when he said:

"I can sympathise with the Secretary of State's claim that it would have been wasteful to hold elections. I fully realise that, but the natural thing to do in those circumstances is to let local authorities continue in existence for another year."[*Official Report*, 11 April 1984; Vol. 58, c. 469.]

That is precisely what part II of the paving Act does.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): How can the Secretary of State say with such confidence that if elections were allowed, as they ought to be, the councillors so elected would serve for less than 12 months? Does not that presuppose the decision of both Houses of Parliament?

Mr. Jenkin: I do not want to weary the House with tedious repetition, but if at any stage the main abolition Bill falls, the paving Act contains the power to reinstate those elections. I have given a categorical undertaking that, in that event, the order to effect that reinstatement would be presented as soon as might be possible. I do not take for granted the passage of the legislation. I have accepted — as many hon. Members and many people

[Mr. Jenkin]

outside the House have accepted—that it is probable that the legislation will reach the statute book. That being so, it is quite unnecessary to hold the elections.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has raised the question of further by-elections. I find that most of those who called most loudly for the GLC elections are now remarkably silent on that issue.

Mr. Tony Banks: No. The right hon. Gentleman must wait and see.

Mr. Jenkin: On 20 September there was an attempt to hold four by-elections. It was forecast that Londoners would turn out in tens and fifties of thousands to vote for the pro-GLC candidates. People of all parties were supposed to flock to their banner. Those four stunt by-elections were the flops of the year. Compared with the results in 1981, 8,000 fewer people voted for the four Labour candidates. Less than one elector in five even took the trouble to register his vote for a Labour candidate. Where are the other stunt by-elections that were promised? They are as hard to find as a living dodo. I suspect that we have heard the last of them.

The order also brings section 3 of the paving Act into force. That is the section that allows the Secretary of State to prescribe a smaller quorum for meetings of the GLC or of an MCC. The present statutory quorum is one quarter of the whole number of members of the council. Section 3 allows the Secretary of State by order to reduce that number if he considers it necessary for the transaction of the business of the GLC or of a metropolitan county council. That order-making power is subjeect to the negative resolution procedure, and can be prayed against.

Ideally, this order would confine itself to elections. It should not be necessary to provide for the substitution of a smaller quorum. However, a number of councillors have been threatening to obstruct the will of Parliament. They would be in a position to bring their council's business to a standstill simply by refusing to attend council meetings. It is to safeguard against such sabotage that section 3 was included in the Act, enabling the quorum to be varied.

I have honoured the promise that I made on Second Reading. I have not sought to make the order to activate part II of the paving Act before the principle of abolition had been debated and approved by the House. It has now been approved by the Second Reading given to the Bill last week. It would be unjustifiable to delay any longer the coming into effect of the order. I ask the House to approve the appointed day order.

10.38 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I have no hesitation in saying that we reject the Secretary of State's arguments for this order. As he well knows, he is creating a precedent in presenting this order. It is yet another precedent in a long and rather unenviable line of precedents that the right hon. Gentleman has set in local government legislation.

The order abolishes elections that would involve between 13 million and 14 million electors in the GLC and metropolitan county areas. The Secretary of State and his colleagues are taking away the votes of that many people and not, as has been the case in previous local government reorganisations, replacing them with votes for successor authorities. In no sense can the Secretary of State claim that, in producing the order and his arguments for it, he is following the precedent even of former Conservative Secretaries of State.

In spite of what the Secretary of State has said today, he is taking the decision of this House and that of another place for granted in assuming that the Local Government Bill, which recently received a Second Reading, will become law. The right hon. Gentleman said that he was not taking the House for granted but that he was confident that the Bill would be carried. If that is so, why does he not leave things as they are? Why does he have to bring the order to the House to abolish elections? He has no answer to either question. The reality, in spite of what he has just said about by-elections to the GLC, is that he, the House and the country know full well that he and his right hon. and hon. Friends are frightened of an expression of opinion through the ballot box by the people of London and the met counties. That would be a major test of public opinion on this issue.

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): There has been one.

Dr. Cunningham: Well, I cannot believe that the way in which this measure was cobbled together at the last moment and stuffed into the Conservative party manifesto produced any real test of opinion. I do not believe that it featured highly in elections anywhere. On the contrary, it was hidden away. Perhaps I can ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he agrees with the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who said last week that the commitment to abolish the GLC and the met counties was

"put in nine days after the election was called against the wishes of the party policy committee." —[*Official Report*, 4 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 191.]

I invite the Secretary of State to say whether that is a true record of events.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who is not here to defend himself, might have had more inside knowledge of these matters that I do not share. All I know is that after many months of discussions, as I said last week, this matter was included by a decision of the Cabinet. If it is such anathema to the Labour party, how come the Labour party's Environment spokesman placed not one recorded word in any speech handout on this subject throughout the 1983 general election? Are we to believe that he did not read the manifesto? Did he not know all about it? Did he try to pretend that it did not exist?

Dr. Cunningham: Wriggle as the right hon. Gentleman will, he is not able to duck the charge that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup levelled at him and the Government that the commitment was shoved into the manifesto at the last possible moment without any proper consultation.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there were months of discussions. I invite him to tell the House who was involved in the discussions: certainly not leading Conservatives on the GLC group, certainly not the right hon. Gentleman's own representative on the GLC. As the right hon. Gentleman is only too well aware, they say very different things today.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The hon. Gentleman prays in aid the statement of my right

hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) — he has prayed in aid his statements on a number of occasions — that the policy was rushed through at the last minute against the wishes of the policy-making committee. Is he aware that the county of Humberside was created 10 years ago against the wishes of the people, in a plebiscite in which 85 per cent. of the people of south Humberside voted against its creation, when the Prime Minister was my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman seems to be arguing in favour of local choice and consultation. In my remarks I have said that there has been no consultation. Also there has been no proper inquiry or investigation into the nature of the proposals. Previously when elections to outgoing authorities, or authorities which have been wound up or which were disappearing, have been cancelled they have been balanced by the introduction of new elections to new successor authorities. That was the case in the 1974 election when existing councils ran in parallel with the new ones which were elected in 1973 until the changeover occurred.

It is absolutely wrong for the Secretary of State to claim, as he has claimed in the past although I noticed that he did not make the claim this evening, that he is following precedent in what he is doing with this order and the actions he is taking as a result of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984. The principle is quite different. It is one which we on this side of the House stand by: that local democratic accountability should be preserved. It would be far better for everybody concerned, including although he seems reluctant to agree, the reputation of the right hon. Gentleman, if in this case that principle were to be preserved.

The proposals put forward by the Government do not match up to any credible attempt either to reorganise local government properly in a non-partisan manner, or to take account or make any test of the opinions of the people who are affected by the change.

It should not be argued—indeed, it cannot be argued —that the changeover date should be seen as settled at this stage of the parliamentary process. That implies another assumption: that the Bill will go through as it stands unamended and in the time scale the Government envisage. Given the Government's experience of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984, that is a very arrogant assumption for the right hon. Gentleman to make. He knows as well as we know that not only in the other place but in this House a significant number of his right hon. and hon. Friends are fundamentally opposed to what the Government are suggesting should happen. There is a bald assumption that everything will proceed just as the Government intend.

The West Midlands seems to be the only metropolitan county council for which re-warding has been completed. Therefore, the electoral arrangements are entirely different from those of the other metropolitan counties and the GLC. In that sense, two different wardings are likely to run in parallel — the existing ones and the new ones which result from the Boundary Commission changes which have been put into effect by an order made in 1982.

We must surely presume that if a by-election were to occur in the West Midlands after 2 May it would be held on the new ward basis. That is an anomalous state of affairs. The existing authority, elected on old wards, on old boundaries, is to continue in place but any by-election would apparently take place on new ward boundaries. Is that so?

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Government are well aware of that point. I shall be discussing it with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, with whom responsibility in that matter rests. Proposals to deal with what the hon. Gentleman has perfectly fairly identified will be brought forward in good time before that boundary order takes effect.

Dr. Cunningham: That is just another example, along a road littered with such examples, of how little thought and proper preparation has been put into what the Government are proposing to do. Here again there is a glaring anomaly in the situation as proposed by the Government. It is not good enough to say to the House in the middle of this debate, only because the Labour party had been able to pick up the point, that the Government will respond. Why did not the right hon. Gentleman come to the House and explain it, since he obviously knew about the situation, and say what the Government's intentions were? That would have been a far better way to approach the matter than to have to respond to a question from the Opposition.

The longer the House looks at the Government's proposals and has the opportunity to examine them in detail, the clearer it is that the charges of not only the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup but of other Conservative Members, as well as people in the authorities themselves, are substantiated.

The Government's botched-up approach to local government reorganisation is a shambles. It is shot full of holes, contradictions, errors and matters which have not been properly thought out. The order is not necessary at this time. It is not necessary for the House to approve it. Perhaps it is a little too optimistic to say that nothing would go wrong for the Government, but if the order had not been presented and were not approved by the House it would not affect the Government's proposed timetable. Indeed, it would do something for the Secretary of State's reputation and for that of his right hon. and hon. Friends if it had not been presented at this time.

The order should not be approved now. The House should recommend the Secretary of State not to submit it until at least the Local Government Bill has received the Royal Assent. At that time only would it be necessary to abolish elections to the authorities and not before.

10.53 pm

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I support the order. It is entirely right that at this stage the order should come before the House, the House having formally given a Second Reading, with a large majority, to the Local Government Bill. It would be entirely wrong to suggest or imply that there would be an election for the GLC, with which I am more particularly concerned, when that authority has a life of only about 12 months ahead of it, the House having given a clear sign of its intentions.

There have been examples of elections being cancelled because of local government reform. I remind the House that there will be London borough elections in May 1986 when Londoners will have the opportunity to elect more than 1,000 councillors who will be responsible for running London's services and affairs. It is significant that in the

[Mr. John Wheeler]

reform of local government in London, of the remaining functions of the GLC 95 per cent. in cost terms will be transferred to the control of the elected borough councils.

Mention has been made of the desirability of testing public opinion. Such a test has already taken place in London. On 20 September this year there were four by-elections. It was the most boring of political experiences for the people of London. They were not interested in the elections. They did not participate to the extent of 75 per cent. not turning out to vote. It was significant that the leadership of the GLC had threatened Londoners with a number of by-elections. The GLC leader has clearly shown that the result of the by-elections was such that there was no point in continuing with them.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): While the hon. Gentleman is reflecting on the by-elections, will he tell us what the turn-out was in Westminister, North, what the vote was and why his Conservative association had to be strong-armed into not contesting it?

Mr. Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer to that. He knows the arithmetic of the four by-elections. I shall repeat the results for the benefit of the House. About 25 per cent. turned out in the by-elections. In north Westminster it was slightly above that figure. That is not altogether surprising considering that the present leader of the GLC was the candidate in the division in Paddington and considering also the extent of the propaganda expenditure incurred in the run-up to the by-election.

I well recall that after the result was declared, every conceivable excuse was trotted out to account for the reason why the electorate did not turn out to vote. It was said to be raining, a bad register and so on. It was raining during the GLC election in 1981, when the turn-out in the same division was 44 per cent. The electorate found the whole by-election issue extremely tedious and did not participate.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): I know that the hon. Gentleman would wish to be fair to the House. Will he give as a comparison the national figures in the general election if no Conservative candidate had stood?

Mr. Wheeler: I shall not be tempted down that road. We are concerned with an order that is perfectly reasonable and desirable in view of the expression of the House on the Local Government Bill, before us a few days ago.

We must bear in mind the cost implications of by-elections. It would be wholly inappropriate to spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of pounds of ratepayers' money merely to return a council which, in the case of London, would have 12 months or less to serve. I believe that the order should be supported and I shall vote for it tonight.

11 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I must declare an interest as a Londoner whose vote is being taken away, but that is not why I wish to address the House. As far as I can make out, this is the first time in our history when a Government have reduced the franchise. There have been reorganisations in the past of one kind and another, but tonight we are being asked to take away the votes of those who previously enjoyed them.

The Secretary of State, who speaks of votes as if they could be calculated in terms of efficiency alone or common sense in terms of a better way of organising things, appears to forget that votes were won in this country not by the grace and favour of successive Governments, but by systematic public campaigns, and systematic campaigns of law breaking to win the rights that we have. I am referring historically to that. The right to worship as we wish was won against laws passed by Parliament that sought to impose uniformity on methods of worship; the rights of trade unions were won by systematic law-breaking of the Combination Acts; the rights of working class men were won after riots and disturbances, led by the Chartists, had been forced on a very unwilling House of Commons and an exceptionally reluctant House of Lords. The Prime Minister would not be in her position as a voter, a Member of Parliament or Prime Minister if the suffragettes had not systematically broken the law, chained themselves to the railings, been imprisoned, force-fed, released and then rearrested under the infamous cat and mouse Act that was passed during the lifetime of many present tonight.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The right hon. Gentleman is being dramatic and seems to be inciting people to break the law. Will he answer this question? Since the environment spokesman of his party, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), argued in favour of unitary authorities, and since that would have meant elections to but one level of government, is it not inevitable, beyond peradventure, that precisely the same process would have taken place—that there would have been a reduction in the number of elections held for layers of local government?

Mr. Benn: The right hon. Gentleman only confirms my long suspicion that he does not understand the impact of his own Bill, because he is taking executive power from elected people and using the prerogative — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, indeed. We are discussing not the other legislation, but the power to abolish the Inner London education authority by statutory instrument. The Secretary of State is using the prerogative of the Crown and taking power from elected people. That is a wholly different matter from the reorganisation of the structure of local government.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: Many hon. Members want to speak. I am putting a point to the House. I have not intervened before——

Mr. Tracey *rose*——

Mr. Benn: If the hon. Gentleman has a serious point, I shall try to answer it.

Mr. Tracey: Indeed, I have a serious point to put to the right hon. Gentleman. His right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is on record, on the point about unitary authorities, as saying that if his party were elected in the general election on that policy it would proceed with no more Royal Commissions and no more reviews, but direct to legislation. That was said by the right hon. Member for Gorton. Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on it?

Mr. Benn: I dealt with the point in answering the Secretary of State's question. The issue, as the hon.

Gentleman knows very well, is the removal of powers from the elected local authorities to the Executive using the prerogative of the Crown, in some cases without having to come back to the House of Commons at all.

The point that I want to make is that if the Secretary of State, who is introducing the order, were to study our history, he would find that the pressure for democratic rights was not an abstract pressure. It was not that anybody thought that elections in themselves were of value; it was the consequence of the extension of the franchise that people wanted to see. In 1832, 1867, 1884, 1918 and in subsequent Bills, the enlargement of the franchise brought much-valued social progress. Those who remember—some are still alive—what the House of Commons was like before women were granted the vote—which was only in 1918—will remember that in those days, when Members of Parliament were answerable only to male constituents, women's issues and rights got short shrift in Parliament.

If one considers local democracy, it is clear that, as it spread, health, education, housing and transport became much improved. I have with me—it may have been cited previously—the development of the city council in Birmingham from 1838, when the municipal charter was granted: 1842, the police force; 1861 the public library; 1867, the art gallery; 1870, the school board; 1872, the first medical officer of health; 1874, the first municipal hospital; 1875, the city took over the supply of gas; 1875, the fire brigade; 1876, the water supply; 1890, the first municipal houses; 1898, the supply of electricity; 1904, its own tramways; 1908, maternity and child welfare; 1916, municipal savings; 1919, the orchestra; and 1939, the municipal airport. All those things were made possible by the extension of the franchise. It is no good saying that the GLC has no functions left, because the Government have removed those functions. They have performed a characteristic administrative trick of destroying the functions of an elected body and then describing it as unnecessary.

The public must understand clearly that this is not an administrative reorganisation. The Secretary of State is committed to the destruction of the services provided by local government, and therefore he has chosen to attack the democratic institutions that provide them. That is what this is about. It has nothing whatever to do with the need for a better organisation. I forget whether the Secretary of State was a member of the Government who set up the GLC, but I was a Member of Parliament at the time. There was no argument then about the need for those services; there was an argument about how they could best be provided. No one outside should believe that we are having a limited debate about how best to run local services. The Government wish to cut services as part of their central economic policy. This is a by-product of their economic and social policies and has nothing to do with the better government of London or the metropolitan counties.

I give a special warning to another place, and in doing so I differentiate myself momentarily from Ken Livingstone's notice on County hall. I did not agree with his slogan, "Peers, Thank you for saving democracy in London." It may be tactically useful to the GLC to butter up some bishops and wangle some wets into voting against the legislation, but the Lords have never believed in democracy. I searched through all the debates on the Reform Bills last century to find the best quotation from the House of Lords on the democratic process, and I offer to the House a quotation from a dissent to the Third Reading of the Reform Act 1867, which was registered.

The grounds for the dissent are stated clearly. The first was:

"Because the Bill, creating in almost every City and Borough in *England* a new Constituency more numerous than that which exists, impairs, where it does not destroy, the power of the present Electors, and substitutes for it that of a new Body inferior to them in Property and Education."

The second reason was:

"Because the Confidence justly placed in Constituencies of approved Worth cannot reasonably be transferred to such Men now first entrusted with electoral Power; and it is to be feared that when Labour makes laws for Capital, Poverty for Property, legislation, no longer directed by educated Intelligence, will impair the individual Freedom of Action and the Security of Possession which have been the Foundations of our Prosperity and Wealth."

I warn Ken Livingstone not to put too much hope in the other place, for it has never believed in democracy. It is half filled with hereditary peers, and padded out with the patronage of successive Prime Ministers.

If the other place passes this order, which will go to it soon, let me remind it of another Act of Parliament, passed on 19 March 1649. It is an Act to abolish the House of Peers, passed by the House of Commons. It is one of the Acts of the interregnum. I shall read it for the benefit of the other place, because I think that the peers are more likely to be influenced by this than by another lunch with the campaigners for the preservation of the GLC. It begins "The Commons of England". I doubt whether those words have been uttered in the House since then, so let me remind those who have forgotten what they are:

"The Commons of England assembled in Parliament, finding by too long experience, that the House of Lords is useless and dangerous to the People of England to be continued, have thought fit to Ordain and Enact, and be it Ordained and Enacted by this present Parliament, and by the Authority of the same, That from henceforth the House of Lords in Parliament, shall be and is hereby wholly abolished and taken away; And that the Lords shall not from henceforth meet or sit in the said House called The Lords House, or in any other House or Place whatsoever, as a House of Lords; nor shall Sit, Vote, Advise, Adjudge, or Determine of any matter or thing whatsoever, as a House of Lords in Parliament."

That was clearer legislation than that introduced by the Secretary of State. If a non-elected House takes away the votes of the people of Britain, it signs its own death warrant the day that it does so. Nobody should have any illusions about that.

I shall now relate the order to the wider attack. We are always told by the Tory party that the proper way to get our rights is to vote. However, when the GLC was elected on a cheap fares policy, the Government wheeled out Lord Denning from the chamber of horrors, and he said that that manifesto was illegal. Now that that has been amended, they wheel out a Bill to abolish the GLC. No Tory Members should try to tell the British people, certainly not Londoners or those who live in the metropolitan counties, that they are prepared to see change made by democratic means, because they are not. The attack by rate-capping, the introduction of quangos—which is only the Royal prerogative reappearing in the modern language of adminstration—the use of ministerial fiats, the abolition of trade unionism at GCHQ, sequestration by the courts and the national police force are designed to crush all opposition to the Government of the day.

That is why the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) expresses

[Mr. Benn]

his doubts. No doubt, if one could get him into a Sub-Committee, one would have an interesting discussion about some of the managerial problems that we are told we are discussing. But he knows what we know—that the Tory party, by reverting to a principle that has not illuminated its thinking for many centuries, is trying to crush all opposition, however expressed.

I say seriously that if those rights, which were never granted graciously from the top, but were won by law breaking from underneath, are taken away, that will be an open invitation to return to law breaking as a means of winning back rights that the Government are taking away. If that happens, although I believe that the Prime Minister will not be allowed by her party to get away with it—for it is only with the party that the capacity to remove her now rests—everything that flows from the clutch of policies, of which this is one, will be the responsibility of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and every hon. Member who votes for the order tonight, and any peer who votes for it when it reaches the other place. This is a very much graver matter than can be settled by an exchange of witticisms, comments or even quotations from other people's speeches on other occasions.

Tonight, the House is being asked to reverse its own history, and, in so far as it does, it should recognise that putting the clock back is a package deal that has other consequences. This, and other measures, will reawaken the determination of the British people to govern themselves and not to be told what to do by Ministers cloaking themselves in prerogative in order to destroy the rights of those they were elected to represent.

11.14 pm

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): I tried to follow the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), but I had some difficulty. I think that he is in some confusion when he speaks of enlargement of the franchise. If he considers the examples that he gave from the last century he will find—or if he asks his researcher, he will no doubt tell him—that the references are to giving votes to those who did not have them. That is the usual meaning of the phrase, "enlargement of the franchise".

The order proposes not to take away votes from those who have them, but to take away a vote from those who at present have three, so that they then have two. However, if the right hon. Gentleman looks at the motion, he will see that there will be an additional vote for the Inner London education authority and so, hey presto, there will be three again. Therefore, I cannot accept the right hon. Gentleman's assertion that to take away a vote from those who have three is an incitement to violence. I cannot believe that most hon. Members follow the right hon. Gentleman in that.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): During the past year there has been a great deal of complaint from Conservative Members that people have votes in local elections when they do not pay rates. The implication has been—and it has been mentioned by Conservatives outside the House—that those who do not pay rates should not have votes in local elections. Is that the hon. Gentleman's view?

Mr. Shelton: No. Like the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is completely confused.

My point is that the quotations about the enlargement of the franchise referred to giving votes to those who did not have them. But the motion takes away a vote for the GLC from those who have the vote for local councils and for Parliament, and gives—if the right hon. Gentleman so wishes—a vote for ILEA. That is not, in any normal sense, a restriction of the franchise. The right hon. Gentleman was also deeply confused when he spoke about a centralisation of powers. I am sure that he has read the Bill, so I shall remind him that on abolition of the GLC—if that is what the House decides—all the services provided by it alone, or together with the boroughs, will pass to the boroughs—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—with a few exceptions.

I shall list those exceptions. First, there is ILEA. There will be an increase in representation with regard to ILEA, because we shall now be able to vote directly for that body. Then there is London Transport, which has already become London Regional Transport, and the recommendation concerning that was made by an all-party Select Committee. I agree that the fire service will involve a joint board, but of borough members. Flood protection is of tremendous national importance and responsibility for that will go to the Thames water authority. There are historic buildings, ancient monuments and the arts. But the arts will be dealt with mainly by the boroughs. If anyone calls that a centralisation of powers that will lead to violence in the streets, he is deeply confused.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Is not the hon. Gentleman aware that by the time all these quangos, joint boards and other devices are put into effect, 67 per cent. of the services now run by the metropolitan county councils will come under the Secretary of State's jurisdiction?

Mr. Shelton: No new quango is being formed, one new joint board is to be formed. I am talking about the GLC. I do not have sufficient knowledge to talk about the metropolitan counties. When I was a member of the GLC about 15 years ago I thought that it had come to the end of its useful life.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) saying that the legislation was hastily cobbled together. I have no idea whether it was or was not, because I am not in the Cabinet. If my right hon. Friend tells me that the proposals were agreed by the Cabinet I believe him.

It is strange that the 1983 alliance manifesto proposes "abolishing one of the existing tiers of local government". which will

"inevitably involve the eventual abolition of the Metropolitan Counties, and the GLC."

Was that purely by chance and cobbled up overnight? Even the Socialists in "Labour's Programme 1982" say:

"The main difficulties of the present system are clear enough. There is an irrational split of functions between the two tiers . . . a confusing overlap of responsibilities".

In a typically Socialist way that expresses a dilemma but does not suggest any way to solve it. At least the Conservatives and the alliance gave a pledge.

It is said that no referendum was held. In the 1983 election the Conservatives won 56 out of 84 London seats.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to mislead the House, but like many of his colleagues who quoted from the alliance

manifesto he left out a sentence. That sentence referred to the proposals to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties:

"against the background of our proposals for the development of regional government."

There is a difference between replacing authorities and putting nothing in their place, as the Government propose.

Mr. Shelton: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Nevertheless the alliance was unhappy with the present system of local government and proposed to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties.

I was a member of the GLC between 1967 and 1970. Even then its powers had been eroded. When I mentioned the centralisation of powers a moment ago, I wonder if the right hon. Member for Chesterfield was aware of how many powers the GLC today operates alone, without the co-operation of the boroughs. It operates about four such powers. One could say more if one included for instance the collection of information. Very few people know that it operates only four such powers. The only powers of importance that the GLC exercises today without borough co-operation are the fire service, waste disposal, land drainage and building control—not for the whole of London; just for Inner London.

I applaud the Government's decision. Having decided to abolish the GLC, what do we do about elections in May 1985, which will be less than 12 months before abolition, should the House so decide? There are three choices. The first is to let the elections go ahead.

I understand entirely why some Labour Members relished the thought of elections going ahead, but I am surprised that they still take that view after Labour's miserable showing in the four by-elections that took place. Those who say that the elections should go ahead, to be regarded as some form of referendum, are doing as much damage to our constitution and the House as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield seemed to believe that the GLC's abolition would do to Britain's peace and tranquility. Quite apart from the cost and the fact that councillors would have been in office for less than a year, there are precedents to support the Government's position. In 1963-64, for example, local elections were cancelled with the reorganisation of local government.

Mr. Sidney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Surely the essence of the argument is that the House has not yet decided to abolish the GLC. The hon. Gentleman should address his mind to that.

Mr. Shelton: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say "should the House so decide" to abolish the GLC. If he checks *Hansard*, he will find that I said that.

One of the benefits of a good Government is that it plans ahead. This motion is another example of a good Conservative Government planning what should happen in a year's time or two years' time. The Opposition should welcome this demonstration of careful planning.

The first possibility was to let elections take place. The second was to extend the term of the present councillors. The third was to install a provisional council formed by members of the borough councils. Initially, the Government recommended the third plan. It is a sign of the Government's flexibility and genuine readiness to engage in consultation that they changed their plan and took the second course.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is my hon. Friend not under-rating somewhat an event that took place not so very far from this place?

Mr. Shelton: I accept that it is difficult for Labour Members to realise that the Government are prepared to consult. I remind them that they did so on the composition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend please acknowledge that there was an element of force majeure in what the Government had to do in that the other place decided contrary to what Her Majesty's Government intended?

Mr. Shelton: I remind my hon. Friend that the Government's decision on ILEA reflected pure, voluntary good will. It had been decided that ILEA should be a joint board of borough councillors. That was known as the Marshall solution, following the recommendations of the Marshall inquiry. However, they changed their mind to go along with majority feeling and decided that there should be direct elections. This new election should reassure Labour Members that the franchise is not being eroded.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Gentleman will surely remember that the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that he reinstated ILEA because of the overwhelming feeling on the issue and the arguments. It was not a matter of good will. The right hon. Gentleman said that the reinstatement was due to the convincing nature of the arguments for taking that course. Why does the same test not apply on this issue? The feeling is similar and the arguments against the Government's policy are equally overwhelming.

Mr. Wilkinson: We have not had the arguments.

Mr. Shelton: As my hon. Friend says, we have not had the arguments. I confess that, on balance, I favoured a joint board. I was wrong, and I believe that the Government were right to change their mind. I think that it is right to have direct elections. I have some doubts about having a single-purpose elected local authority, because there will not be the necessary conflict between competing claims for funds as, for example, in local government and central Government, and there may be some difficulty as a result. I look forward to the ILEA elections. I wish that they would take place in 1985 rather than 1986. I do not like the transition period. However, I am afraid that it is inevitable. There is little or no way of getting the measure through without that transition period.

It is time that I gave way to allow other hon. Members to participate in the debate. I support the order, because it is right. When we look back in five or 10 years the Government's decision will be vindicated. For some 15 years, I have thought that the GLC should be abolished, and I am glad to vote for this measure.

11.31 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): The major objection to the order——

Mr. Robert C. Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I certainly would not dare to suggest that I should insist on the right of any hon. Member to be called, but I draw your attention to this fact: if we include the Front Bench speakers and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), who has just been called, so

[Mr. Robert C. Brown]

far in this debate five London Members and one provincial Member—my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) — will have been called. Hon. Members representing the Tyne and Wear county council area, Merseyside and other metropolitan county council areas are present. I suggest seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that those hon. Members will feel a sense of outrage if this continues to be a London debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am sharply aware of the hon. Member's point. Obviously I must take many factors into account in determining which hon. Members I should call. I shall, of course, bear in mind the hon. Member's comments.

Mr. Cartwright: The major objection to the order is that it abolishes elections to authorities that Parliament has not yet decided to abolish. The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) may regard that as planning ahead; I think that most people would regard it as total arrogance.

The fact is that this order was not planned all that far ahead. We all know that we are debating this order because of the actions of the other place, where last summer the Government moved an amendment to the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill producing this affirmative order procedure. They did so under pressure of criticism that they were abolishing elections even before a Second Reading debate in this House. When the amendment from the other place was debated in this House on 30 July this year, only the alliance and our occasional allies, the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox) voted against the amendment; the official Labour party abstained.

The reasons for the alliance's decision to vote against the affirmative order procedure to abolish elections were outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who criticised that procedure which allowed no amendment. My hon. Friend quoted the case of Conservative Members who supported the principle of abolition, but believed that the Government would make a mess of the drafting of the Bill, which clearly they have done. My hon. Friend said that such hon. Members might

"suggest that there are particular and detailed objections to the Bill that arise not from total opposition to its intentions and basic provisions."

My hon. Friend said that those hon. Members might not wish at that time to approve the order. He went on:

"I do not want this to come as a surprise to those people, which is why I underline it now. They will find that there is nothing that they can do to the commencement order."—[*Official Report*, 30 July 1984; Vol. 65, c. 39.]

That is one of our objections to the procedure. There is no room for amendment — no opportunity for hon. Members who have reservations about the abolition Bill to amend the Bill.

The House is being asked to agree a procedure over which it has virtually no power. There are hon. Members, including those on the Conservative Back Benches, who may wish to amend the abolition Bill in a variety of ways. Some of them have already put their names to substantive amendments which will be debated on Wednesday and Thursday. At present there is no way in which any of us can be sure what form the abolition Bill will finally take.

There is an amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and some of his hon. Friends which calls for a new scaled-down authority to replace the GLC. If that amendment is passed, or receives substantial support, which leads to a modification of the Minister's plans, or if a similar amendment is carried in another place some months hence, then the Bill with which we shall have to deal will be different from the one with which we are now concerned.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) rightly reminded us that one only has to remember the saga of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill 1984. It started life as one type of Bill but ended up as a different type. The Bill that left this House on 22 May was designed to cancel elections and set up interim bodies. It had one minor financial clause only. The Bill which returned to this House from the other place on 30 July had a different purpose — to extend the life of the councils and to introduce major financial restrictions on their autonomy. The Bill was changed out of all recognition. The Bill accepted by the House of Commons on Second Reading was different from the Bill which was finally enacted. On that basis, none of us can be sure of the final form of the Local Government Act.

It is, in my judgment, wrong and arrogant for the Government to seek to force through the order tonight. It should be left until after clause 1 has been debated on Wednesday and Thursday.

I do not often these days agree with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), but I agree with him when he says that the order will lead to the biggest reduction in the franchise since 1832. Every previous Bill enacted in the House dealing with elections has extended the franchise or left it the same, all the way through from the great Reform Bill 1832 until the Bill given a Second Reading today which extends the franchise to those people who are on holiday and those resident overseas.

It is ironic that on the day on which the House of Commons has agreed, in principle, to extend the franchise to 500,000 more people it should go on to be asked to approve an order which deprives 40 per cent. of the electorate of their right to vote in next May's county council elections. That would not be so bad if the other 60 per cent. of the electorate also lost that power, because it would be a move to one-tier local government throughout the country. It would not be a reduction of democracy but a consolidation of two votes into one.

It would not be so bad if the bodies which were to take over the functions of the GLC and the metropolitan counties were all elected. No one will directly elect the London fire and civil defence boards; no one will vote in the election of the London Planning Commission; no votes will be cast in the election of joint boards for waste disposal, although all those bodies are taking powers away from a directly elected body in London. On the same basis, no one will vote for joint boards for police, fire and transport which will remove many of the functions of the directly elected metropolitan county councils.

The order will deprive a large section of the population of its vote. Electors in London and the metropolitan counties will not have a vote on 2 May 1985 even though electors outside those areas will be voting for authorities that provide many similar services.

The order will also have an effect on councillors who were elected in 1981 for a four-year term. There are likely to be by-elections next May, not for the political reasons

that caused the by-elections in Grater London, but because people who were elected for four years have planned their lives on that basis and did not expect and should not be ecpected to carry on for a further year.

If the Government believe what they say—that there is genuine public support for their abolition plans—they should let the elections go ahead. They should put their fate in the ballot box and allow a new Greater London council and new metropolitan county councils to be elected. That would be much better than trying to coerce existing members to continue in office. The order is a shabby measure with the smell of gerrymandering about it. We shall vote against it.

11.39 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): When one listens to a lesson in history from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) one has the impression that history itself is speaking. One of the sad things about the order is that it has given him a degree of credibility that he would not have had if we were not seeking to pass this somewhat shabby and disreputable measure.

I believe that this will constitute an unhappy precedent for our party. It would have been better and wiser to secure the enactment of the Local Government Bill first and then to take the necessary steps to abrogate the Greater London Council elections. That would have been the correct and wise chronology. I fear that the legislation on which we are embarked and which is to be debated on Wednesday and Thursday will prove as unhappy an experience for the Conservative Government as the devolution Bill proved for the Labour Government. That is not the subject of this debate, but it is indeed an unhappy measure.

I also believe that the road to political condemnation is paved with the consciences of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I did not vote against the paving Bill, but now —unlike then—we know what the Local Government Bill contains. We know that it arrogates even more centralised power to the Secretary of State and that it will lead to the creation and proliferation of quangos, joint boards and other bodies on which borough councillors will serve although they were not elected to do so and may not have the necessary time or qualifications. But that is for another day.

I suspect that the Government, with their very big majority, may succeed in laying the body politic of the Greater London council to rest, but I fear that its spectre will rise to haunt us. In the future, anything that goes wrong with London's governance will be laid at our door and if the Labour party ever returns to power — unfortunately, these things sometimes happen—it may use this precedent to do away with elections of far greater import than those due to take place next spring.

Mr. Tony Banks: We are democrats.

Mr. Wilkinson: Labour Members may shake their heads now, and I am glad that they do, but I suspect that my fear may well prove to be justified.

Many Members of this House would have the other place do our work for us. That has been a growing tendency of this Parliament, but I shall not resort to it. If my conscience dictates on behalf of my constituents that the amendment of the coming legislation requires a vigorous and critical approach I shall pursue such an approach, and if I judge this order to be unworthy I shall act accordingly. My action today will be to abstain because I do not believe that the measure merits passage.

11.44 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I oppose the order for the cancellation of the 1985 elections for the GLC and metropolitan county councils. My theme will be similar to that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). Any remarks that I may make about Conservative Members should be understood not to include the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). The hon. Gentleman will understand why.

The order is one more step on the road to dictatorship. Centralisation is now on its way, and dictatorship will certainly follow. This is a time when much frustration is being caused because an insensitive Government do not understand the problems of the provinces or the inner cities, or the pressures of unemployment. At such a time, the Government are bringing in even more legislation to curtail the freedom of the individual. The nation is already divided. Trade union legislation is crushing the fundamental rights of trade unionists to defend and represent themselves. Millions face unemployment for the rest of their lives. The arm of the law is used to suppress democratic rights and to do the dirty work of central Government. The Government are continuing to remove any opposition to their views, and putting pressure on people by imprisonment, various forms of restriction, bankruptcy and force. The Government are now taking the final step—the removal of the right to vote. That is why I oppose the order, and that is why there is so much frustration and despair in the country.

Why do the Government not address themselves to the real issues and evils of the present day? Why do they not try to stop the rot in our industries? Why do they not try to bring back hope to those in despair? Why do they not use the good offices of local government, which not only upholds local democracy but contributes directly through services, the stimulation of jobs, care and understanding. When there are so many problems everywhere, why, instead of helping people and using the good offices of local government, do the Government remove the one element that clearly has served its purpose very well?

No one says that the system is perfect. No one says that there is no room for change. What the people say is, "For God's sake, do not remove the one area of democratic control where we can make ourselves heard through the ballot box." If the people do not like something, they can remove it. That is not a job for central Government. That is what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield was saying.

Governments can change things, but they should not remove something just because it happens to be a thorn in their side and obstructs policies that the people recognise as insensitive. Sooner or later, the price must be paid.

Why not use central Government to stimulate the economy to protect freedom, and to allow local people to have their say through the ballot box?

I have been worried by some of the comments made by Tory Ministers and Back Benchers. They talk about democracy. They may think that by defending the Government they are defending democracy. I suggest that they are betraying democracy, and that it is time that they had the guts to stand up and fight.

11.49 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): It is perhaps not unusual that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown) should forget that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has had a provincial reincarnation and that his speech was not relevant to the debate. It was much more a repetition of the farrago of words that we have had during the past few months, based on the unreal world in which he dwells. His speech had little or nothing to do with local government or the order.

I am a realist and I know that the Bill will pass through this House and another place [*Interruption.*] It will do so for two reasons. First, the Bill was in our general election manifesto.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you remind the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) that we are discussing an order and not a Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will relate his remarks to the order.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I have done so, but it was difficult with the noise of Opposition Members, for you to hear that the order arises out of the Bill.

Hon. Members: No, it does not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House has dealt with the Bill. We are now dealing with the order.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: As I said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said three times that the order arises because the House has given the Bill a Second Reading. The order and the Bill—the two are inseparably linked, but I shall speak merely about the order — will pass through both Houses because there is a principle, which has been enshrined for many years in another place, that legislation which appears in a party's manifesto is not blocked by another place. That happened several times when there was a Conservative majority in another place —which there is not now—and a Labour Government.

There is one advantage in the extra year that will result from the order and the extension of the term of office of members of the GLC—we shall have more time to see Mr. Livingstone in action. We shall have more time to hear him join his allies, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Sinn Fein, and give him more time perhaps to apoligise for having called Jews Fascists. His calling the Board of Deputies of British Jewry Fascist is the biggest racial insult that I have heard during my public life. [HON. MEMBERS: "When did he do that?"] In an interview on Monday 10 December. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will refer that speech to his national executive and call for the expulsion of that member for such language.

I have dealt with the reality and shall now deal with what the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said. He said that there are significant numbers of Conservative Members who might not support the order or the Bill. He made a mistake. There might be a number of significant Members, but there is not a significant number of Members. Many who have said that they do not like the order will recall that they said that they wanted to abolish the GLC in their manifestos. As this order flows from it, it is important to recognise that fact.

Mr. Wilkinson: Would my hon. Friend agree that there need be no conflict between a desire to abolish the GLC and an equal wish to see an appropriate, directly elected, slimmed-down body in its place and that it is perfectly reasonable to oppose this order since it pre-empts the will of Parliament? It is that which sticks in most people's craws, to use that most unparliamentary expression.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend is entitled to his view. I merely recall that the democratically elected council in the area he serves has specifically called not merely for abolition but for no directly elected body to replace it. That is the view of most people who follow these matters very carefully.

Mr. Corbyn: While the hon. Member is dwelling on this point, would he care to tell the House what the member of the Greater London council and the Inner London education authority from Hampstead thinks about the abolition Bill and the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I said when I spoke on Second Reading, and I repeat it in the context of the order, that Mr. Alan Greengross is wholly and totally committed to the abolition of the Greater London council, as stated in the election manifesto. That is a fact that I have reconfirmed with him, following the intervention of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) last week.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Not again, no. In 1967 elections were due for the London borough councils. It was the Labour party, supported by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, then representing Bristol, South-East, who postponed those elections for one year — and postoned them very clearly for political advantage. On this occasion the order we are being asked to pass is being put forward because it would be the height of stupidity to have an election for the very limited period for which electors would be asked to vote. We need to realise that, even with £10 million worth of propaganda, four phoney GLC by-elections got under 30 per cent. of the voters out to vote. I recall also——

Mr. Tony Banks: Could I inform the hon. Member that the amount of money that the GLC has spent so far in this financial year on its advertising programme is not £10 million but £4·8 million. Last year it was £1·4 million. The projection for next year is £1·2 million. Could we have correct figures?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: We have the figure of £10 million directly and indirectly spent on political propaganda, including phoney adverts by an organisation called GLEB. May I remind the House that at the general election in 1979 my opponent was a certain Mr. Kenneth Livingstone and that he was seen off from Hampstead. My opponent in 1983 was a certain Mr. McDonnell, and he was seen off from Hampstead, too. I appreciate that there are many problems connected with local government outside London and I am sure we shall hear more about them during the debate this evening on the order. I am sure that the House would not expect me to talk about the problems of areas such as the Socialist republic of south Yorkshire. That can be well done by Labour Members.

We are being asked today to act in a sense of realism. The Bill has been given its Second Reading and has therefore properly persuaded my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to bring forward the order. He clearly does not intend to put all the electors of Greater London and the six metropolitan counties through the farce of an election. It does not matter if the political parties have to spend their money, but why should the ratepayers have to spend money on elections for a period so short as to be meaningless.

My right hon. Friend is right. The general public, who have begun to see through the barrage of propaganda, now realise that the organisations for which they were being asked to vote have no real functions and no real purpose. Conservative-controlled local councils throughout London, all of which, without exception, have said that they want abolition, all of which want the powers as rapidly as possible, and none of which want a directly elected replacement, are right, and my right hon. Friend is right, to ask for the order to be passed tonight.

12.1 am

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): It is fair to say that the House is getting used to seeing constitutional monstrosities coming before it, as the Government, with their enormous majority, tread down elected representatives of the people on both sides of the Chamber.

Tonight's measure can only be described as a constitutional outrage, a constitutional obscenity, a constitutional disgrace or a constitutional scandal. No matter how hard Ministers try to tart up this tatty order —I have no doubt that the Minister will do that when he replies—there is no way that the Minister or any Conservative Member can deny that tonight we are embarking on a serious precendent. As the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) so rightly said, it is a dangerous precedent that the Government may well come to regret, although not for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman suggested.

The Government cannot deny that no Administration has ever had cause to deprive the British people, or a major part of it, of what is in any language their inalienable democratic right to vote for an administration of their choice through the ballot box at a local election, which would have been in May next year, without a major Bill already on the statute book, and included in the Bill the reason for the abolition or postponement of an election.

Let no one forget that, had it not been for the action of their Lordships in the other place, my constituents in Newcastle upon Tyne, North would have been ruled until 1986 by nominated Tory councillors, or, to be fastidiously correct, by councillors nominated by a Tory Minister. Indeed, as things stand, a major part of Britain's electors is to be lumbered with an administration which it may or may not wish to continue in office for a further year. Only the ballot box could determine the true wishes of the electorate in Greater London and the metropolitan county councils.

The Secretary of State has waxed eloquently about the months of discussion in committees in the Tory party prior to the general election last year, when this issue became an election manifesto commitment. I find it extremely difficult to believe that the major issue in this Parliament —and the Minister must concede that—should find a place in the manifesto nine days after the election was declared. Are we to believe a former Tory Prime Minister? I am sure that no one in the House would be so unworthy as to suggest that the word of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) should be doubted. If we believe him, this pledge was thrust into the manifesto after the election was declared. It is difficult to believe that a major Government commitment was not in the draft manifesto long before the election was declared. In any event, without wishing to be offensive to any of the Tory Front Bench, I would prefer to accept the word of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup than that of anyone sitting on the Treasury Bench.

There is no valid reason for the abolition of the Tyne and Wear county council other than sheer, unadulterated political spite. The electors of Tyne and Wear will not take kindly to having their democratic rights nicked, stolen —call it what we may—for any reason other than that they have persisted in voting Labour since a previous Tory Government gave birth to the metropolitan county councils.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood referred to the dangerous precedent of the abolition of elections. He suggested that a future Labour Government might use this dangerous precedent to abolish general elections. Perish the unworthy thought of the hon. Gentleman. However, that thought had not escaped my mind. Several months ago I wrote to the Secretary of State protesting about the proposal. In a lengthy letter I posed the question of the evils of the abolition Bill. I asked what guarantee had the electorate that in 1988, with a Tory Government who were so desperately unpopular that they would clearly lose the election, they would not use their massive majority to push through a Bill to postpone the general election using the argument that they would be saving the country from a dangerous Marxist Labour authority.

12.8 am

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): There is a rumour that the Government will distribute an official Christmas present this year. Labour Members do not believe it because we all know that they are too mean. However, the rumour is that it will be a deck of playing cards made out of sandpaper for all the people to whom they have given a rough deal. That means all those in London and the metropolitan counties who have had their votes taken away.

This order is all about dogma before democracy. The Government are so obsessed with their dogma of cuts, and their political vendetta against local authorities and the GLC, that they are prepared to abolish elections to further that obsession. The Government are increasing public spending in several areas—for example, on Trident, and the waste there, Fortress Falklands, the British Telecom City bonanza, the cost of the coal industry strike, which they have described as a worthwhile investment, and the dole money paid under their unemployment strategy. They are spending public money when it suits them and wasting it when it suits them. However, the wastage has to be paid for through cuts in social services, education, housing and other factors in local authority budgets. Then they have the nerve to say that there is no alternative. That is absolutely ludicrous when the priorities are put side by side.

There is also the Government's political vendetta. They have become obsessed against Ken Livingstone at the GLC and now against the rate-capped Labour local authorities. It is because those Labour authorities are

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

showing that there is an alternative to dismal, doleful Toryism. They have sought to match their public services to local needs. They have promoted economic development and job creation, and employed community policies that are both popular and relevant in their areas. With such programmes, those councils would be re-elected with massive majorities if they were allowed to go to the electorate. Hence the Government are coming forward with the order to abolish them and the elections.

Last week we debated the Local Government Bill. Conservative Members were wrestling with their consciences on the matter of their mandate. Listening to them was like being an intruder on their private grief. Of course, it was a mess all of their own making. It is exactly what happens when an authoritarian petty tyrant writes in a commitment on a whim. The right hon. Lady the Prime Minister did that to avoid any real commitment to tackling unemployment.

Manifesto commitments are not to be taken lightly. The Government will be condemned if they break their commitment. They should not promise what they cannot deliver or what has not been properly thought out. They will be condemned much more if they implement that commitment, particularly in the Local Government Bill. During the general election, at no stage did they say what the alternative to the GLC and the metropolitan counties would be or that they would abolish the elections and people's right to vote for their own regional and city governments.

If the Government push ahead with that manifesto commitment—so called—their manifesto will have to be rewritten, certainly for the next election. If they do not do it, we shall have to do it for them. Perhaps we shall have what can be described only as an honesty manifesto—for example, that the Conservatives are for creeping centralisation. That is actually being quite charitable, considering the reserve powers of the Secretary of State. A plethora of clauses give him powers. Clause 93 is a classic, giving him the power to do anything that he wants that he regards as necessary and expedient. It is a blank cheque.

What has happened to the Prime Minister's famous insert into her conference speeches, that she was protecting the individual from the power of the state. I hope that we shall hear no more of that. What with the Government using the police and the courts against trade unionists and the overwhelming powers that they are taking to themselves in the Bill, it is not creeping centralisation, but much more like galloping centralisation.

The Conservative party will have to say in its honesty manifesto that it is in favour of quangos and more complexity. The previous manifesto was sold to the public on the basis that a Conservative Government would make life simpler, but they have made it about as simple as Einstein's theories. A web of quangos and joint boards will replace directly elected councillors. People will not know where to go and who to see if they have a problem or complaint.

The Conservative party will have to say in its manifesto, "Conservatives put people on the dole." It is the party of unemployment. That would be an automatic inclusion, with unemployment presently running at 4 million; but they even had the cheek to boast in the debate on the Local Government Bill that they would put another 7,100 public servants out of work.

The manifesto would also have to say, "Conservatives waste public money." Last week's Coopers and Lybrand report estimated that the provisions would cost £69 million, which is completely unnecessary expenditure. It will cost ratepayers more as the quangos determine their rate precepts——

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Rubbish.

Mr. Cohen: Those precepts will increase considerably.

On top of all that, an important inclusion in the honesty manifesto will be that, "Conservatives are for diminishing democracy." The order is about abolishing elections. That would be bad enough—indeed, it is diabolical—but they are doing it on a partial, biased basis. They are doing it on a party-political basis, because only Labour-controlled authorities will be abolished, not Tory-controlled shire county councils. It will also be remembered that the Government tried to gerrymander the House on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill. First, they tried to ensure that they obtained a Tory majority in the borough nominations; they even floated the idea of London Members of Parliament being involved. They were all temporary devices to ensure that they had a majority.

However, the Secretary of State has gone beyond that and taken the powers unto himself. From an answer to a parliamentary question that I put down, I learnt that his powers will extend to deciding whether the GLC can buy teabags.

The abolition of the elections is massively unpopular; the opinion polls show that more than 70 per cent. of Londoners are opposed to it. During the consultations on "Streamlining the Cities" many people, including Conservatives, spoke against the abolition of elections. They included voluntary organisations, local authorities —not just those involved directly—the staff of local authorities, trade unions, churches, pensioners' organisations, women's organisations, ethnic minorities, housing associations and professional organisations.

Even the arts came out against abolition. If the Government will not take account of those views, they will have to include in their honesty manifesto, "Conservatives are uncaring, undemocratic Philistines."

Mr. Fallon: Rubbish.

Mr. Cohen: As a result of this order and the Local Government Bill, London will be the only capital city in the Western world without its own directly elected, city-wide government, and it has been shown overwhelmingly that Londoners do not want that. The Conservative honesty manifesto will not win many votes, but it is the truth and——

Mr. Fallon: Rubbish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) is not helping our proceedings by keeping up a running commentary of abuse. I hope that he will desist.

Mr. Cohen: I was on my last sentence, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Government's honesty manifesto will not win many votes, but it is the truth, and the Minister knows it.

12.20 am

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Much has been made by the Government Front Bench of precedents for the abandonment of elections, but for two years after the passage of the Local Government Act 1972 there existed not one set of elected councils, but three. There were the old county borough councils, which were going out of existence, there were the district councils elected in 1973, and the metropolitan county councils. Now for most of the country, the reality will be no local elections for 1985.

The Government wish to avoid elections as much as possible. Despite the hoo-ha about the opinion polls, they know that in much of the country they are very unpopular and would suffer in any local elections. We are being asked to transfer the sort of inner-party autocracy that already exists in the Tory party to the major conurbations. There will be no elections if——

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Is not my hon. Friend a little concerned that, as the debate has developed, Tory Members have left the Chamber——

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I have not.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I have not.

Mr. Fatchett: There is a noticeable improvement on the Tory Benches by the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). However, is not my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) worried that there is not a Tory Member who wishes to make a contribution to support his Government? It is not a problem of Tory Members wrestling with their consciences. They must have decided that they do not support their Government.

Mr. Wareing: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. I appreciate that most of the Tory Members are not here in the Chamber, and those who are present are not all here either. They certainly have nothing to contribute to the debate.

Under this order, there will be no elections. People in the conurbations will not therefore be allowed to determine what transport, police, fire service and economic development policies there will be, because, like the water and health authorities, those services will be run by people who have got their jobs by indirect appointment. There will never be a coherent, clear policy presented to the people in the conurbations. They will not be able to determine what sort of administration they desire.

The reason for all this is simple. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has made it clear that the Labour party thinks that this is a battle for democracy against the autocrats in the Tory Government. Autocracy began inside the Cabinet. The real professionals in the Tory party have been sent on to the Back Benches. Few in the Cabinet now will resist the Prime Minister. It is the Prime Minister's whim that we are debating, and it is her whim that will be debated on successive nights this week when we discuss the Local Government Bill. The essential point is that what the Tory party failed to win in the local elections of 1981, it now seeks to win by silencing opposition the in the metropolitan counties. It has tried everything else.

I notice that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) is no longer in the Chamber, but I understand that he has some interest in Great Universal Stores — the patron saint of the small shopkeeper. That was the organisation that took Merseyside county council to court over its "Fares fair" policy.

Mr. Fallon: I am not surprised.

Mr. Wareing: But the hon. Gentleman may be surprised to know that Great Universal Stores was defeated even in the High Court; and it did not have the courage to go as far as the other place, because, I suggest, it realised that Merseyside county council was performing its fiduciary duty to its ratepayers. Many of them do not have the use of a car and do not live in the luxiourous areas represented by so many Conservative Members. Those people cannot afford the luxury of sitting in a slovenly manner on the Tory Benches——

Sir Ian Percival (Southport) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as the one Conservative Member who actually wants to participate in the debate also rose to his feet. If the Government think that the judges made the wrong decision in the case of Great Universal Stores, might they not start thinking about abolition of the judges' bench?

Mr. Wareing: With this Conservative Government, anything is possible. Their belief in democracy is clearly skin-deep. Even those who reside in Southport on Merseyside now benefit from the fairer fares policy, and that is particularly true of those who are of the age of the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir. I. Percival), who I now see rising to his feet. They have concessionary fares.

Sir. Ian Percival: A moment ago the hon. Gentleman was asked if he could explain why there were so few Conservative Members present. Has it occurred to him that we are sick and tired of hearing the same old claptrap over and over again? He may ask why not more of us want to contribute, but we have made our contributions. We know what is right. I know what is right for the people of Southport and I do not require the hon. Gentleman to tell me. We shall support the Government in the Lobby the minute that we have the chance.

Mr. Wareing: Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I can offer to acquaint the people of Southport, particularly the pensioners, of the debate. The right hon. and learned Gentleman might care to debate with me in Southport, and in front of pensioners, the problems involved in travelling round Merseyside.

Mr. Nigel Spearing: (Newham, South): Is not the more likely explanation of the absence of Conservative Members—including the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir. I. Percival)—that they know that the order has the whiff of totalitarianism about it and that it comes from 10 Downing street?

Mr. Wareing: Yes, a sufficient number of Conservative Members smell—*[Interuption.]*—not only the whiff of totalitarianism but of defeat for the Prime Minister. They want to distance themselves from such policies, which they believe will ultimately lead to the demise of the Conservative party.

The Tories are using the weapon of trade union legislation and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act

[Mr. Wareing]

against the official Opposition because the Government fear the day when our arguments will win accord with the public and sweep them from office. That will happen soon.

The decision on the elections comes before Parliament makes a decision on the main Bill. Assuming that it goes through both Houses unamended, Royal Assent is not likely before next year. Yet the elections, which as a Merseyside county councillor, I would welcome, are to be swept aside. In May 1985 the people who elected me cannot say whether my stewardship has been good or bad. I prefer the people in my ward to make that decision, not the diktat of the Gauleiter of Marsham street. This is a deliberate attempt to prevent opposition.

Conservative Members believe that their consciences will be salved by saying "Well, it was in the manifesto." It was put there by the Prime Minister nine days after the election was declared without any discussion with her policy committee or reference to London Members in her party. Conservative Members are not voting tonight for their manifesto commitment. By refusing elections for the metropolitan counties, they are not ensuring that district councils will take over the services, because on Merseyside only 15 per cent. of expenditure by the Merseyside county council will go to the district councils. The joint boards, the indirectly appointed bodies which have no coherent policy, will take over.

Conservative Members who have any belief in democratic accountability will exercise their right to vote against this intolerable measure which is more akin to Fascism in Spain under Franco than to the democracy on which this House has been built throughout the ages.

12.33 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In future years people may ask what we were doing in 1984, when there was so much unemployment and poverty and when so much money was spent on armaments, discussing the abolition of elections in Greater London and the met counties. Our discussion is not irrelevant to those problems. It is indicative of the Government's attitude to those problems that they are abolishing elections. They are abolishing them because of what many local authorities have been able to achieve. Before coming to the Chamber I was looking at the election address for the 1898 London county council elections. The then Conservative party in London, which said that it was moderate — we have heard about that before — was campaigning for the abolition of the London county council because it did not like the direct works department, the attempts to clear away the slum landlords, to clean up the Thames, to introduce a proper fire service and all the other things upon which Londoners now depend for a decent life.

Ever since those days the Conservative party has been opposed to the principle of a Londonwide elected authority. The Government are using their majority to force through this squalid order to destroy the right of Londoners and those in the metropolitan counties to vote for a local authority. If anyone imagines that the day after the local authorities are abolished consequent upon the order he will be able to influence decisions, let him bear in mind the quangos and the problems associated with them. If anyone in my constituency has a housing problem or any problem connected with the local authority or the GLC, he can see an elected representative, take up the matter and possibly obtain satisfactory, or possibly not. He can vote to remove that person from office if he wishes to do so. Let him try to do the same to representatives of the gas board, the electricity board, the Thames water authority or even the health authorities. Democracy is to be removed from many vital services.

Conservative participation in the debate about the future of local government and the abolition of elections could well be described as abdication. Conservatives have used their friends in the media to rubbish the idea of democracy. When the four by-elections took place in Greater London in September, the Conservative party did not participate. That was a bit thick, Conservatives having called the leader of the GLC the most hated and most wanted man in Britain. They have said that the Labour administration at County hall is an evil on the face of the earth but they refused the opportunity to participate in the by-elections. Had they won them, they could have gained control of the GLC.

The real reason for the Conservative party's non-participation was fear. It was not prepared to send its supporters to knock on doors to tell the electorate why its vote was being taken away. The Conservative party has still not satisfied anyone in London of its reasons for wishing to destroy the GLC or the metropolitan counties outside London, or take away the right of people to vote. Opinion polls show an increasing level of support for the principle of elected local government and a decreasing level of support for the Government. There are 33 Conservative Members who would lose their seats if an election were to take place on the issue of the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties. They should be well aware of that.

The proposals that we are discussing are indicative of the continuing centralisation of power under an increasingly paranoid Government. Since 1979 they have been systematically removing funding from the inner city areas. They have been systematically trying to control local authority finance. They have been systematically removing powers from local authorities and systematically penalising the poorer areas of the country.

We know that Britain's problems are severe. Against that background, why are the Government afraid of allowing those in the poorest areas to vote? Unemployment rates in London are well above the national average. In my constituency there is 21 per cent. unemployment, which is a common figure for many in London's inner city areas. The Government are denying these people the right to vote. They know that they will vote for a local authority that will try to provide jobs and services to alleviate the hardships that exist within London. They will continue to vote for a GLC, or successor bodies, that will campaign politically to get resources back into the inner city areas and thereby stop the poorest people being stamped down by Conservative Members.

The order is indicative of the Government's contempt for the poor and for democracy. When the order is passed, it should be remembered that a Conservative Member said during the debate that he was concerned that a future Labour Administration might be tempted to use these measures as precedents for further abolition Bills or as reasons for denying elections in other spheres. I have no fears about that. Conservative Members should understand that Opposition Members are members of a democratic party. We are born of democracy, because the Labour

party has fought for it. *[Interruption.]* We have fought for democracy in all places and in all spheres. The order is the beginning of the abolition of other forms of elections. Anyone who organises to oppose the Government is immediately opposed by the Government and their puppets in the media and, eventually, some squalid little Bill is forced through the House late at night. The day of reckoning for the Government will come. Government Members will have a rude awakening if they ever step outside the chamber late at night or during the day—I realise that some have other jobs to do — and test opinion to find out what people really think about being denied the right to vote, and the abolition of the local authorities. They will be surprised to learn of the respect felt by many for what the GLC and metropolitan councils have done in improving planning, fighting for the rights of women and ethnic communities and for industrial jobs, and so on.

The Government may well succeed in forcing this nasty little order through the House and in officially destroying next year's elections—with the ridiculous excuse of the cost of printing ballot papers, when they spend £17 billion on defence. The Government have contempt for democracy and for the poorest people. They will rue the day they passed this order, because they know what will happen to them when the people finally get an opportunity to vote.

12.41 am

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): A number of Opposition Members wish to participate in this debate, so I shall try to limit my remarks to a few minutes.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), who is no longer in the Chamber, asked why we should bother holding elections when those elected will remain in office for only one year. During the past few months, the running theme of our arguments has been that, if the elections are not held, the assumption is that both Houses of Parliament will pass the abolition Bill and that the legislations will receive the Royal Assent. The Opposition believe that it is disgraceful and unacceptable that there will not be elections in 1985.

There was an interesting reaction from Conservative Members when the word "democracy" was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). It is clear that Conservative Members have forgotten what that word means. I think that I am the fifth Opposition Member in succession to speak — the Government ran out of speakers nearly one hour ago, so few are the Conservative Members who desire to defend the order.

Surely the election in 1985 would have given the people an opportunity to decide. We are democratic because we would have been prepared to let the people in the met counties, including Tyne and Wear county of which my constituency is a part, hear the case put by the Conservatives—they are the opposition in my area—and the case for the retention of the Tyne and Wear county council. We would have been prepared to let the people decide what they want. The Conservatives could have put the case about profligate spending, and so on. The people know what the Tyne and Wear county council has done for them in an area of massive unemployment. I could spend some time citing figures, but suffice it to say that the male unemployment rate—even on the Government's fiddled figures—is 22 per cent. and that nearly 50 per cent. of the unemployed in Tyne and Wear have been out of work for more than a year.

If I had been a Conservative Member, I would not have wanted to put my case to the people who have suffered such deprivation for so long, because I would have known that the election result would have been a foregone conclusion. The only word that can express the Government's position is cowardice. The Government were too cowardly to put their case to the people of Tyne and Wear county, the other met counties and the GLC.

Ministers have made great play of the fact that the decision to abolish the GLC and the met counties was contained in the Conservative manifesto. Let me remind the House of what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said about the manifesto;

"they must recognise that a democratic Government still have to justify to the House what they are doing even though proposals were set out in the party's manifesto. No democratic Government have ever been able to say, 'it was in the party's manifesto, so we shall do it.'"—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 191.]

Let us see what that means. The right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) said that he was fed up with hearing the same old claptrap. The claptrap may be coming from the Conservative Benches. Two respected opinion polls have been published—one by MORI for *The Sunday Times*, and one by Harris for *The Observer*. They were published the week after the Government had spent hours and hours presenting their argument to the country. The first opinion poll was taken throughout the country and not just in London and the metropolitan counties. It showed that 46 per cent. of the people were against abolition and only 30 per cent. were in favour.

A by-election is taking place in Enfield, Southgate this week, and an opinion poll has been taken there on the people's attitude to the Government's proposals. The Harris poll found that 47 per cent. of the people were against the Government's proposals and 31 per cent. were in favour of them.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: Conservative Members are not convincing the country with their arguments. The Government's case is not proven. They should drop this order until the abolition Bill has been decided by Parliament.

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: There is still time to have an independent inquiry. Five Opposition Members have wanted to speak but not one Conservative Member has stood up. The Government's case has not been proven and they have no right to expect support in the Lobby on this order.

12.47 am

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): I am driven to speak by the extreme observations of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). This is a serious issue and it is possible for there to be two different points of view. Do not Opposition Members realise that everything that can be said has been said? They may hold their views passionately, but it was a rather sick joke when an Opposition Member said that the Labour party is the democratic party. Does he not remember the time when the Labour Home Secretary was obliged to put forward the Boundary Commission's recommendations which did not suit the Labour party?

Mr. Ernie Roberts (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) *rose*——

Sir Ian Percival: I shall not give way. The Home Secretary was under a statutory duty to propose that the recommendations be adopted and so he laid the order. His party was whipped to vote against it. That is an example of democracy and parliament fighting for it.

The arguments for and against the Government's proposals have been fully rehearsed. It does nothing for Opposition Members to put forward extravagant arguments that have no bearing on the point. Conservative Members have not taken up much of the time of the House this evening because we have made up our minds. We are aware of the arguments. We are convinced that the Government are right and we shall support them.

12.49 am

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): For hundreds of years there have been battles to extend and preserve people's right to vote and the duty to preserve that right is deeply ingrained in all of us. I do not think that anyone in the House, in London or elsewhere would ever have believed that in 1984 Parliament would be called upon to destroy a vote.

In all those battles no group has been so disadvantaged, obliged to fight so hard and held back from voting for so long as women. The women of London are very angry at the taking away of their vote, the cancellation of the elections and the prospect of the Greater London council ceasing to exist. The GLC has given women a voice in London—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come off it!"] It is no use Conservative Members shaking their heads. They should listen. They do not listen to anyone. The GLC listens to women. *[Interruption.]* There is nothing for hon. Members to laugh about. Let me tell them a story.

The GLC is the successor to the old London county council. Like other hon. Members, I was fascinated to read the record of the first election to the LCC, written by the record keeper to the council and entitled, "Sexism and the first London County Council election, 1889". At that time women did not have the vote and it was a matter of contention whether they could stand for election. Indeed, it was another 20 years before they obtained the right to stand for Parliament. In the end, however, three women stood for the first LCC election and two were elected—Lady Sandhurst, who was returned for one of the two Brixton constituencies, and Miss Jane Cobden, daughter of the famous Richard Cobden, who won one of the two seats for Bromley and Bow.

When the two ladies took their seats at county hall the council seemed determined to reinforce the feminist view that had come into the council chamber and as well as welcoming the two women members they took the very progressive step of electing an alderman who was a woman to make a women's triumvirate in the chamber. Those women were scarcely a threat to local government democracy, but they were vulnerable because they were not masculine. The person who had stood against Lady Sandhurst in the election challenged her right to her seat, took the case to the High Court and won. Although the women retained their seats they were not allowed to vote or to speak, so they sat it out, unable to do any more than to attend council meetings. Finally, they got fed up with that and decided to speak and to vote. They were then challenged yet again, someone else took them to the High Court and they lost.

The anger throughout London and in the council itself, however, was such that campaigns were pursued until those women and others after them were able to take their seats and to vote in the council chamber. Those battles have been won. Women in London today are determined that the battle for the GLC shall be won as well. That is what we are discussing this evening.

Much has been said in the debate about the Tory manifesto. One woman said to me the other day that she found it strange that, although our Prime Minister is a woman, there was no woman's perspective in the manifesto. As far as the women of London are concerned, the Prime Minister has not contributed a woman's perspective. All her policies, including the abolition of these elections and perhaps of the GLC, tend to disadvantage women and to cut them off from services that have been of enormous benefit to them.

Many women may well have voted for the Prime Minister and the Tory Government at the last general election. Very many of them will be thinking again about what they should do at the next general election. Indeed, many of them are wondering whether the Government will go on to abolish the next general election as well.

12.56 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The time of night—or early morning—chosen to discuss an order such as this is of crucial importance. The Government must be hoping that their proposals will receive as little publicity as possible.

By their failure to speak in the debate, Conservative Members have shown that they do not wish to be associated with the proposal—or, perhaps, that they cannot summon up adequate arguments to support their own Government.

It is appropriate that we should be discussing the order at such a time, because our democratic rights are being stolen from us. The Government, like a thief in the night, are taking away the democratic rights of Londoners and of people in other areas.

There has been another interesting feature of today's proceedings in Parliament. Earlier, we discussed the Representation of the People Bill, which proposes certain extensions—as the Government see it—to the franchise. Now, however, we are discussing an order that will take the vote away from 18 million people. The Government say that there are other opportunities to vote.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) said that only one vote is being taken away from the people of London. He should reflect on the fact that in the shire counties people have opportunities to vote in parish, district, shire county and general elections. In outer London constituencies, such as mine, we will, if the order is passed have only two opportunities to vote—in borough council and general elections. We have only two opportunities to vote, whereas in the shire counties there are four.

How many more proposals will the Government make, saying that voting is inappropriate and too expensive and that people must therefore lose their right to vote? The order will deprive London of 95 years of voting for city-wide government. This is a squalid little measure from a squalid little Government who will get their come-uppance in the local government elections in 1986.

12.58 am

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Only eight months ago, the Secretary of State advised the House, with all the conviction that he alone can command, of the merits of his Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill, which at that stage not only abolished the 1985 elections but replaced the authorities by nominated bodies, thus transferring political power without elections.

We would do well to remember that this debate is taking place only because the Government have suffered abject humiliation at the hands of the House, another place and the British people. There would not have been the same pressure if it had not been for the fact that representatives here have woken up the deep unpopularity of the measures that the Secretary of State and his colleagues have advanced. None of these recommendations would have been accepted in April if only Conservative Members had bothered to listen to the arguments and to study the issues. Instead, as we have seen again today, the Government do not bother to consult their Back Benchers. That is no wonder, because they are not worthy of consultation. The Government know that almost anything that they present, unless it directly affects the pockets of wealthy voters, will be supported by Conservative Members, who will jump up and read Conservative research department briefings and troop through the Lobby behind the Government.

When he seconded the motion on the Loyal Address on 15 May 1979, the Minister for Local Government said:

"it is difficult to find that narrow strip of land that lies between rebellion and sycophancy."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 57.]

Far too many Conservative Members have found it too difficult today.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): It is called the art of politics.

Mr. Straw: Is it? I know that the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) once thought that the future of his political career lay in rebellion. He obviously now thinks that it lies in——

Mr. Tony Banks: He has got a Parliamentary Private Secretary's job now.

Mr. Straw: I am not sure that he has got a Parliamentary Private Secretary's job. Has he? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Maybe——

Mr. Tony Banks: He gets money for it.

Mr. Straw: I learnt only tonight that the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) has wisely decided not to continue as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Paymaster General. Perhaps the hon. Member for South Ribble has taken that job.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): My hon. Friend may care to note that the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), whose principal responsibility at the moment is as a Parliamentary Private Secretary on the Films Bill, has admitted to the Committee that he has not been to the cinema for some six or seven years? That is the extent of his competence and knowledge.

Mr. Straw: I do not think that there are any cinemas in his constituency.

There was little justification for this measure when it was first introduced and then amended, but there is now even less justification for abolishing the elections. The first reason, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, is that we now know that the manifesto commitment that was presented to the British people lacked all legitimacy. It is claimed by none other than the Prime Minister—I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to savour these words—that the Conservative party

"can reasonably claim to be the leading democratic party in the world."

It is a modest claim in a modest speech—her Carlton Club lecture which was given last week. We all enjoy the spectacle of the Conservative party, flexible as ever, as the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) told us, fighting for years—in some cases centuries—against a major principle, such as democracy, as it did until Disraeli persuaded it that democracy might be in its interests. We now see what has happened to him. The Prime Minister wants to go back to Lord North. It is fascinating to us, who are members of what we believe to be a party of principles, however inconvenient they might sometimes be, to watch the flexibility of the Tory party fighting democracy. The democrat used to be a term of abuse used by Tories. Now Tories suggest that they are in favour of democracy and that the Conservative party is the most democratic party in the world. If so, I ask the Minister, how, in an internally democratic party, can a commitment find its way into the manifesto against the wishes of the party policy committee? I assume that, if it is a democratic party, it has a constitution and that there are votes. The right hon. Gentleman must answer that question.

If the Tory party practised what it preaches about democracy—I am interested to find that evidently it does not—plainly that commitment was railroaded into the manifesto against the wishes of the party as a whole and it lacks any legitimacy either in the country or in the Conservative party.

The second reason why there is even less justification for this measure which abolishes elections to precede the abolition of the authorities is the evidence which has emerged about the cost of this farrago of proposals. We have all noted that the Government have gone very coy indeed about their claim that £120 million is to be saved from the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan authorities. I am glad that they have. The message has not quite reached some of their hon. Friends. I took part in a radio interview with the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who claimed that as a result of this change 9,000 bureaucrats would go. It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman believes that all of these savings will come from savings in administration. If that is so, the metropolitan counties would have to save £50 million from administration. The metropolitan counties spent only £47 million upon the administrative costs of all their services. In order to achieve those administrative savings, those services would almost have to be wiped out.

However, since those wild claims were made and since our debates last week there has been the fascinating story in the *Financial Times*—not denied, not even commented upon tonight by Ministers—that to dismantle the GLC and London's capital fund could add £750 million to public borrowing. The article was written by Mr. Robin Pauley, who was so derided by the Secretary of State during the proceedings on the Rates Bill for his, Mr. Pauley's, leaks from the Treasury that the Rates Bill would

[Mr. Straw]

cost £900 million. Mr. Pauley proved to be entirely accurate on that occasion, as he will on this, since his information is impeccable. I hope that when the right hon. Gentleman winds up the debate he will tell us a little more about the Treasury's briefing of the *Financial Times:* that the abolition of the GLC will add £750 million to public borrowing. Had that been anticipated by the Prime Minister when she forced that commitment into the manifesto, I do not believe the Government would have gone ahead with the legislation.

The third reason why there is even less justification for this measure than there was is the personality of the Minister for Local Government who apparently has the principal responsibility for piloting this measure through the House. As we heard last week, his claims that he had always been in favour of the abolition of the GLC ever since the early 1960s were not entirely accurate. What the right hon. Gentleman told this House on 18 March 1971 bears repeating. Indeed, it should be repeated daily. We must not forget that he told the country only recently that he had always been opposed to the abolition of the GLC ever since the 1960s. His exact words were:

"I believe and have always believed in the abolition of the GLC, consistently since I represented London back in the 1960s".

He said on 18 March 1971 when moving the Second Reading of the Greater London Council Bill:

"It"——

the GLC—

"has progressive and expanding programmes, it is making life better for Londoners, and it will make it infinitely better for Londoners in the 1970s and the 1980s".—[*Official Report,* 18 March 1971; Vol. 813, c. 1741.]

We let the Minister off rather lightly last Tuesday. The right hon. Gentleman owes the House and the country an apology for deliberately misleading them about the position he took on the GLC during the 1960s and 1970s. He said on the radio that he had always supported the abolition of the GLC. That is utterly inconsistent with speech after speech that he has made in the House. I now offer the right hon. Gentleman the chance to set the record straight.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: If we cannot have the organ grinder, let us have the monkey.

Mr. Dickens: It takes a gorilla to know a monkey. May I say, in defence of my right hon. Friend, that when I first came into the House in 1979 I introduced a ten-minute Bill to abolish the metropolitan county councils, and my right hon. Friend was most supportive.

Mr. Straw: I regret to tell the hon. Gentleman that although he may think that the world revolves around him, I was talking about his right hon Friend's record. If the Minister did support the abolition of the GLC throughout the 1960s and 1970s, how did he manage to write that now notorious pamphlet and make so many speeches in the House? I hope that at some stage he will have the courage and guts to explain to the House the problems that he now faces.

We have heard the many forebodings of my hon. Friends about where the anti-democratic actions of the Government are likely to lead. I share many of them. Let me read to the house a report that appeared in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* on 24 December 1983 on the Lancashire county council's proposal to abolish the metropolitan county councils. A county councillor told the policy resources committee that she foresaw a day when elected representatives would be "not worth a fig". She said:

"Will the shire counties be next in their place? Will we have Government sponsored people on district councils to put them on the right lines? How long will it be before we have 1984 when elected representatives are not worth a fig? I see this day coming and I am fearful."

That comes not from a Labour councillor but from a woman elected as Conservative county councillor for Lancashire.

Ultimately, although we are concerned about services, the order and the Local Government Bill are about democracy. The Government tonight are seeking to fly in the face of democratic principles that they claim to hold dear and the democratic rights of 13 million voters in London and the metropolitan counties. It is a completely disreputable and dishonourable order, and it should be opposed.

1.13 am

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) dips yet again into my voluminous speeches and writings. I have been looking through what he has written and spoken over the past few years. But I must disappoint my hon. Friends because I have not been able to find anything either interesting or memorable.

Let me briefly remind the House of the purpose of the order that we are discussing. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) said that in the paving Bill both Houses of Parliament agreed that it was right to put on the statute book what is now part II of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984—the provision to suspend elections. So the principle was then agreed. However, it was subject to the approval of both honourable Houses by way of an affirmative order, and that is what we are asking the House to agree to tonight.

In effect, both Houses—including the House at the other end of the Corridor—accepted the Government's view that it makes little sense to hold elections to councils which, if Parliament enacts the Local Government Bill, will have only 11 months to run. Never before has a whole council been elected for a term of less than a year. That was the principle agreed in the Bill, although I appreciate that Opposition Members do not accept that.

From the outset the Government made it clear that they would introduce an order instituting part II of the paving Bill, and that that would not be made until the House had approved the main principle of abolition by giving a Second Reading to the Local Government Bill, which it did last week by a majority of 135.

I come now to the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). He made an interesting and important speech, which was echoed by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson). The tenor of his speech was that the struggle for democracy has been long and hard. He said that great advances had been made only by systematic breaking of the law. He listed a great parade of the various advances of democracy.

The right hon. Gentleman's memory was a little selective. It stopped short when he took office. It was a

parade of the Labour party's great crusade of extending democracy. During the first Wilson Government, the Cabinet took action that could not be described as democracy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate said, in 1967 that Government postponed the London borough elections for a year—from 1967 to 1968. It is possible that those elections were postponed because the Labour Government were unpopular, were losing by-elections at Meridon, Dudley and Acton, and therefore it became convenient to postpone them? When it suited the Labour Government, they postponed the elections.

Having learned how to do that, in 1969 the right hon. Gentleman participated in one of the most disgusting pieces of gerrymandering that this House has ever seen. The Labour Government wanted to postpone the boundary revisions of 1969 because they would have abolished a number of small inner London seats. They tried not to introduce the measure, but then introduced a Bill only for London. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman remembers that marvellous episode in the great progress of Labour party democracy. They introduced a Bill to gerrymander London alone. They found themselves in a mess because it involved Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Surrey and all the areas around London. Overcome by shame, they withdrew the Bill and did nothing. The record of the Labour party on democracy is poor.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I am sorry, but I will not give way as I wish to answer the debate.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said in effect that we are introducing the measures because we are frightened of having elections. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman read last week's *New Statesman*. Perhaps it is a little too Right-wing for him. If he had read it, he would have seen an article by Peter Kellner, the political editor, who is one of the most accurate and best commentators upon local government election results. He was analysing the November local government results all over the country, and the article was under the heading:

"Worst council results of Kinnock leadership"

Analysing what happened in November, Mr. Kellner said:

"Labour came third in local council by-elections in November — the party's worst month since Neil Kinnock became leader."

In the month of November, taking all the council and county council by elections——

Mr. Michie: What about the county council elections?

Mr. Baker: I am coming to the county council elections in a moment. The hon. Gentleman should wait for it. Mr. Kellner stated that in all the council elections in November, of all the people who voted, 40·1 per cent. voted Conservative, Alliance 29·9 per cent., and Labour 27·3 per cent. What was interesting was that buried deep in those results was a by-election for a county council that is to be abolished—the West Midlands county council. There was a by-election in Coventry, South West in which the Conservative candidate stood on a ticket to scrap the council. He won with a swing of 4 per cent. and ——

Mr. Michie *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I am sorry, I cannot give way.

The seat that was contested was Coventry, South-West. This is what Mr. Peter Kellner said about Coventry, South-West, which we held with a swing of 4 per cent:

"It is . . . precisely the sort of ward Labour needs to win."

The seat was represented by an old friend of us all Audrey Wise, from 1974 to 1979. Mr. Kellner says:

"Last month's result, however, represents a 4 per cent swing to the Tories".

Therefore, according to the evidence the recent electoral contests that we have had have been shown to be valueless, and we are doing rather well. Let me refer——

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baker: No, I must reply to the debate.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baker: I must reply to the debate.

Mr. Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order.

Mr. Straw: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want it to be placed on record that this Minister was given more time than he asked for, and it is dishonourable of him not to give way. The way that he is behaving is outrageous.

Mr. Baker: I should like to refer to the GLC by-elections. They show the unscrupulous attitude of Opposition Members. Two of the candidates who stood and were re-elected in the stunt by-elections were Mr. McDonnell, the deputy leader of the GLC, and Mr. Ken Little of Edmonton. They were just re-elected in September at the stunt by-elections. But in this week's *London Labour Briefing*, Mr. McDonnell says that all the wet members of the GLC on the Labour side who were not prepared to risk bankruptcy and illegality in setting a rate should stand down and resign their seats and allow the Labour party to replace them

"with a councillor who is willing to stand firm in support of party policy. In my view if any councillor refuses to stand down now and goes on to support compliance and cuts . . . he or she is as much a scab as any miner currently crossing NUM picket lines."

I do not ascribe those views to the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) or Blackburn, but that is what Mr. McDonnell said. He is saying that his colleague who has just been re-elected, Mr. Ken Little, must stand down. Mr. Little has been told that he must obey the caucus, not the people who re-elected him. That shows entirely the attitude of——

Mr. Wareing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that the Minister has very little time in which to reply to the debate——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Baker: The example that I quoted of Mr. McDonnell trying to force out of office one of his elected colleagues shows that Labour's approach to local government in London is not one of concern for the people or for essential services. The hard Left in London has used local government as a platform for its Left-wing dogma and political ambitions, and I wish to use——

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business), and to order [5 December]:—*

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 169.

Division No. 45] **[1.28 am**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'brcke)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mather, Carol
Mellor, David
Needham, Richard
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Proctor, K. Harvey
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles

Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Allen McKay

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985, which was laid before this House on 22nd November, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Social Security

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 15th November, be approved. —*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Greater London Council

1.32 am

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I beg leave to present a petition that has been signed by more than 50,000 women in London. Its purport is to show

That the Government's plan to abolish the Greater London Council and to replace it with non-elected boards, and to cancel the 1985 GLC elections, is an affront to democracy and to the liberties of the people of London;

That the Government's proposals would seriously reduce the quality of public services available to Londoners, and increase the rate burden in most London Boroughs;

That abolition of the GLC would be against the interests of women in London, for these specific reasons.

The reasons are listed in the petition, and include child care projects, employment and training opportunities and other projects of general benefit.

I have great pleasure in presenting this petition. If there had been more time, we would have had more signatures. But it generally reflects the feelings of women and other citizens in our capital.

To lie upon the Table.

Cream Heat Treatment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

1.38 am

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the important subject of the Cream (Heat Treatment) Regulations (Scotland) 1983. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for keeping him at this late hour, but, in view of the importance of the issue, I am sure that he will forgive me.

The regulations came into effect on 18 November 1983, two days after they had been theoretically debated in Parliament. I say "theoretically", because they were only one of 11 measures for debate, and in the subsequent Division they were grouped with nine others. The debate hardly touched on the case for heat treatment for milk, cream and other dairy products. The issue that night was the impact of European UHT milk and the earlier action by the Community which prevented United Kingdom opposition to imports.

That lack of serious consideration has characterised the progress of this and other regulations governing the production, distribution and sale of milk, cream and other dairy products.

The earlier Milk (Special Designation) (Scotland) Order 1980 was brought in without taking into account the implications for the small producers of effectively enforcing the heat treatment of all milk in Scotland. The consequences were understood by the local authorities which had to enforce the regulations. Indeed, some of them spoke out at the time. I understand that about 200 small producers in Scotland have gone out of business as a result of the 1980 order. At least when that order was implemented people had reasonable time to react, since it came into effect in mid-1983.

In a letter from the Scotish Office dated 3 November 1980, it was said that the Government had no plans to extend the requirement for heat treatment to include cream, yoghurt or other milk products. Yet, a little over two and a half years later, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Scotland wrote to 11 organisations indicating its intention to introduce heat treatment for cream.

I understand that the representative of those most likely to be affected, the Small Farmers Association, was not among those consulted. Had it been consulted, objections would have been made and perhaps we should have had second thoughts about the order. No objections were made by any of the organisations. That is not surprising since the regulations eliminate the small, independent producer and benefit the larger producer.

The order came into effect without those most closely affected being consulted or even being aware of its existence. The first that producers of cream in my constituency knew of it was when they were contacted by environmental health officers one month after the order had come into effect explaining their obligations and saying that they should cease selling their cream. That is no criticism of the district council, because it had received little prior notice.

In the circumstances, it is interesting to examine the reasons for justifying this secondary legislation. Salmonella poisoning arising from milk has been a small, if persistent, problem for many years. According to written answers, between 1970 and 1983 the number of outbreaks varied between two and 10 and the number of people affected between 21 and 730. In one year—1971 — no outbreaks were attributable to milk. Over the entire period there were 12 deaths.

The dairy industry's record on food poisoning is such that most other food industries envy it. That includes National Health Service kitchens. It is significant that none of the outbreaks can be traced to cream or other dairy products, as all of them have involved milk.

I have seen no evidence to link even the incidents involving milk with small milk producers with fewer than 20 cows. I am informed that one case was attributed to cream, although parliamentary answers suggest that there has been none. The case involved pasteurised or treated cream, so it does not add to the argument.

Equally significant is that it has not been thought necessary to introduce the same rigorous controls on the sale of cream in England or in Wales. Despite the fact that there is no evidence of salmonella poisoning arising from cream, I received a parliamentary answer from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State giving reasons for the introduction of the regulations which suggested that there was a proven risk to health.

All this might have been understandable in the real world of politics if there had been tremendous public pressure for regulations to be introduced. However, it seems that the Government have not had one representation to suggest that heat treatment regulations should be introduced to cover cream.

The implications are all too obvious. Choice is effectively destroyed for the consumer as an attractive, quality and varied natural product is replaced by a standardised and homogenised mass-produced material which is related more to shaving foam than to cream. Small businesses will be destroyed along with jobs in local communities in favour of large organisations which already have, or can afford, the expensive equipment that is required to pasteurise cream. Even for the smallest producer, the cheapest equipment available amounts to an investment of about £10,000. That has a bearing on the local economy, including local printing, packaging and distributon, which centres on the small producer. All those enterprises suffer.

My constituent argues convincingly that tourism will suffer. He has a thriving business selling his cream, providing farm teas and showing customers round his private and unsurbsidised farm museum. All that is prejudiced by his inability to sell his cream.

The best protection for the consumer is knowing the man who produces the cream. Locally produced cream for the consumer means that he knows the dairyman and the farmer. He will see the cows and he will be able to judge for himself the public health risks, if any, that he is taking. That cannot be said of the cream coming from the large producers, or of the milk. It is ironic that, on a day when the front page of *The Scotsman* carries an article about a Scottish farmer who says that he will not drink his own milk because he believes that it is being polluted by dioxide and that he has had independent testimony to that effect from scientists, the combined forces of the farmer and the district council are unable to prevent his milk being uplifted by the Milk Marketing Board for general sale. However, the regulations that we are discussing prevent my constituent from selling his cream to his neighbours.

Those who are being asked to cease production are not cowboys. My constituent has consistently won an order of merit for the cleanliness of his milk and for his cream. I understand that my hon. Friend must be concerned with public health, but we appear to have no evidence that the sale of unpasteurised cream constitutes a health risk. If there are zealots in the Department who wish to eliminate salmonella, should they not be applying their minds to banning imported poultry, which is far more of a risk, or preventing people from having holidays in foreign countries? I hasten to add that I do not favour either of those measures, but they would do more to reduce the incidence of salmonella poisoning than attacking those who produce small quantities of cream.

I am conscious, of course, of the problems of bovine leucosis, which I understand can survive the pasteurisation process; yet the testing of herds for it is not compulsory. From a series of parliamentary answers that I obtained on 1 August, I am forced to the conclusion that there have been no representations in support of the regulations.

There have been no replies to the consultation documents sent out by the Department. Indeed, the people affected were not consulted. Therefore, I am forced to conclude that no public health problems exist and that the consequences of the regulations and the costs of compliance are unknown to the Scottish Office. This is a classic example of regulations which destroy jobs, incentives, enterprise, competition and a quality product —things to which all Conservative Members subscribe.

I understand that the regulations are being reviewed. I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to consider seriously exempting small producers—perhaps allowing them to sell unpasteurised cream from the farm gate—or making a blanket exemption for people who produce less than a given quantity. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend to suggest an appropriate amount. It is not unreasonable to review these regulations with a view to change, because the future of small, quality producers is at stake. The regulations have not been given the consideration due to them because of their consequences.

1.51 am

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I thank the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) for choosing this topic for an Adjournment debate. I know that he has a long and continuing interest in this subject. It is to his credit that he has raised this topic, which affects a small number of persons who run fairly small enterprises. None the less, it is important that the House should turn its attention to their needs as well as to the greater needs of our constituents.

I certainly subscribe to the hon. Gentleman's argument about the way in which the Government have played safe in introducing buying orders—originally on raw milk and subsequently in the 1980-83 period on cream. The Under-Secretary of the State must accept responsibility for public health. We must err on the side of safety. The Government have got the balance wrong. They have gone over the top and are prejudicing unnecessarily the rights of small producers in view of public health needs.

A small organisation in my constituency produces milk products from unpasteurised milk, specifically Bonchester cheese. I commend that cheese to the Under-Secretary of State. I make special trips to Harrods to buy it—it is about the only product I can afford to buy there—and I am alive to tell the tale. The arguments about cream advanced by the hon. Member for Stirling showed how ridiculous the regulations are. They are even more ridiculous when they apply to the contamination of cheese made from unpasteurised milk. Small producers of unpasteurised cheese milk would suffer if they had to incur the capital costs of the machinery involved in small-scale pasteurisation, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Stirling. The figure of £10,000 was mentioned to me, too. The use of such machinery would produce bland cheese, unsuited to market requirements, and the small producers would not be able to receive the premium prices they are able to commend at present. The products would probably not even be mentioned in the marvellous publication "The Taste of Scotland" produced by the tourist board. We must ensure that public health is protected, but we must not legislate bacteria out of existence. We cannot go on producing sterile foods that have no character or flavour.

As the hon. Member for Stirling said, it is a matter of freedom of choice. I subscribe to the view—perhaps I can put it more forcefully than he did — that this requirement runs just about counter to every chapter of the Conservative manifesto in terms of liberties, distinctive ways of life, trade prospering, free enterprise, incentives to small businesses, lifting restrictions on farmers, reducing the burdens on small firms, diversifying regional economies and supporting tourism.

Tourism is important. People have conducted tours of small businesses such as that which produces Bonchester. The concluding paragraphs of the 1983 Conservative manifesto talked about cutting a path through the jungle of modern bureaucracy. The Conservatives claimed that that was hard going. It is as hard going for the producers of small, high value products such as unpasteurised cheese as it is for cream producers.

The Government should consider the matter carefully when they review the regulations, because, although the number of people affected is not great, the Government can easily put small businesses out of business by playing it safe and going for the easy option and banning production on the basis that there might be future health risks.

1.55 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) have made an eloquent appeal against the heat treatment provisions of the Cream (Heat Treatment) (Scotland) Regulations 1983 based on the constraints this imposes on small businesses and the limitation of the freedom of choice for the individual.

It was good to hear that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire had read the Conservative party manifesto. We hope that he might perhaps be converted by it. He seemed to be convinced by parts of it.

The latter point about the freedom of individuals is one underlying the basic doctrines of our democracy and is one of the tenets, which my hon. Friend and I hold dear. It is, nevertheless, necessary on certain occasions for the good of the individual and for the greater well-being of others to constrain that freedom. I merely draw hon. Members' attention to the laws and regulations that have been passed in this House in recent years and in particular to the provisions that have been

[Mr. John MacKay]

introduced to regulate the use of seat belts in cars, and the tightening up of standards in respect of transport and building. The underlying principle in all of these actions has been to improve the standards of services and facilities for the general public. The driving force behind the action on untreated cream is that of protecting public health and I should like to return to this point shortly.

First, however, it may be useful to remind my hon. Friend of the background to the introduction of the regulations under discussion this evening. During 1983, this country was faced with an adverse judgment by the European Court of Justice in respect of the ban on imports of UHT milk. The Government rightly considered, however, that if imports of milk were to be permitted it would be essential to ensure that public health be safeguarded as far as possible. The terms of the court "judgment" confirmed that the United Kingdom could take measures in this field and, following discussions with the Commission and the industry, we established a system of certificates and standards. These are principally embodied in the Import of Milk (Scotland) Regulations 1983, for Scotland. Concomitant with this system it was necessary to establish standards to apply to the production and manufacture of domestic milk products. For this reason the Milk-Based Drink (Hygiene and Heat Treatment) (Scotland) Regulations 1983 and the Cream (Heat Treatment) (Scotland) Regulations 1983 were promoted. These estalished parameters for domestic trade against which any imports could be measured. Generally speaking, the regulations merely embodied the standards and practices operated by the dairy industry. In view of the legal obligation on the Government to accept imports, it was necessary to promote the regulations as quickly as possible but formal consultations were undertaken with the industry in adddition to many meetings on an informal basis.

While the regulations were being prepared, consideration was given in Scotland to sales of untreated cream. My hon. Friend will be aware that at that time action was being taken in respect of sales of untreated milk in Scotland. This resulted in a ban on the sale of untreated milk on 1 August 1983. As was made clear in the period leading up to the ban and subsequently, action was required in Scotland to require heat treatment of milk in view of the numerous instances of food poisoning resulting from the consumption of untreated milk. In recent years the instances of poisoning had been numerous and over the previous decade some 12 people had died as a direct result of drinking untreated milk. My hon. Friend will no doubt recall the outbreak at Keith when some 200 individuals were affected and the subsequent outbreak on Islay in my constituency affecting some 70 people.

The requirement to pasteurise is in no way intended as a criticism of the management techniques of farmers. Salmonella infection can be transmitted in the best-managed herds and passed through cow's system to the milk. The only reliable means of killing salmonella and rendering the milk safe is by a form of heat treatment. To protect the health of the consumer in Scotland and in particular to minimise the risk to the young and the elderly, a programe of compulsory pasteurisation was introduced. A system of exemptions was also established to enable producers who faced severe economic difficulty and in whose area no alternative supply of heat-treated milk was readily available to continue to sell untreated milk after 1 August 1983.

Seventeen applications for exemption were received, of which 14 were granted. Each exemption lasts for a period of one year and is subject to review. When consideration was given to exemptions this year, 11 were renewed. A continuation of the exemption was granted to many of those only as a result of the introduction of a milk quota system which, as my hon. Friend will be well aware, still places certain difficulties on direct sellers of milk. It is to allow time for the position to be clarified that those producers have been given exemption. Subject to the status of direct sellers being clearer, only four producers will continue to be exempted from the ban after 31 March 1985. All the exemptions are in island areas.

I have outlined in some detail the arrangements which apply in respect of untreated milk in Scotland to show the extent to which we are limiting the sales of untreated milk. The arguments in respect of freedom of choice for the consumer and the effect on small businesses apply equally and it was with this background that we gave serious consideration during the preparation of the regulations to introducing a compulsory ban on the sale of untreated cream in Scotland. The health arguments for requiring heat treatment of cream are no less than those in respect of milk. In fact, cream as a medium is more likely to promote the growth of harmful bacteria. For that reason, when sales of cream were reintroduced after the war there was a major drive by the sellers of cream themselves to pasteurise their product. The code of practice recommended that cream be heat treated to preserve its shelf life and to protect the health of the consumer. The pattern of sales in Scotland has resulted in most cream passing through a few manufacturers and for several years around 99 per cent. of all cream sold has been heat treated. For this reason, actual recorded outbreaks of food poisoning resulting from cream are very few indeed. Logic and the evidence from milk before heat treatment was introduced, however, tell us that if cream was not heat treated outbreaks of salmonella poisoning would occur. Therefore, to improve the quality of milk and milk products on offer to the consumer, we believe that a complete ban on untreated products should be introduced.

On that basis, the consultation document was issued on 18 July 1983 and the letter referred to the proposed ban. I note my hon. Friend's comments about the Small Farmers Association. The Scottish National Farmers Union has a producer-retailer sub-committee which encompasses most of the small producers in Scotland as well as the large ones, but no comments were received on that aspect of the regulations. Since the regulations came into effect we have been made aware of difficulties, due to the ban on the sale of untreated cream, being experienced by only two producers in Scotland, one in my hon. Friend's constituency and the other in the constituency of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. In view of the concern expressed by my hon. Friend, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State undertook to re-examine the application of the Cream (Heat Treatment) (Scotland) Regulations 1983 in this regard and the operation of certain other aspects of the regulation which have been drawn to the Department's attention by certain enforcement authorities.

My right hon. and noble Friend is still considering the regulations, and I would not wish to pre-empt the

outcome, of his deliberations. Nor, however, would I like to hold out too much hope that a re-examination of the regulations will provide the outcome desired by my hon. Friend. In reviewing the regulations my right hon. and noble Friend has to have regard to the availability of supplies of pasteurised cream and to our policy in respect of public health that exemptions should not be permitted simply for economic reasons.

The success of pasteurisation speaks for itself. I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) to the ice cream regulations which have required compulsory pasteurisation of that product since 1956. All manufacturers of ice cream must comply with that arrangement. Since pasteurisation was introduced nearly 30 years ago, there have been no recorded outbreaks of disease attributed to the product.

More recently, in August 1983, with the introduction in Scotland of the general requirement that milk be pasteurised, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of cases of salmonellosis following the consumption of raw milk. While raw milk may still be consumed on the farm, pasteurisation is a measure which is outstandingly successful in protecting the public from this source of food poisoning. I think I need neither dwell on this point, nor apologise for our having introduced a measure that benefits the industry by the production of food that can now, without qualification, carry this high standard of safety.

My hon. Friend has drawn to my attention the differences that exist between England, Wales and Scotland. The difference in policy in Scotland results from more recorded incidences of outbreaks of food poisoning and a recognition that there was a degree of public concern not prevalent elsewhere in the United Kingdom which had to be met. It was therefore decided that, in view of the health arguments and the pattern of milk sales in Scotland, it would be feasible to move towards a complete ban.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire mentioned in particular the question of the cheese milk used for Bonchester cheese. After the good advertising that the hon. Gentleman has given that product this evening, I may even make a trip to Harrods to purchase some and sample it.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there is a recommendation that cheese milk should be pasteurised. That recommendation is made by the milk and milk products technical advisory committee in its code of hygienic practice for the manufacture of cheese, published in 1963. That code of practice has been generally implemented by creamery cheese-makers, and compliance with the code of practice has ensured that no recorded outbreak of milk-borne infections have occurred from cheese.

There are no plans at present to involve cheese milk in a compulsory heat treatment scheme such as exists for ordinary milk and for cream, and the hon. Gentleman may tell his constituent so.

The arguments are equally applicable to cream, and a similar move was appropriate. In reviewing the regulations, my right hon. and noble Friend will keep the principle of improving safeguards to protect public health in Scotland to the fore. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that the Government have a duty in this area and that we are endeavouring to fulfil our responsibilities towards the public as a whole. I can, however, assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. and noble Friend is fully aware of the circumstances of his constituent. I am sure that he is equally aware of the circumstances of the constituent of the right hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. The arguments put forward this evening will be borne very much in mind in reaching a conclusion.

Over many years there have been campaigns in Scotland — indeed, campaigns have been conducted in some national newspapers — to introduce the heat treatment of milk to safeguard public health, and——

. *The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock on Monday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

STANDING ORDERS (PRIVATE BUSINESS)

Ordered,

That the Amendments set out in the list of Amendments to the Standing Orders relating to Private Business proposed to the House by the Chairman of Ways and Means, laid upon the Table by Mr. Speaker on 4 December, be made.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Order for consideration read.

To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Defence Programme (Annual Review)

1. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State of Defence when he expects to announce the results of the annual review of the defence programme.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Heseltine): Information about the future defence programme will be given in the 1985 "Statement on the Defence Estimates" in the normal way.

Mr. Cartwright: As the existing commitments in the 10-year defence programme are reported to exceed available resources by as much as £10 billion, will the Secretary of State ensure that his next review makes it clear what non-nuclear commitments are being cut out to make room for the Trident programme?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman must learn to distinguish between a planning process and a commitment. There are no excess commitments in the Ministry's long-term policies, because such commitments have not been authorised by Ministers.

Mr. Robert Atkins: In the course of the review, will my right hon. Friend give urgent consideration to the future of the European fighter aircraft, bearing in mind that discussions are being protracted, largely by the French? Will he make provision, if necessary, for funds to go national?

Mr. Heseltine: I appreciate my hon. Friend's real interest in this matter from his constituency point of view, with which I sympathise. However, there are great prizes to be achieved if Europe can co-ordinate more closely its military procurement. Ministers of various Alliance countries are trying to achieve that, if possible. We cannot say that it is possible to achieve greater co-ordination, but we are trying to achieve it within the framework of the EFA discussions.

Mr. Boyes: Has the Secretary of State had time to study an answer that I was given about using animals, without anaesthetics, to test the effects of cyanide poisoning? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a number of Conservative voters have told me that they will vote Labour at the next general election because of the Government's outrageous attitude to animal welfare? Does he believe that it is in the national interest to propose in the defence review the closure of Porton Down as a chemical research establishment or to consider it as a suitable and useful area for peaceful purposes?

Mr. Heseltine: I think we all realise the immensely difficult issues that are raised in the context of the research to which the hon. Gentleman draws the attention of the House. We must also realise that we have a responsibility to our troops, especially those in Germany who face the possibility of a chemical attack by the Soviet Union. It would be unthinkably irresponsible for a Ministry of Defence Minister not to do everything possible to provide them with the best preventive kit.

Mr. Stern: In the course of the defence review, will my right hon. Friend consider the role of export sales in making our defence programme possible? Will he encourage his Department of Trade and Industry colleagues to take a realistic attitude to potential export sales, particularly to countries, such as Turkey, which have never defaulted on such contracts?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support and interest. I have the closest and most harmonious relationships with all my Government colleagues, who meet to discuss these difficult issues of priorities.

Mr. Denzil Davies: When the Secretary of State comes to publish the fruits of the defence review, will he be as candid as was the Minister of State for the Armed forces in the Royal Navy debate two weeks ago and admit that the cost of Trident is bound to come out of conventional defence programmes? If that is so, does he agree that, by cutting our conventional defence, he is weakening Britain's real defences and its contribution to NATO at a time when it is important to build up conventional defences and not to rely on the first use of nuclear weapons?

Mr. Heseltine: It is fascinating to note that the right hon. Gentleman, whose party campaigned during the election for a reduction of 30 per cent. in the conventional defence budget, should now tell us that the Labour party wants to improve our conventional defences.

Cruise Missiles

2. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to alter security precautions for exercises involving cruise missile convoys.

5. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any proposals to change the security precautions for exercises involving cruise convoys.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): Security precautions always remain under review.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that, in the early hours of 15 November, when a convoy of cruise missiles was entering Longmoor camp in Hampshire, two local inhabitants who were disturbed by the convoy were kidnapped by the police, deposited in a 5 ft deep pit, fenced by barbed wire, and guarded by two armed soldiers? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the deployment of cruise missiles will inevitably lead to this sort of erosion of civil rights and put us on the road to totalitarianism?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman has an extraordinary recollection of that event. Those individuals were trespassing in a military training area during a military exercise. To protect them, they were put in the one place where there was some shelter and cover from the elements —a rifle range, which was not, of course, being used at that time.

Mr. Home Robertson: Does the Minister accept that interference with telephone lines in the neighbourhood of cruise missile convoy exercises, as happened last night, is neither tolerable nor legitimate as a security precaution? Does the right hon. Gentleman now accept that his strategy of trying to hide American weapons in the British countryside is doomed to failure, because many thousands of people will not turn a blind eye to what is going on?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. The off-base deployment programme of ground-launched cruise missiles for training purposes has been extremely successful.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is most important that there should be off-base deployment to maintain the credibility and deterrence effect of the second strike power of all this weaponry? It seems to me that that approach is broadly accepted not only by those who live in the area but by those who are concerned about defence matters.

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for making that point. He is entirely correct.

Mr. John Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the activity of people such as those who participate in Cruise Watch—whether or not they are aware of it—in monitoring the movement of these missiles off-base only aids and abets this country's enemies?

Mr. Stanley: I agree with my hon. Friend that the amount of time and effort devoted by certain small minorities to watching cruise missiles is strange. Some Conservative Members wish that those people would devote the same amount of energy to watching the progress on SS20s on the other side of the wall.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Are not all these problems an indication of how ridiculous it is to base cruise missiles not only in Britain but in the most populous areas of southern England? Is it not a fact that the cardinal principle of ground-launched missiles is that they should be mobile and not be detected? These missiles are not mobile. It seems that everyone from here to the Kremlin knows where they are.

Mr. Stanley: That is not the case, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. The Government and NATO were right to serve notice on the Soviet Union that the massive increase in its capacity to blackmail western Europe through the SS20s would not go unanswered by the West.

Mr. Viggers: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that such are the safeguards built into the cruise missile system that the only risk of deployment is a traffic accident and, therefore, the right action for right minded people is to ensure that deployment can occur without obstruction?

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I am sure that all responsible people believe that deployment for training purposes is a necessary part of deterrence. Responsible people will enable those deployments to take place.

RAF Molesworth and Alconbury

3. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of Defence if he will make a statement on the development of RAF Molesworth and RAF Alconbury.

Mr. Stanley: On RAF Molesworth I cannot at present add to my answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 29 October .

RAF Alconbury is scheduled to be developed in support of the deployment of TR1 tactical reconnaissance aircraft, with construction planned to begin next year.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister proud of the fact that he is a member of a Government who have turned Britain into a police state against the miners? Not content with that, they are now crawling on their hands and knees to Reagan and the Americans and are prepared to bring conspiracy charges against the Alconbury seven to help site American missiles there? Why do the Government not send them back where they belong and drop the charges against those people? They are British people.

Mr. Stanley: I am proud to be a member of a Government, as are all my right hon. and hon. Friends, who have cemented the Anglo-American alliance which formed the linchpin of our security during the second world war.

Dr. Mawhinney: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the people of Cambridgeshire will not react kindly to any authority which allows to be established at Molesworth and Alconbury the type of peace-camp nonsense that was established at Greenham common? The people of Cambridgeshire do not expect to have to pay increased police bills as a consequence of any unlawful activity at Molesworth and Alconbury.

Mr. Stanley: I note what my hon. Friend says. Police bills are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. I am sure my hon. Friend accepts that the important deployment that will be taking place at Molesworth should be subject to the necessary security measures to protect the ground-launched cruise missiles as and when they are established there.

Mr. Marlow: If Britain were to be the only significant territory within a nuclear alliance—NATO—on which no nuclear weapons were based, and if hostilities broke out with the Warsaw pact, would not the most likely area of NATO to be subject to nuclear attack be the United Kingdom, because the likelihood of retaliation would be

rather less? If the United Kingdom were not to have atomic weapons on its soil, would we not be in more rather than less danger?

Mr. Stanley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. If the Opposition believe that it somehow serves our defence interests to ask our most important ally to go back across the Atlantic, their logic escapes me.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister tell us when we shall reach a stage, such as we have at Greenham common at present, when what was originally a Royal Air Force camp turns into a United States air force base where we have little or no control over whether weapons are used in this country.

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to be aware that the agreement establishing ground-launched cruise missiles in this country was between the United States Government and the Government of this country.

Helicopters (Northern Ireland)

4. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any complaints about helicopters operating in Northern Ireland, especially in the Crossmaglen and Forkhill areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): There have been a few complaints, including some from the Crossmaglen and Forkhill areas. We are considering whether the levels of noise referred to in these complaints are sufficient to justify the payment of compensation by the Ministry of Defence. A decision on this complicated matter will be taken next year.

Mr. Dubs: May I urge the Minister to go to Forkhill and Crossmaglen and listen to local people? Is he aware that there is enormous feeling about the frequent helicopter flights? They sometimes fly as often as one every 30 seconds out of the military base at Crossmaglen. People who are by no means opposed to the security forces in general feel angry about helicopters flying at night 30 ft above their bedroom windows.

Mr. Lee: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. This is an operationally dangerous area. Many members of the security forces have been killed. There is a substantial threat from culvert bombs. Therefore, substantial helicopter activity is essential.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend accept from those on both sides of the House who have been to Forkhill that people have a genuine complaint, particularly on Sundays when church services are upset by the noise of helicopters? Despite the security implications, will he do all that he can to ensure that only necessary flights take place on Sundays?

Mr. Lee: The security considerations must be paramount, but we shall take into account the points made, particularly about the sabbath.

Mr. John David Taylor: As I live in the same county as Crossmaglen and Forkhill and within 100 yards of the helicopter station, may I put it to the Minister that the vast majority of people in County Armagh welcome the presence of the helicopters and their constructive contribution towards the pursuit of terrorists? Is he aware that people have been killed even during church hours?

Mr. Lee: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. I am sure that the security forces will also be grateful.

Mr. Duffy: Is the Minister aware that when more force than is reasonably necessary is used in sensitive areas, such as Crossmaglen, Forkhill and Derry, simply to appease Unionist politicians, not only is the infamy of the Black and Tans recalled, but the most notable and enduring casualty is the honour and reputation of the British Army?

Sir Humphrey Atkins: Sit down, you silly man.

Mr. Duffy: Say that outside.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lee: With respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman is overreacting. I am sure that the security forces do not use more force than is necessary in the circumstances.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: In view of the difficulty of operating helicopters in that region without infringing the border, is it not time that there was direct co-operation between the British and Irish Armies against those whom Dr. FitzGerald has described as the common enemy?

Mr. Lee: Relationships between the two forces are extremely good, but I take the specific point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. McNamara: Can the Minister say whether helicopters were used at the time of the Gransha hospital incident last week? Can he also say whether the British Army has now abandoned its stop-and-search policy in favour of a shoot-and-kill policy? Is he aware that the yellow card procedures seem to have been completely abandoned? Can he also tell us whether the two people killed by the British Army last week were first given the opportunity to surrender, whether there were any warrants out for their arrest, and, if so, why they were not dealt with by the RUC?

Mr. Lee: The services are, as always, answerable to the law.

Nuclear Missiles

6. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the equivalent numbers of nuclear missiles targeted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Warsaw pact countries on western Europe and vice-versa.

Mr. Stanley: As detailed on page 43 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984", the Soviet Union has deployed about 1,800 intermediate and short-range land-based nuclear missiles facing western Europe. The equivalent figure for NATO systems based in Europe facing the Soviet Union is some 300. Strategic nuclear missile systems would be additional on both sides.

Mr. Chapman: As there is clearly an imbalance in nuclear missiles in favour of the Eastern bloc, would not any simple nuclear freeze result in a greater threat to western Europe unless it were the first stage of an agreed, verifiable multilateral disarmament programme?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The fallacy of a nuclear freeze is that in the present circumstances it would merely freeze the very substantial superiority of the Soviet Union in this area and remove any incentive for the Soviet Union to reduce that superiority.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Is not the question of balance in terms of the number of warheads completely academic? Does the Minister appreciate that if nuclear war broke out in Europe many fewer missiles than those now sited would create a very cindery situation in this country and mainland Europe?

Mr. Stanley: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the policy of successive Governments has been that multilateral disarmament should be on a balanced and verifiable basis.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Does the Minister accept that whether he is counting missiles or warheads, which he is not counting today, the deployment of sea-launched cruise missiles, not only in the waters surrounding Europe but in the Atlantic and other areas totally annihilates the potential for verifiable arms control?

Mr. Stanley: The deployment to which the hon. Gentleman refers is carried out by both the United States and the Soviet Union. In the short term, the Soviet Union is likely to have an operational capability for strategic ground-launched cruise missiles, strategic air-launched cruise missiles and strategic sea-launched cruise missiles.

Mr. Terlezki: As Mr. Chernenko is to visit this country soon, will my right hon. Friend give him a message to take back to the Soviet Union—that we want peace, but not at any price; that if the Soviets dismantle their nuclear missiles we will dismantle ours; and that the British people are not naive?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend summarises the message very well. The British Government want a more peaceful world, and a world that is also more secure. That means multilateral balanced disarmament by both sides.

Mr. Denzil Davies: When we consider nuclear missiles, must we not also consider strategic as well as Euro and intermediate missiles? On the question of a freeze, is it not true that there is a balance now, generally speaking, between the Soviet Union and the West?

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned multilateral talks. Can he tell us whether the British Government favour talks to cover both strategic and intermediate range weapons? As he is so keen on multilateral disarmament, will he also tell us whether the British Government will be present at those talks?

Mr. Stanley: Like the American Government, the British Government favour participation in both the strategic and intermediate areas. We have been taking part in the negotiations. We have been directly involved, for example in the talks on chemical weapons. Traditionally, strategic negotiations have been matters for the United States and the Soviet Union.

Defence Expenditure

7. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of conventional defence spending.

Mr. Heseltine: The defence budget for the current financial year amounts to £17·25 billion. Of this, some 97 per cent. will be spent on our conventional forces.

Mr. Cook: When will the Secretary of State realise that the electorate will not tolerate the kind of fob-off offered to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) in answers to supplementary questions on question No. 1? Does not persistent dependence on a reduction in conventional spending inevitably mean that we rely more on the threat of nuclear arms and the sophisticated weapons that are being developed? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that persistent reliance on that strategy means that we will inevitably contribute to the destruction of the globe?

Mr. Heseltine: I take a somewhat different view. All Labour Governments since the war have followed the policies that I follow. I believe that we should continue to follow those policies, because they have worked.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will my right hon. Friend spell out the implications of a decision by this country to scale down our spending on conventional forces to the levels currently maintained by our NATO colleagues? Would not such a decision mean the decimation of our conventional forces and place greater reliance upon nuclear weapons?

Mr. Heseltine: I believe that all those consequences would indeed flow from such a decision, together with another which my hon. Friend did not mention, but which I am sure he will accept, namely, the incalculable effect upon the credibility of the NATO Alliance of Britain's taking a decision dramatically to reduce our commitment to defence.

Mr. O'Neill: Will not the assurances given by the Secretary of State today have a somewhat hollow ring for the 1,000 people who are to lose their jobs in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers workshops? Will they not directly relate any savings of that nature to a campaign to make money available for Trident in the future?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not think that anyone would seriously believe that that is the purpose of trying to get more value for money out of the defence budget, which, on all counts, we have a responsibility to do.

Light Aircraft Industry

8. **Mr. Lyell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from representatives of British industry about the opportunity to re-establish a British light aircraft industry during his evaluation of the tenders for the new basic trainer for the Royal Air Force.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Adam Butler): My right hon. Friend and I have received numerous representations from industrialists in support of the companies tendering for the new basic trainer aircraft including some reference to the wider aspects of re-establishing a civil light aircraft industry.

Mr. Lyell: Will my right hon. and hon. Friends remember that Hunting Engineering Ltd.'s Firecracker is a beautiful aircraft, which well meets the RAF's needs, is wholly the product of private enterprise, is wholly privately financed, and would provide Hunting Engineering Ltd. with a real opportunity to re-establish the British light aircraft industry?

Mr. Butler: I appreciate my hon. Friend taking this opportunity to press the case of one aircraft. Of course, what he mentioned is one of a wide range of considerations that we have to take into account.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Is the Minister aware that what remains of the British light aircraft industry is to be found in my constituency? Is he aware that no fewer than three of the contenders have connections with the Isle of Wight, where unemployment is now approaching 17 per cent. and where many of those who work in the aircraft industry are working a three-day week? Will he assure the House that he will take those facts fully into account when making a decision about a replacement for the Jet Provost?

Mr. Butler: We shall take those facts fully into account. Perhaps I might say something about the light aircraft industry. We have short-listed two aeroplanes, which will be made by companies which are not manufacturing fixed-wing aircraft at the moment. That means that we are prepared to accept that possibility. However, there are many other considerations that will carry greater weight.

Sir Patrick Wall: When considering these tenders, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that only the PC9, linked with the Hawk advanced trainer, will form a package that could provide major export orders?

Mr. Butler: There is no reason in theory why there should not be a package that involves the Hawk with another aeroplane.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is the Minister aware that there is already a company in the light aircraft industry that has a worldwide reputation? Will he assure us that Shorts Tucano will also be considered?

Mr. Butler: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that we really need an aeroplane that meets the requirements of the RAF? The RAF has undertaken an extensive review of the technical merits of all of the aeroplanes at Boscombe Down. Does he agree that what is wrong in this procedure is the fact that the air staff target has set a speed that is far too low for the RAF's requirements?

Mr. Butler: I agree that the operational requirements of the RAF must have priority, but, as I have made clear today and previously, there are many other considerations. I hope that we shall be able to make a decision reasonably soon, and preferably before the next round of Defence questions.

Mr. McNamara: The whole House agrees that we require an aircraft that most meets the RAF's requirements. I understand that the overwhelming support for that comes from the PC9. Will the Minister confirm that, among the weighty considerations to be taken into account, there is not the fact that if Shorts get the order it will be made more attractive for privatisation? Secondly, will he confirm that if, for some strange reason, we have the RAF flying a Brazilian aircraft, thus becoming the laughing stock of NATO, that will not be done to enable us to have facilities to get down to the Falklands because of the Fortress Falklands policy?

Mr. Butler: I hope that the RAF will not be the laughing stock of anybody, whether it has an aeroplane that is designed in Brazil, Switzerland, Australia or the United Kingdom. There are many considerations to take into account. Relations with Brazil are important to Britain, as are relations with Switzerland, Australia and many other countries.

Trident Missile

9. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost in pounds sterling of Trident.

Mr. Heseltine: As I indicated in the answer that I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 13 November, the Trident estimate is currently being reviewed as part of the annual recosting of the defence programme. I hope to be able to announce a revised estimate to the House early in the new year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Have not the Government been patently negligent in failing to negotiate with America an offset agreement guaranteeing work to British defence contractors? Is it true that, apart from the submarine and the warheads, British contractors have won only £12 million-worth of contracts out of a multi-million pound contract and that Britain is retaining less than half of the total capital cost? What will the Government now do to defend the interests of British defence contractors?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman touches on an important issue which is of concern to me. When we decided to purchase the Trident D5 system, it was an existing system with existing contractors in the United States. That makes it especially hard for British industrialists to break into the bidding process. However, substantial opportunities are available and I hope that British industry will take advantage of them. I shall be looking to ensure that, wherever reasonable, without raising undue hopes, we are pursuing such opportunities as exist.

Mr. Leigh: Does my right hon. Friend see any significance in the announcement by Sir Charles Pringle, director of the Society of British Aerospace Companies, that the Ministry should look at the possibility of a home-grown Polaris system to replace the existing system?

Mr. Heseltine: It would be quite wrong to leave any doubt. There is no question of the Government's reviewing the Trident programme.

Mr. Strang: Does not the right hon. Gentleman's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) contrast sharply with the assurances that he and his predecessor gave to British contractors? Is it not now clear that about half the colossal expenditure on Trident will go on American technology and jobs? How many hundreds of thousands of jobs might be created in this country if that £5,000 million or thereabouts were spent in Britain?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that this decision was taken for defence reasons. The technology that we are purchasing is available in the United States, and it was considered that that technology gave Britain the best possible independent nuclear capability. That was the object of the decision. I shall do what I can to secure proper job opportunities in this country, but there is a limitation, for the reasons that I have given. The House will realise that virtually half of the

Trident programme will be spent in Britain, and consequently very large numbers of jobs will be associated with it.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that deterrence vitally depends on our ability to inflict an unacceptable level of damage on a would-be aggressor, and that the important aspect of Trident D5 is that, for the next 30 years, it will possess just that capability, while many of the alternatives on offer do not?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The alternatives were set out and discussed in the open government document. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the Government took the view that this is the system most likely to create the deterrence upon which our ultimate peace depends. We believe that we took the right decision, and there is no prospect of changing it.

Mr. Ron Davies: Does the right hon. Gentleman expect the total cost of Trident to be in excess of £10 billion? Will he confirm that that is double the original estimate? Will not the most likely consequence be that this will put increased pressure on the level of our conventional defence expenditure? Does the right hon. Gentleman not accept that the result of that will be to heighten the nuclear threshold, thereby making nuclear war more, rather than less, likely?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will remember the open government document, which I have with me, which refers to the cost as £7·5 billion. Therefore, his arithmetic does not stand up even if his figures are correct. The House will appreciate that most of the change about which we are talking is based on changes in the exchange rates at today's money values carried forward over the next 10 to 15 years, when the House is not capable of reaching an informed judgment about exactly what the exchange rates will be.

Mr. Franks: In considering the Trident programme, will my hon. Friend take account of the necessity of ensuring that when the Vickers shipyards are privatised, control of those shipyards remains firmly in British hands?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that my hon. Friend's question will be drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has responsibility for that matter.

Mr. Denzil Davies: If, as the Secretary of State rightly said, no one knows what the exchange rate will be in the next 10 years, how on earth can he trot out these spurious estimates of the cost of Trident? Given the present state of the British economy, the likelihood is that exchange rates will go down rather than up. Even more important, will he confirm what he said earlier—that he has no intention of looking at the suggestion of a Polaris Mk II to try to get him off the hook of paying for Trident?

Mr. Heseltine: I can confirm that we are not reviewing any other alternatives. We did so at the time of the review of the options and arrived at our decision. The right hon. Gentleman asks how I can trot out spurious calculations to give costings to the defence Estimates. The answer is simple. I inherited much precedent from the previous Government, to which I have slavishly stuck.

Nuclear Weapons (Transportation)

10. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Defence to which chief constables and to which fire officers general guidance has been given concerning safety aspects of movements of nuclear weapons; and when such guidance was last issued.

Mr. Stanley: Guidance is issued to those chief constables and fire officers who have a need to know, and is kept up to date. For security reasons I cannot give details.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware that this morning I received a letter on this matter from the Prime Minister, who says that guidance is given to chief constables and fire officers about the transport of nuclear weapons through their areas, "where necessary"? For the benefit of those who live in Leicester and other cities through which Chevaline and other missiles are transported, will he say whether the words "where necessary" mean that chief constables and fire officers are or are not told when such weapons pass through their areas?

Mr. Stanley: We are not willing to disclose which chief officers are notified, as that would involve disclosing routes and methods of transport.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the people of Leicester will welcome the news that such information is to remain confidential? Does he further accept that they are grateful for what has been done by the chief constable, the police and the fire services, and that any attack on them is completely unwarranted and undeserved? It ill-becomes the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) to behave like that and scare the people of Leicester in such a way.

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his responsible attitude.

Animals (Experiments)

11. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of animal experiments carried out by his Department.

Mr. Lee: Experiments involving the use of animals conducted by the Ministry of Defence are mainly directed at developing defensive measures against chemical attack. The Soviet Union maintains substantial stocks of chemical weapons and it is essential that our forces are protected. It is also necessary to ensure protection against biological warfare. Other work includes medical studies, including the study of wounding, and the diagnosis of disease.

The use of live animals for experiments is governed by the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876. It has been the consistent policy of the Ministry of Defence to comply fully with the Act.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware of the ever-increasing anxiety of the general public about the barbaric experiments on animals that the Department allows to be conducted? Is he further aware that it seems that it is only by persistent questioning in the House that he will begin to outline the experiments that are allowed? What efforts is his Department making to find alternative methods of experimentation, if he claims that it is so necessary, rather than using defenceless animals?

Mr. Lee: Porton Down takes the lead in considering alternatives. The vast majority of the population, and of hon. Members, and all our service men and women recognise the necessary work that is done at Porton Down.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite the comments of Opposition Members, there is no equivocation on this subject, and that the growth of non-animal-based toxicity tests has been rapid in recent years and months? Does he further agree that the tragic incident in India has highlighted the need for toxicity tests on cyanide, which are paralleled by the work at Porton Down?

Mr. Lee: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and am grateful for his support. We resent some of the innuendo, abuse and exaggeration about the work of Porton Down.

Exercise Autumn Train

12. **Mr. Duffy** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the official reports on Exercise Autumn Train which took place in the Atlantic in November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Exercise Autumn Train 84 was this year's Fleet weapons training exercise. Some 20 Royal Navy and other NATO ships and submarines took part, as well as RAF Buccaneers, Nimrods and Phantoms. All participating units achieved considerable training value from the exercise.

Mr. Duffy: Will the Minister assure the House that the operational effectiveness of the Fleet and its aircraft was not seriously affected by a shortage of spare parts, notably for the Sea King helicopters which embarked with 814 squadron on the carrier Illustrious?

Mr. Stanley: There has been some difficulty in the supply of engine components for Sea King helicopters. That is partly a manufacturing problem. The overall stock of the Royal Navy is in pretty good shape.

Mr. Porter: Does my hon. Friend believe that the operational effectiveness of the Fleet was affected by the delay in ordering the type 22 destroyers? Does he accept that it is about time that the order went to Cammell Laird at Birkenhead?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend has introduced a difficult issue. As was made clear in the debate on the Navy, we shall try to resolve this matter quickly.

Defence Procurement (Memorandum of Understanding)

13. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the balance of advantage to the United Kingdom of the effects of the memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy on defence procurement.

Mr. Butler: I assume that the hon. Gentleman has in mind the memorandum of understanding relating to the FH 70 and Tornado programmes. The answer is yes.

Mr. McWilliam: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, but how can he be so complacent as to be satisfied with collaboration with companies such as Rheinmetall, when that company is now in court for supplying arms to Argentina via Spain—arms that were used against our men—and when that company is putting people in Britain out of work?

Mr. Butler: The memoranda of understanding and present circumstances show that for different reasons the balance of advantage lies with the United Kingdom in respect of both the FH 70 and Tornado programmes at the moment.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Fisher: When considering whether a pit should close for economic reasons, does the Prime Minister think it sensible or reasonable that costs such as surface damage, which may continue for many years, whether that pit closes or not, should be included? Given the interest in, not to say controversy about, the National Coal Board's accountancy system that has been stirred up, would it not be helpful and constructive if the Prime Minister were to set up a full review now to look into the accounting basis for pit closures?

The Prime Minister: No, the board fully accepts that management decisions on pit closures should not be based on a single accounting document, and that has never been its practice.

Mr. Haselhurst: Could my right hon. Friend find time today to consider how far my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has infringed his quasi-judicial capacity on airport policies by proceeding with the Civil Aviation Bill? Does she understand that there is grave concern among many hon. Members on both sides of the House that a fair decision on this matter is being prejudiced by the way in which matters are being handled?

The Prime Minister: I could not possibly accept my hon. Friend's strictures on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. I am aware of what happened this morning, but the future meetings of that Committee is a matter for the Chairman of that Committee.

Q2. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cunliffe: Will the right hon. Lady reconsider her Government's mean and niggardly decision to cut old people's heating allowances for those on supplementary benefit by £1? Does she understand that this has caused considerable anxiety and concern in all parts of the House — a concern equal to that about student grants? Furthermore, will she resist any attempts by her Chancellor of the Exchequer to put 15 per cent. VAT on fuel prices, which will again cause severe hardship for pensioners and others?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman does less than justice to the Government's excellent record on fuel allowances. The Government are spending £400 million this year on help with fuel bills, and £200 million of this goes to pensioners. The level of the heating allowances has risen by 40 per cent. more than the increase in fuel prices.

Mr. McCrindle: Is my right hon. Friend as concernd as I am about the activities of the drug companies, which are suggesting that the very limited movement into generic prescribing is calculated to create two levels of health service? Will she place on record the fact that there is no reason why any patient should be disturbed, because the efficacy of those drugs being recommended is at least as good as those with brand names? Will she also express surprise that general practitioners and the British Medical Association are prepared to lend their names to this campaign?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I fully endorse what my hon. Friend has said. The House would have cause to criticise the Government if we did not get the best value for money spent on drugs in the NHS.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister aware that the youth training board of the Manpower Services Commission is recommending to the MSC that the pay of young people on youth training schemes should be increased to £34 next year? Is the Prime Minister willing to endorse that recommendation and so give assistance to young people on training schemes and their families, much as she did last week to deserving young people and their families involved in higher education?

The Prime Minister: No. I think that it is more important to get the maximum number of young people on the youth training scheme—*[Interruption.]* No. I think that it is much more preferable to get the maximum number of young people on the training scheme, to enable them to get jobs for which higher skills are necessary; jobs which would not be available to them but for that training.

Mr. Kinnock: There seems to be confusion in the Prime Minister's mind. There is no conflict between the quality of training, the numbers involved and the payment of at least acceptable rates of pay to young people. If the Prime Minister is interested in these matters, will she acknowledge that the youth training board is also interested in involving the maximum number of youngsters, but that it still recommends £34 a week? Will the right hon. Lady also accept that, because of the anticipated underspend in the next year, the MSC could pay £40 a week and still not exceed its budget?

The Prime Minister: If increases were to be made, resources would have to be found. The right hon. Gentleman talked about anticipated underspend. Precisely because of that anticipated underspend we increased other training services. The money has already been spent on other training projects.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister saying that after offering a guarantee to all young people—of which she boasts—that they will have education or training, she has been expanding other schemes by filching money from the funds that she was offering under that solemn guarantee to those young people? Will the right hon. Lady now answer the question? Does she think that young people should be properly paid, by the amount recommended by the youth training board—£34 a week—or does she think that they should continue to be underpaid?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's last question was inconsistent with his previous question. In his previous question he said that an increase was justified because of an anticipated underspend. In his last question he said that we had spent the anticipated underspend that he proposed to spend on increasing the payment—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman said that we should increase the amount because of the anticipated underspend. I was telling him that because of the anticipated underspend we had already increased the spending. I am concerned about increasing the numbers of young people who are trained. The right hon. Gentleman's proposal is impossible without imposing extra tax.

Q3. **Mrs. Jill Knight** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Knight: Is the Prime Minister aware that claims made last week by an Opposition Member based on an article published in *Accountancy* that NCB accounts were a flawed instrument have been totally invalidated by the article being withdrawn—*[Interruption]*. The article's authors have admitted that they did not properly understand the accounting or decision-making procedures employed by the NCB and that they included factual inaccuracies in their article.

The Prime Minister: I understand from a press statement issued by the National Coal Board on 7 December that the NCB's members and its director general of finance yesterday met the authors of an article in *Accountancy*. The statement said:

"The board . . . explained how the authors had misunderstood the board's accounting and decision making procedures and drew attention to factual inaccuracies. The authors, who regretted that the orginal article had been circulated by the magazine before the board had an opportunity to discuss it with them, readily agreed to review the contents of their article.

The board . . . expressed their willingness to discuss with the authors their revised article."

Mr. Steel: Can the Prime Minister confirm that the £10 Christmas bonus for pensioners introduced by a previous Conservative Government in 1972 is now worth only £2.80 in real terms? Is the right hon. Lady continuing to refuse to uprate the bonus? Does she realise that comparisons between her and Mr. Scrooge are wholly unfair, because he was prepared to see the error of his ways?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that this Government have paid the Christmas bonus every year—unlike the last Labour Government, whom the right hon. Gentleman helped to keep in power. This Government will continue to pay the Christmas bonus. If the right hon. Gentleman wants more, will he tell the House where the resources should come from?

Q4. **Mrs. Rumbold** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Rumbold: Although many people agree that the laws on Sunday trading need to be reviewed, does my right hon. Friend agree that the traders who opened last Sunday should be roundly condemned for opening illegally? Would it not have been preferable for those traders not to have opened illegally on Sunday but to have left the matter for Parliament to consider and reach a decision?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the law must be obeyed until it is changed by Parliament.

Q5. **Mr. Barron** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barron: The Prime Minister said earlier that the National Coal Board does not use any one set of accounting figures in relation to colliery closures. Will the right hon. Lady tell the House why she stood at the Dispatch Box last Thursday and tried to defend the NCB's practice of using a single set of figures? What was said in the article about those figures has not yet been withdrawn. Have not those figures been described as a mine of misinformation?

The Prime Minister: I have made the position perfectly clear. The NCB fully accepts that management decisions on pit closures should not be based on a single accounting document. That has never been its practice. What I said last week still obtains—that, whatever the accounting procedures, the taxpayer has paid £1·3 billion subsidy to the NCB. That is a matter, not of accounting procedure, but of fact.

Q6. **Mr. Stern** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stern: Will my right hon. Friend take time during her busy day to study the recent conclusion of Professor Patrick Minford that the best possible way to reduce unemployment is to raise tax thresholds?

The Prime Minister: I accept the implication behind my hon. Friend's question that there is an unemployment trap because there is virtually no gap between the level of what a person can receive on supplementary benefit and some of the levels of pay, and because of the difficulties that occur when withdrawing certain means-tested benefits. It is vital to raise the thresholds. Under Conservative Government, thresholds have been raised by 16 per cent. in real terms, compared with a fall under the last Labour Government.

Mr. John David Taylor: Does the Prime Minister recall her assurance to the House last month that the United Kingdom would not pass on to the European Community super levy payments unless other countries were seen to be complying with the milk quota scheme? What is her reaction to the strange decision of the Commission last night to withhold from the United Kingdom's regular agriculture payments an amount equivalent to what it assumes to be the super levy due by the United Kingdom to the EEC?

The Prime Minister: This matter will be dealt with in the normal way, by representations to the Commission. What I said will hold.

Q7. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Forsyth: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Wang factory which will be opened next week in my constituency by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and of the news today that Hughes Microelectronics has announced a £25 million expansion scheme in Glenrothes, creating some 500 jobs? Is it not a tragedy that the Labour-controlled local authorities which represent those areas are adding to the costs of these new businesses by squandering more than £1 million of ratepayers' money in support of striking miners?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I was very glad to hear the news about Hughes Microelectronics setting up in Glenrothes, which means some 500 new jobs. I agree with my hon. Friend that when local councils put heavy rates on business, ultimately it will drive away business from that area. Also, I agree with the implication of my hon. Friend's question that the strike is doing untold damage to the repuation of this country for value for money and speedy delivery.

Mr. Ewing: On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: I will take points of order afterwards, unless they are directly related to questions.

Mr. Ewing: Yes. It is directly related to questions.

Mr. Speaker: Very well.

Mr. Ewing: I apologise for raising a point of order, Mr. Speaker, but I noticed that during defence questions when my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) raised a question you called the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) to give, quite rightly, a contrary point of view. I do not complain about that, but the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) has just made a scurrilous and untrue allegation against—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman had been watching the clock, he would have seen the reason why it was not possible to call another hon. Member.

M25 Motorway (Accident)

3.32 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the serious motorway accident this morning which resulted in death and injury.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): A multiple accident occurred in thick fog over a length of some 40 yd on the westbound carriageway of the M25 at 6.15 am today near the Kent boundary with Surrey. I understand that 22 vehicles were involved. Wreckage has not yet been cleared and it is feared that at least nine deaths have occurred, but this figure may not be the final total. The total number of injured is not yet known.

The westbound carriageway is completely blocked and is not expected to be opened until tomorrow, Wednesday, at the earliest. The eastbound carriageway has been closed except for use by the emergency services. The police have set up an emergency telephone service for news of casualties. I thank all the emergency services involved in dealing with this motorway tragedy.

I am sure that the House will wish to join me in expressing condolences to the relatives and friends of those so tragically killed and in sending the injured our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Mr. Adley: I thank my hon. Friend for her statement. I join in her thanks to the emergency services for yet again turning out at short notice in awful conditions and in expressing condolences to the relatives of those who were killed and to those who were injured, so near to Christmas, but may I ask her a number of questions? First, will there be a specific——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One question.

Mr. Adley: May I ask my hon. Friend whether a specific inquiry will be set up into this accident, as is done with other modes of transport, and whether the police have powers to close motorways in certain weather conditions to prevent similar accidents from occurring in the future? Will my hon. Friend now examine the attitude of her Department, which seeks to increase rather than to reduce the speed of heavy lorries?

Mrs. Chalker: In the event of a road accident, it is up to the police to decide whether to prosecute as a result of their inquiries, but I assure my hon. Friend that my Department will examine all the data, using all the relevant resources, to see what we can learn from this terrible tragedy. I can tell my hon. Friend that a 30 mph limit had been in operation for all vehicles throughout the night, in an effort by the police to prevent such an accident.

Mr. George Gardiner (Reigate): How regularly is this section of the M25 vulnerable to fog, and has it any previous record of accidents as a result of fog? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the lighting arrangements along substantial sections of this motorway?

Mrs. Chalker: I cannot tell my hon. Friend how regularly fog will fall on any section of the motorway. To my knowledge, there have been no major accidents on this stretch of motorway, but I shall check and write to him about that. Motorway lighting, which may be helpful in some cases, is not necessarily helpful in fog; it depends on the height of the fog. I cannot say that the lack of lighting at the point of the accident was necessarily unhelpful until we know the prime cause of the original and subsequent crashes.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Will the hon. Lady undertake to look into speed restrictions and their observance on motorways? Does not this accident show the Department of Transport's wisdom in resisting the pressure to increase the speed limit from 70 to 80 mph? The public do not generally understand that an amber flashing light warning of the necessity for a reduction in speed is only a recommended limit. Will the hon. Lady try to ensure that the law is changed to make that limit enforceable?

Mrs. Chalker: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has just said. I thank him for his comment on the Government's common sense in retaining the 70 mph speed limit in good weather conditions. I am aware that the amber flashing lights are switched on by the police only when they believe that speed should be reduced to the level shown on the matrix signals. All drivers should heed that warning. In this case it was 30 mph, but it may be even less. Drivers should seek, not only to slow down, but to keep a sensible distance from and as far behind the vehicle in front as possible, so that they have room to pull up in bad weather conditions. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall look fully at all the evidence in the case.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I thank my hon. Friend for making a statement on this tragic accident. It gives the House the opportunity to express our condolences to all the victims. I support what she has said, but will she re-emphasise that on the motorways each driver depends for his life and that of others on the responsible driving of other people? It is only by keeping a safe distance and driving at speeds which suit the weather conditions at the time that safety can be increased and ensured. Too fast and too close is all too often the cause of this kind of tragedy.

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said. He is right in the guidance that he gives. I would add that every driver should consider whether it is necessary to go onto the road in bad conditions, and, if so, to ensure that all his lights are in safe and working order and well cleaned so that he may be seen as well as see others. I recommend all motorists to look at paragraph 50 of the "Highway Code" entitled "The Fog Code", which contains sensible advice.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I do not wish to prejudge the cause of the accident, but will the Minister accept that many such accidents are caused by motorists going too fast? Will she urge the police to crack down on these law-breakers, especially those who travel at more than 70 mph?

Mrs. Chalker: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not yet know the cause of the accident, but there is no doubt that to drive faster than is safe in bad weather conditions, or in any other conditions, is motorway madness, as it has been dubbed. I very much hope that motorists will learn from this terrible tragedy that, whatever the weather conditions, they should obey the law, which lays down a maximum of 70 mph in good weather conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Will my hon. Friend consider the design of this motorway, about which she will remember I have had extensive correspondence with her? The problem is as much that of a traffic jam building up eastwards for many miles as anything else, as it is impossible to leave the motorway for a distance of about 20 miles. If there were only an interchange capability where the motorway meets the A21, many hundreds of drivers could have been eased out of the traffic jam which caused so much chaos for so many hours.

Mrs. Chalker: I do not think that any change in the distance between junctions would have made any difference to this tragic accident. I shall consider what my hon. Friend has said, but if drivers would obey the "Highway Code" and take notice of police advice we would not be dealing with a private notice question about a tragedy of the sort that took place this morning.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): In view of what my hon. Friend has said, will she seek the consent of the House to give the amber lights the full force of law?

Mrs. Chalker: As I said to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell), I shall be examining the matter.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The whole House will join the Minister in sending condolences to the unfortunate relatives of those who have been killed and injured. Will she consider closely the history of the lighting along this stretch of motorway, where several accidents have occurred, as there may be some connection between accidents and the lack of lighting? Will she bear in mind that there is no point in giving advice to motorists if it is constantly ignored? Will she satisfy herself that the police can impose restrictions where motorists consistently break the speed limit that is imposed in bad conditions?

Finally, will she tell the Secretaries of State for Social Services and the Home Department that it is not only on occasions such as this that we should remember the worth of the emergency services? The ambulance, fire and police services are increasingly under attack while doing their jobs. They need the support of a proper budget and the ability to provide proper cover at all times.

Mrs. Chalker: On the information so far given to me, I am content that the police will impose all necessary restrictions on a motorway when this is necessary. I am considering lighting on motorways. I cannot say that the absence of lighting was necessarily a good or bad thing in this instance.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will note what the hon. Lady said about the emergency services. I know of no circumstances where our emergency services have been anything but first class. They have been on the spot immediately. That should be said, whatever the political background to the hon. Lady's question.

Rate Support Grant (England)

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the rate support grant settlement in England for 1985-86.

In my statement to the House on 24 July I set out my proposals for the main elements of the rate support grant settlement for next year and listed the 18 authorities which I was designating for rate limitation. I have today laid before the House the main Rate Support Grant report for 1985-86 and I am sending rate-capped authorities notices advising them of the rate or precept limit proposed for them. Copies of all the material being sent to local authorities today are available in the Library and the Vote Office.

I have also laid today two Rate Support Grant supplementary reports. The third supplementary report for 1983-84 adjusts authorities' grant entitlements in the light of the latest information on outturn expenditure for the year. The second supplementary report for 1984-85 implements grant abatement for Liverpool city council, whose budget was received too late to be taken into account when I implemented grant abatement for all other authorities in July. Both reports also contain other technical adjustments to grant.

I now turn to the main report for next year. For 1985-86, for the first time, the Rates Act 1984 enables me to influence directly the spending levels of the worst overspenders by imposing limits on their rates. As we promised throughout the passage of the Rates Bill in Parliament, this means that rate limitation will benefit not only the ratepayers of the selected authorities but low-spending authorities, since I am no longer obliged to ask them to make cuts because of the excesses of the high-spending minority.

I have decided to confirm the targets that I proposed in July with two important changes. The first allows most low-spending authorities an increase over this year's budgets of 4·5 per cent. instead of the 4·25 per cent. I previously announced. This reflects the slight increase in the forecast inflation rate over the period. For the first time, targets for the lowest spenders imply spending increases in line with inflation, or, in other words, no further cuts in real terms, the second change relates to a particular group among those low spenders—namely, authorities such as Berkshire budgeting this year to spend not only below grant-related expenditure but at or very close to target. They will be allowed a further relaxation of targets so that they may increase spending by up to 4·625 per cent.—a little more than inflation—without incurring penalties. With these changes, the targets for low-spending authorities fulfil to the letter the undertakings that I gave to the House last January.

I have decided to confirm the stringent holdback tariff which I announced in July at the rate of 7p in the pound for the first percentage point of overspend, 8p for the second, and 9p for each point thereafter. I believe that it is only fair to match realistic targets with a strong incentive that they should be met. I propose, however, to continue to exempt from penalty increases in certain urban programme and civil defence expenditure and increases in expenditure on schemes jointly financed with health

[Mr. Patrick Jenkin]

authorities. Aggregate Exchequer grant will be £11·764 billion. That is slightly higher than the figure which I proposed in July. The grant percentage is 48·7 per cent.

Following consultation with local government, I have decided on some limited but important changes to GRE assessments, affecting primarily the GREs for passenger transport support, highway maintenance, rate fund contributions to council housing and recreation. I have also increased the slope of the block grant poundage schedule. This increases the importance of spending in relation to GRE as a factor in grant entitlements and increases the marginal cost of spending about GRE for all authorities. Again, this helps low-spending authorities, since it gives more of the available grant to authorities spending at or below GRE.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): May we have a translation?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend may take it that it is good news because it gives more of the available grant to authorities spending at or below GRE.

In the light of this RSG settlement, I am issuing maximum rate or precept limits for the 18 selected authorities. Since July, when I announced expenditure levels for these authorities, it has been open to each of them to apply for a redetermination of its expenditure level at a higher level, but none has done so.

Rate or precept limits for 1985-86 are therefore based on the July expenditure levels. I am today sending out statutory notices informing each authority of the limit that is proposed for them. A list of these limits has been placed in the Library and is available in the Vote Office. In calculating the rate or precept limits, I have taken account of the expenditure levels set and the authorities' block grant entitlements next year. I have had regard also to the level of financial reserves available to each authority, making assumptions as necessary.

Authorities now have until 15 January to comment on the rate or precept limits proposed and to draw my attention to any relevant information of which I may not be currently aware. Unless I have comments by 15 January, it will, in the absence of agreement, be necessary to move on to the next stage of asking the House to confirm the rate limits by affirmative order.

The proposed rate and precept limits that I am announcing today will be warmly welcomed by ratepayers in the areas concerned.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Tell us what they are.

Mr. Jenkin: For 13 of the 18 authorities I have set rate or precept limits which are lower than the rates or precepts being charged this year. In the five remaining cases, however, the rate or precept will be lower than it would have been without rate-capping.

This year's average rate increase was the lowest for 10 years. If authorities budget to meet their targets next year, the average rate increase next year should be even lower. the first stage of rate limitation will at long last bring relief to ratepayers in the rate-capped areas. Moreover, rate-capping has allowed me to set much fairer targets for low-spending authorities. This settlement has meant increasing the provision for local authority current spending next year by £820 million above the provision in last February's public expenditure White Paper. In present economic circumstances, this is a reasonable and fair settlement, and I commend it to the House.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The House will be aware that if the Secretary of State had been bringing good news today, he would have announced it in language that we could all understand. Is not the irony of it the fact that he makes a statement in which he continues the trend which has currently, under this Administration, removed £9,000 million from rate support grant and placed increasing burdens on the ratepayer, when his colleagues in the Treasury are publishing a report which shows that, because of almost six years of Government inefficiency, almost £1 billion is being wasted through Government purchasing policy? That is far in excess of any alleged overspending by local authorities.

Is it not also significant that in the five pages of his statement, the Secretary of State never once mentioned the quality of services or the impact of the settlement on employment? The reality is that the provision for expenditure, despite the right hon. Gentleman's protestations, is 5 per cent. below what is required just to maintain existing services across the country. Have not the local authorities made that clear to the right hon. Gentleman in their discussions with him? Are not local authorities being aided for spending below the assessment of what is required of them for the proper provision of services?

How can the right hon. Gentleman believe that an increase of one eighth of 1 per cent. in targets—that is only for some authorities—will make up for the fact that the aggregate Exchequer grant next year is to be £110 million less in cash terms, which equates to £600 million in real terms? That is the measure of the reduction.

Will the Secretary of State say how many councils spending at target will receive less grant in real terms next year than they received in the present year, after taking into account his changes in transport supplementary grant? Will not most major spending councils receive less in real terms as a result of this settlement? When does the right hon. Gentleman expect to make his announcement about housing investment programmes and other capital allocations?

Is it not a fact that for 1 per cent. expenditure over target, authorities will be fined treble the amount taken away from them in the current year? That is, for every £1 in excess, they will have to pay £10 to the Treasury. Paradoxically, the Treasury has gained from authorities spending above target in the current financial year to the tune of over £500 million. That is how perverse the Government's financial arrangements are.

May I also ask the Secretary of State — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] If the Secretary of State insists on making two statements, one on rate support grant and one on the Rates Act, he can expect two lots of questions. He will recall saying on 24 July:

> "Rate-capping does not therefore mean that services must be slashed. The spending limits that I am setting are reasonable and should be perfectly attainable".

Is he aware that one of the most impoverished boroughs in England is being asked for a cut of 28 per cent., the city of Leicester for a cut of between 15 and 16 per cent., the London borough of Brent more than 13 per cent., Merseyside almost 18 per cent., the London borough of

Haringey almost 14 per cent. and the city of Sheffield 12·5 per cent. Does he accept that that is the reality of the cuts in local authority budgets that he seeks?

It is idle to claim, as the Secretary of State does, that the derogation process somehow offers a way out. Is the Secretary of State aware that on derogation the Conservative leader of Portsmouth city council said:

"The thing about the redetermination is that it could come with strings attached that my council could not possibly accept".

That is the view of Conservatives in local government. [HON. MEMBERS: "One."]

Is the Secretary of State aware that in engineering rate decreases at the expense of the shire counties through lower grants being made available to them and at the expense of the Exchequer he has at last admitted what many Members and people outside have put to him—that because of the increase of more than £800 million in public expenditure that he has just announced under the rates Act he is spending £800 million to save £100 million?

May I say, finally——

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Dr. Cunningham: Is not the Government's message to ratepayers the same old recipe—pay more and get less? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that people are increasingly realising that the Government are determined to prevent local democracy from working and to prevent elected councils from meeting their statutory obligations?

Mr. Jenkin: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman spoke a great deal of nonsense, but I will try to answer his specific questions.

Of course there is a reduction in the percentage of expenditure met by the aggregate Exchequer grant—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] That continues the trend of many years, including the period of the Labour Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a member. In 1976 the percentage was 66 per cent.——

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Here we go.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman may not like it, but he is going to hear the truth. The percentage fell to 61 per cent. under the Labour Government and it has continued to fall. Many people in local government, and the Association of County Councils in particular, support that development because they recognise that a higher proportion of expenditure being paid by ratepayers enhances local accountability.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) went on to ask how many councils spending at target would receive less grant. I can only advise him to look at the totals. There are a number of changes in grant-related expenditure assessment. A number of councils will receive more grant, but most, of course, will receive less because of the reduction in the percentage. That is perfectly clear. The hon. Gentleman persists in confusing the real savings that will be made with the necessary adjustment in the public expenditure White Paper figures to achieve realistic targets.

The figure that we expect to save this year through the operation of rate-capping, based on what the rate-capped authorities have shown that they would otherwise have spent, is about £400 million. Because of that £400 million, I have now been able to offer much fairer targets to the shire counties and to fulfil our undertakings of last January.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked when we expect to make a statement on capital spending. I know that authorities are anxious to know where they stand on capital, so that they can make their plans. I am sorry that we have not managed to make the announcements coincide, as they usually do, with the rate support grant settlement. I cannot yet give a firm date—we are still sorting out some of the details—but I hope to make an announcement quite shortly.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): If I understood my right hon. Friend's answer correctly as meaning that the Exchequer proportion of local authority expenditure is further to be reduced, how does that equate with the intention to reduce the rates burden? In particular, how does it equate with the effect on small businesses, on which the employment prospects of many people depend?

Mr. Jenkin: I can assure my right hon. and learned Friend that in each of the past four years the proportion of expenditure met by the rate support grant has fallen and that in each of those four years the percentage increase in rates has fallen as well. There is no necessary connection between the level of rates that a local authority levies and the proportion of its expenditure met by grant. What matters is the level of an authority's spending. By increasing their accountability, we are bringing greater pressure on local authorities to keep their spending firmly under control and to keep their rates down with a lower increase each year. I confidently expect that to happen next year.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On the point referred to by the right hon. and learned Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle), will the Secretary of State confirm that—leaving aside the cruel effect on many households—the extra burden on commerce and industry is £4,000 million? Does the right hon. Gentleman consider that the Prime Minister was entitled to make the remarks that she made at Question Time today? Does he accept that the arrangements that he has proposed this afternoon will further increase unemployment, and that many areas cannot stand any further increase?

Mr. Jenkin: On the contrary, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong. High rates cost jobs. In many of the areas of highest unemployment, the rate reductions made possible by rate-capping will help to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): What persuades my right hon. Friend that the present system of rates is a more just form of taxation than central Government taxation? If, like me, he is not satisfied that the rating system is a just form of taxation, why does he increase the percentage of local government expenditure borne by that unjust system?

Mr. Jenkin: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's views on the rating system. I am sure that he will have taken comfort from my announcement in October that I have asked my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government to undertake a series of thorough studies into the whole system of local government finance. I hope that that process will produce a fairer and more robust system

[Mr. Jenkin]

of financing local authorities and will enhance local authority accountability. I am sure that we would all welcome such an enhancement.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does the Secretary of State believe that, by those figures, he can justify taking away over £2,000 million of grant from London in the past four years, because that has been the result? My borough has lost over £70 million in grant. Can the right hon. Gentleman justify the fact that, on the figures now announced, if Southwark spends the maximum that it is allowed to spend under the rate-capping legislation, it will none the less be over £1·5 million over the target above which it will be penalised? Is that logical? If it is logical, where does that logic lead us?

Mr. Jenkin: The ratepayers of Southwark expect to benefit from a reduction of about 25 per cent. in their rates.

Mr. Hughes: Thirty-three per cent.

Mr. Jenkin: The figure on which the rate limit is based is 25·74 per cent. Had Southwark been free to spend in accordance with the intentions that it had disclosed, the domestic and business ratepayers of Southwark would have faced an increase of 30 per cent. rather than a cut of 25 per cent. The hon. Gentleman would do well to keep quiet about the matter for a time.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): My constituents will welcome the fact that the three authorities to which they pay rates have all been rate-capped. However, will my right hon. Friend explain the justification for continuing the target and penalty system for rate-capped authorities, and for continuing the grant calculation system under which the GLC and the Inner London education authority will continue to receive no rate support grant? Is that not extremely unfair on Londoners? Could not my right hon. Friend arrange matters so that rate-capped authorities receive their fair share of the rate support grant?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend must recognise that it would be wildly unfair as between rate-capped authorities and those which fell just below the criteria for rate-capping, to impose penalties on the latter for exceeding their targets but not on the former. That distinction would be completely indefensible.

On this basis, the GLC will recover a marginal entitlement to rate support grant. However, both the GLC and ILEA spend so much more than their grant-related expenditure assessment that they remove themselves almost completely from entitlement to rate support grant. Were that not so, there would be less grant for everyone else.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): How can the Secretary of State argue that local accountability is improved by reducing the rate support grant to 80 per cent. of expenditure when that reduction is accompanied by fictitious penalties, targets, GREs and rate-capping? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his diktat to Merseyside county council will mean the loss of 3,000 local government jobs and the abandonment of statutory obligations? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell Merseyside county council which laws it should break and which statutory obligations it should renege upon?

Mr. Jenkin: There is no question whatever that any local authority faced with a rate limit is likely even to approach the level at which it would be obliged to break its statutory obligations. The authorities concerned are all high-spending authorities, which spend at least 20 per cent.——

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): On what?

Mr. Jenkin: —more than their GREA and at least 4 per cent. more than their target. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) is quite wrong. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should study the precept limit that I have set for Merseyside. As the legislation requires, I have had to take account of the use of balances in the authority's accounts. Merseyside will still face a substantial precept increase next year, but it will be very much lower than it might have been. If the authority had continued to spend at the level at which it made clear earlier this year it intended to spend, the increase might have been as much as 100 per cent. Merseysiders must be grateful for small mercies.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): I welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals for target increases in those shire counties which have been most hard hit by targets after reacting responsibly and diligently to the Government's requests that they should reduce or contain expenditure. However, is my right hon. Friend aware that low rate increases in the shire counties are not the sole objective of a large proportion of the electorate and the ratepayers? People are equally concerned about the provision of adequate services. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the worst of all worlds is a high rate increase coupled with a cut in services?

Looking even further ahead than 1985-86, will my right hon. Friend give a commitment now to relax or preferably to abolish targets for shire counties in 1986-87?

Mr. Jenkin: I am glad to confirm to my hon. Friend that the increase in target for Wiltshire, at 4·625 per cent., is the highest for any authority. I am grateful for his welcome recognition of the steps that we have taken to acknowledge the efforts made by low-spending authorities. I entirely agree that ratepayers are concerned about standards of services. One of the advantages of the present rate support grant settlement, compared with all those that have preceded it, is that any economies that an authority is able to make and any extra efficiencies that it is able to achieve, instead of being clawed back under the penalty system, may be spent on improving and enhancing the quality of services given to the ratepayers. That is a perfectly fair outcome of the consideration that we have given to the matter in the past two months.

Mr. Janner: Does the Secretary of State not understand that it is undemocratic, unreasonable and unfair to penalise a well-run city, such as Leicester, for building up reserves under Conservative and Labour Administrations, precisely as a good businesslike operation would do? How can he expect a reduction of 56·61 per cent. in rates to be absorbed without destroying and causing chaos in services which all citizens need?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. and learned Gentleman has obviously not studied the figure of Leicester city council's reserves, which, on the information available to us, were astronomically high. It is unreasonable that ratepayers should be expected to add to such reserves. On the

contrary, any sensible council with such massive reserves can reasonably be expected to charge ratepayers a lower rate. That is the basis on which we have approached the setting of a rate limit for Leicester. If Leicester believes that we have got it wrong, it has until 15 January to come and give us the true figures.

Mr. Janner: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jenkin: It is for the council to come in. I believe that the ratepayers of Leicester will cheer mightily at the prospect of a 56 per cent. reduction in rates.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be welcomed in areas which have suffered because of high-spending authorities elsewhere? Will Buckinghamshire be among the low spenders that will benefit from a permitted increase in target spending of 4·625 per cent.? Has my right hon. Friend been able to make any progress on the problem relating to Buckinghamshire's population?

Mr. Jenkin: The target increase for Buckinghamshire is not 4·625 per cent., but a full 4·5 per cent. because it has been budgeting this year marginally over the target. The highest increase in the target goes to authorities which have budgeted below GRE and target. I am well aware of the case of Buckinghamshire and several other authorities which have expanding populations. I am not convinced that the system works as unfairly in their case as they claim, but I am always prepared to listen to arguments about whether further adjustments and refinements of GREs are necessary to reflect that phenomenon.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many rate-capped authorities are planning to spend more rather than less next year? Does he agree that a sudden slamming on of severe cuts will produce chaos, confusion and real hardship for people who depend on local authority services and for local authority employees? Whatever the Secretary of State's argument with councillors might be, will he take steps to limit the impact of rate-capping on innocent bystanders who are not involved in this battle?

Mr. Jenkin: The local authority is responsible for the level of its expenditure. I believe that many ratepayers in Greenwich will welcome an 18 per cent. cut in the rates. Greenwich is that London borough the expenditure and rates of which have increased among the fastest in the country. It has become a byword for extravagance. It is for the council to decide how to live within the level that we have set. I am sure that Greenwich ratepayers will welcome an 18·9 per cent. reduction in rates.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): By how much would the ILEA precept have increased next year without rate-capping? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that further reductions could be made to bring the ILEA target nearer to its GRE?

Mr. Jenkin: The proposals for the ILEA precept will result in a reduction of 7·25 per cent. ILEA has published for next year a bogus budget of what it would have liked to spend. If it spent that amount, there would be a 12 per cent. increase in the ILEA precept. My hon. Friend is right. ILEA is notoriously extravagant and can make savings which would enable it to come closer to the GRE and so begin to be entitled to rate support grant. Several proposals have been made by the Conservative minority on ILEA.

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): The Secretary of State referred several times in his statement to low-spending authorities. Is he aware that the average rate level in the London borough of Greenwich is the fourth lowest in inner London—way below that for Chelsea and Kensington and for Westminster? Is he aware that that is the case in spite of the fact that Greenwich has lost or had stolen by by the Government a larger—*[Interruption.]* Will the Secretary of State listen?—a larger proportion of its rate support grant than any other authority in Britain? Is he aware that his proposals will lead to the imminent loss of no fewer than 1,000 council jobs and a slashing of services to the elderly, the disabled and the poor? The Secretary of State's Audit Commission described those services as efficient and well run. Is the Secretary of State surprised that my constituents regard his attitude, and that of the Government, towards Greenwich as nothing short of unjust and vindictive?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. Greenwich's rates have increased by 112 per cent. since 1981-82. It has a high GRE because it scores high on several of the inner-city deprivation indicators, and therefore its base entitlement to grant is fairly high. That is as it should be, but it does not absolve Greenwich from running services effectively and economically. I shall believe the hon. Gentleman's cries of woe when I see Greenwich cutting out a lot of its nonsensical spending on advertising, police committees and the rest, rather than on services. By their works we shall know them. We shall watch carefully where Greenwich makes its savings.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to take into account the fact that there is another statement and then an important debate. I shall take questions until 4.30 pm. I hope that, if hon. Members ask their questions briefly, I might be able to call them all.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, as a ratepayer in the Lambeth area, I am delighted at his tough approach towards high-spending authorities and at his decision to abolish the GLC? Is he further aware that, as a ratepayer in Warwickshire, I am rather less enchanted with the news that he has given us, although it is a move in the right direction? Will he give a pledge that well-run low-spending authorities will continue to be looked on with the greatest favour in view of sacrifices that they have made in the past?

Mr. Jenkin: I thoroughly endorse what my hon. Friend said about Lambeth. I wonder whether he has noticed that Lambeth has decided that, for local authority tenants who owe more than £1,000 in rent arrears, for every £1 that the tenant pays off, he will be let off £4? I should have thought that the ratepayers of Lambeth would have something to say about that.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Housing benefits.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is quite right to mention housing benefits. These tenants are able to pay their rents but are simply allowed to go month after month without paying them. That is a scandal, and Lambeth ought to be thoroughly ashamed of itself.

Warwickshire gets the full 4·5 per cent. increase in target this year. It budgeted marginally above target for the

[Mr. Jenkin]

current year and therefore qualifies for a 4·5 per cent. increase of next year's target over this year's budget. With regard to grant entitlement, Warwicksire loses probably less grant in percentage terms than many other counties. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah—less."] Of course, it will lose some because we are clearly reducing the percentage of the aggregate Exchequer grant. That is in accordance with decisions taken by the Government and our predecessors.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Is the Secretary of State aware that people came from all over the world to observe Sheffield's post-war housing take shape? Now in my constituency there is dilapidated and decayed housing, lengthy waiting lists and appalling repair problems. In view of his confirmed stringency and vindictiveness towards Sheffield, will he tell the House how far and on what timescale he expects to correct that regression?

Mr. Jenkin: I think that Sheffield should follow the example of some of its Labour-controlled neighbours and make arrangements for some housing to be modernised with the help and support of the private sector. The hon. Gentleman should look across the Pennines and see what has been going on in Salford, Oldham and other authorities there. They have achieved a substantial upgrading of the quality of life for the people who live there, and it is being done substantially at the cost of the private sector.

The ratepayers of Sheffield, who have been paying through the nose for years because of the extravagance of the council, will welcome the virtual rate standstill next year. It certainly would not have been so if Sheffield had been free to continue spending as it has been doing in recent years.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Governments tend to lose the confidence of people when they speak in a language which people cannot readily understand? Does he know of any system of local government finance in the Western world which is more confusing and confused than this one?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall send my hon. Friend, together with a number of hon. Members, what I hope will not unkindly be called "A child's guide to the rate support grant system".

Mr. Cormack *indicated assent.*

Mr. Jenkin: I share his concern about its complexity.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Has it been helpful to the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Jenkin: Yes, it has been very helpful to me. It has helped me to understand the system, and I am not ashamed to admit it. I think that I now understand most of it. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) will feel that it is a helpful step. It is important that people should understand the system, which is not as illogical as it is sometimes made out to be. Obviously it is complex, but my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government is studying its complexity.

Mr. Corbett: Is the Secretary of State aware that in the city of Birmingham we are presently discussing rate increases of up to 100 per cent. merely to stand still, not to carry out any of the policies on which we won control of the council? In the light of his statement how does he propose that the first city outside the capital should deal with urban decay and a genuine crisis in housing?

Mr. Jenkin: Luckily for the present Labour-controlled authority of Birmingham, the previous administration budgeted economically. Birmingham is not spending in excess of its target and it is spending below its GRE. Birmingham will qualify for the 4·625 per cent.—the maximum increase in target. I recognise that Birmingham, as a major city, has financial problems, but they are not as serious as the hon. Gentleman tries to pretend.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I welcome any increase in grant support for responsible authorities, such as Havering, but is my right hon. Friend aware that until we have a reformed system of local government finance —he has only recently announced the inquiry—many of us will be concerned about the ever-increasing reduction in the amounts met by the Government and the consequent increases now carried by an inadequate local rating system?

Mr. Jenkin: I certainly understand my hon. Friend's concern. When I spoke about the studies that are being undertaken, I made it clear that a central problem that we need to examine is the balance between central and local government of bearing the cost of local government services. Clearly one wishes to achieve maximum accountability of local authorities to those who enjoy their services for the discretionary spending which rests with them. That is one of the points at the heart of my right hon. Friend's study. We want to ensure that we achieve a better, more robust and defensible system.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Has not the Secretary of State shown that he has no understanding of local government in metropolitan areas, such as Greater Manchester? Will he explain to my constituents who poorer and fewer services, higher rates and increasing unemployment are in their interests?

Mr. Jenkin: Greater Manchester and Manchester city have both been fairly high-spending councils. They have not yet gone above the level that we designated this year for rate-capping. I have no doubt that both authorities can make significant savings without seriously impinging on the level of services, if they are prepared to budget hard and economically. The ratepayers of Manchester would welcome the level of reduction that such action would bring.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Will my right hon. Friend accept my warm support for his statement that civil defence will not count in grant-related expenditure? Does he agree that the financing of old capital expenditure by local authorities should not prejudice the rate support grant, especially where it has led to greater prosperity? Is he aware that Harroate borough council will be affected considerably to its detriment by his statement?

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he said, civil defence expenditure will be disregarded in line with what has happened in earlier years. Where authorities have in the past incurred large capital spending, run up large debts and therefore have interest charges, it would be extremely difficult to disregard those interest charges for the purpose of targets and block grants because they form part of each authority's expenditure. However, each

authority must manage its capital expenditure so that the revenue costs can be borne within the guidelines laid down by Parliament.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Does the Secretary of State recall, when he made his statement in the House on 24 July, that in my question about the alleged high spending of South Yorkshire county council I said that I had not received any letter of complaint about the rates levied by the council? In answer, he said that he had received many letters from ratepayers in South Yorkshire complaining about rates. I then wrote to his Department asking how many letters had been received from people in Rother Valley, and he wrote back that he had received none in the past nine months. Has he received any since 24 July?

Mr. Jenkin: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that if South Yorkshire had spent at the level of the proposals which have been discussed within the council, the precept increase next year would have been more than 50 per cent. In those circumstances, we would have received a flood of complaints. As it is, South Yorkshire's precept will show a 2 per cent. reduction, which will be welcomed.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Has my right hon. Friend taken a look at rate-capping authorities, such as Derbyshire, which think that shoving up rates as fast as possible is part of their duty to their ratepayers and whose services in essenial work, such as education, are worse than those of neighbouring local authorities, such as Nottinghamshire and Birmingham? Incidentally, in Birmingham the Tory council cut the rates twice, yet managed, to find £1 million this year to promote its services in advance of a local election. When can we expect my right hon. Friend's strong right arm to be fully recovered to put a stop to such practices?

Mr. Jenkin: Next May the ratepayers of Derbyshire will have their opportunity to pass judgment on the extravagance of Derbyshire county council. No doubt my hon. Friend will lend her considerable talents to the same end. We are giving urgent attention to the question of spending on advertising. It will also come within the purview of the abuses inquiry, on which I hope to make a statement to the House fairly soon. The huge sums of ratepayers' money which local authorities are spending on what is nothing more or less than blatant political propoganda are an almighty scandal and cause great outrage among many ratepayers who, for the information of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), write to me about it frequently.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Will the Secretary of State now admit that by continuing to reduce the grant he will either force up rates or slash services? Is he aware that in my area, which is one of the most deprived in the country, there is male unemployment of 26 per cent., and that we can afford neither? He is heaping burdens on the backs of those who are least able to bear them.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. Obviously he did not hear what I said earlier. In each of the past four years when the grant has been reduced, the average increase in rates charged by local authorities has also decreased. This year, the increase in rates and precepts will be the lowest on average for the past 10 years.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I realise the importance of the statement. Therefore, exceptionally, I shall allow another five minutes for questions, although I remind hon. Members that long questions lead to long answers.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that Leicester city council is well able to comply with the limits that he has set, because it has so much money in the kitty that it has been able to indulge in a massive anti-rate-capping campaign?

Mr. Janner: So it should.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. and learned Friend is right. He will welcome the 56 per cent. rate-cap that this limit implies.

Mr. Tony Banks: Surely the Secretary of State is aware that he is forcing Labour-controlled local authorities into illegality if they are to defend services——

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Question.

Mr. Banks: I said, "Surely the Secretary of State is aware" that he is forcing such authorities into illegality. Does the right hon. Gentleman relish the confrontation that he will undoubtedly have with Labour-controlled authorities in London? If the GLC does not raise a precept, which I would recommend it so to do, does the Secretary of State plan to introduce a Bill to allow the boroughs to raise a precept next year?

Mr. Jenkin: I am glad to read in the press that several of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the GLC have made it abundantly clear that they will have nothing to do with illegal action and that they will urge the GLC to precept lawfully, as it must do, by 10 March. If the GLC does not raise a lawful precept in line with the limit that I have announced today, or as may be approved by the House, it will be open to any London borough, which will incur extra costs because of the GLC's action, to take the necessary proceedings in the courts. I have no doubt that one or more will do so.

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the residential and commercial ratepayers of London, especially those of the London borough of Enfield, will welcome his statement warmly? Were it not for rate-capping, what would the GLC precept have been?

Mr. Jenkin: Had the GLC been free to precept in line with what it was saying, it would have increased rates by at least 20 per cent., or from 36·5p in the pound to 43·8p in the pound. There is no reason why there should be a large increase in Enfield's rates next year, and Enfield ratepayers will benefit from the GLC rate standstill.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that his statement is wholly consistant with the Government's policy of reducing the standard of living of those least able to look after themselves and of reducing jobs? Would it not have been more honest for him to have told us haw many jobs he expects will be lost and about the deterioration in local government services?

Mr. Jenkin: I expect the significant rate reductions in many of the highest-rated areas to be a considerable encouragement to the private sector to expand its

[Mr. Jenkin]

businesses and increase employment. The reverse has happened as rates have increased. There is no reason why jobs should not increase as rates decreased.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Bearing in mind the complexity of the child's guide which my right hon. Friend will circulate, may I ask him to produce a simpler child's guide? What are the implications of his statement for salary increases for local government workers, teachers and others?

Mr. Jenkin: We have made no assumption about that. The Treasury has estimated the GDP deflator for next year to be 4·5 per cent. That is why we have allowed an increase of at least 4·5 per cent. in the targets of low-spending authorities. I shall do my best to provide what my hon. Friend wishes. Perhaps a pre-natal guide would be the answer. It is a complex system, and if one is to do it justice and my hon. Friends are to understand it, the explanation must be reasonably full and, therefore, complex. My hon. Friend will probably find the paper that I have circulated to be interesting.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is not the Secretary of State disregarding absolutely areas with high unemployment, aging populations and the need for more, not fewer, local government services? When my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Barnett) said that the statement would mean the loss of 1,000 jobs, the "Hear, hears" that we heard from Conservative Members were the real voice of the Tory party.

Mr. Jenkin: The points made by the hon. Gentleman about the unemployed, the elderly and other deprived groups are taken into account, through the GREs, in assessing the grant to which an authority is entitled.

Mr. Loyden *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I am telling him nothing less than the truth. If Liverpool city council is prepared to spend irrespective of its financial resources, it is bound to get into serious difficulties. I hope that even now the city council will see sense and not drag the city of Liverpool, as it seems bent on doing, closer to the brink of chaos.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, until the Conservative party takes control of Cleveland next May, there will be considerable rejoicing among Cleveland ratepayers about the action that he has taken? Not least among those rejoicing will be the members of Teesside chamber of commerce, which announced recently that if Cleveland county council continued to spend money as it has at least 3,000 jobs in the private sector would be lost during the next 12 months. He has saved those 3,000 jobs, and probably many more.

Mr. Jenkin: I understand that, but Cleveland is a high-spending shire county, and its target for next year will be lower than its budget this year. Cleveland must bring its expenditure firmly under control, or it will impose severe burdens on its ratepayers. However, the ratepayers will wreak their revenge next May.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall bear in mind those hon. Members whom I have not been able to call today, and will give them preference in the debate on the rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker—I am sure that I express the view of the House—for extending the time for questions on the statement.

Is it not disgraceful that the central message of the settlement—that grants to local authorities will be cut—had to be wrung from the Secretary of State in questions rather than being made clear by him in his statement? As he has now admitted that most authorities will receive less grant, does that not mean that rates in many Conservative-controlled areas will increase as a direct result of his cuts in rate support grant? Does that not mean in turn that the Secretary of State has failed completely to fulfil the solemn undertakings that he gave to the House on 23 January?

Is it not a fact that rates have increased twice as fast as the rate of inflation since 1979, and that the Conservative-controlled Association of County Councils said that excessive increase in rates was entirely attributable to the Government's action?

When the Secretary of State publishes his child's guide, will he ensure that it explains that if Labour overspenders reduce their spending to the level dictated by grant-related expenditure assessments, it will lead to less for the Treasury and for Tory authorities? To give one example, if this year all authorities had spent at their GRE limit, Tory Norfolk would get not £90 million in grant but only £56 million, and its rates would be 20 per cent. higher.

The Secretary of State said that he would sort out some of the details on capital. Is it not true that he is having a major row with the Treasury about the use of capital receipts? When will that row end? Given the screams of private companies about the potential loss of building orders from the public sector, will not the cuts over which the Secretary of State is presiding lead to a loss of jobs not only in the public sector but in the private sector?

Mr. Jenkin: I cannot add to what I said earlier, in reply to the hon. Member for Copeland, about the capital statement. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is wrong. I gave the percentage of AEG in my statement. The hon. Gentleman knows that the grant this year was 51·9 per cent., so when I announced that it would be 48·7 per cent. for next year I obviously meant that there would be a reduction. To say that this was wrung from me is absurd.

The hon. Gentleman also has it wrong about the holdback, which is the penalty suffered by those authorities which exceed the targets that have been laid down. The money goes to the Treasury, but the Treasury has made it abundantly clear, both in public and in private, that it would far rather forfeit that holdback and have authorities spending in line with the Government's guidelines, which are approved by the House, than have the penalty money going into its coffers.

I do not accept the figures about which the hon. Gentleman talks. What would be set would depend entirely upon the circumstances. I do not expect a large number of authorities spending well above GREA to come down to GREA overnight. Of course they could not do that.

National Union of Mineworkers (Sequestrators)

4.40 pm

The Attorney-General (Sir Michael Havers): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement concerning the indemnity that I gave, on behalf of the Government, to the sequestrators of the assets of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Why?

The Attorney-General: As the House will know, on 28 September this year, Mr. Justice Nicholls gave judgment on an application that had been made in an action by two working miners, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Foulstone, against the NUM. In his judgment, Mr. Justice Nicholls restrained the NUM from, among other things, describing the strike in the Yorkshire area as official, as it had not been called in accordance with the rules of the NUM.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Yes it was—under rule 41.

The Attorney-General: Despite that order, and in full knowledge of it——

Mr. Barron: This is sub judice.

The Attorney-General: It cannot be sub judice— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Attorney-General is only just beginning to make his statement. If hon. Members are patient, they may be called to question him.

The Attorney-General: Despite that order, and in full knowledge of it, the national executive committee of the NUM and its senior officials made statements that affirmed the strike as official. This was a deliberate contempt by the union and on 10 October, Mr. Justice Nicholls fined the union £200,000 and ordered the fine to be paid within 14 days.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that, if a matter is before the courts, it is sub judice. Is the Attorney-General correct to speak on this matter?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that this matter is not before the courts.

Mr. Barron: It is before the courts.

The Attorney-General *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Attorney-General is not talking about the judgment. I ask hon. Members to bear in mind that he is the Law Officer.

The Attorney-General: I am citing a matter of record of the court.

This was a deliberate contempt of court by the union and, on 10 October, Mr. Justice Nicholls fined the union £200,000 and ordered the fine to be paid within 14 days. He made it clear that if the fine were not paid, the union risked having its assets sequestrated. In imposing the fine, the judge said:

"A great and powerful trade union, with a large membership affected by the court orders in question, has decided to regard itself as above the law, and to make this plain repeatedly, emphatically and publicly on a nationwide basis."

The fine was not paid within 14 days and Mr. Justice Nicholls therefore appointed sequestrators, as he had warned the union that he would, on 26 October. The sequestrators accordingly set about taking possession of the assets of the union. However, by about 11 November, they had been able to seize assets only to the value of some £8,500. The vast majority of the remaining assets of the union, amounting to many millions of pounds, had apparently been transferred by the union to banks in various countries abroad, apparently in a deliberate attempt to put them out of reach of the court.

Mr. Skinner: Why not? Your lot do it all the time. There are gangs of them on the Tory Benches sending money abroad.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Attorney-General: The sequestrators, as was their duty——

Mr. Skinner: Have you got any?

The Attorney-General: The sequestrators, as was their duty, took steps in the countries in question to obtain possession of the funds that had been spirited away, and in particular instituted proceedings in the High Court in Dublin where they had traced a substantial deposit of funds. For the purposes of these proceedings, it seemed likely that the sequestrators might be required to incur considerable financial liability themselves, including having to give a financial—*[Interruption.]* Oh, do shut up.

Hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the Attorney-General was referring to me. It would be helpful to the House if the Attorney-General could complete his statement, as hon. Gentlemen would then have an opportunity to question him. Interruptions from a sedentary position delay the proceedings.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): He is barracking the audience from the rostrum.

The Attorney-General: You are quite right, Mr. Speaker. I was not intending to refer to you, and I regret what I said. Sometimes, the temptation is difficult to resist.

In those circumstances, I understand that the sequestrators inquired — *[Interruption.]* This is really quite important. I have been asked particularly to come to the House and make a statement, and I hope the House will let me finish it.

In these circumstances, I understand that the sequestrators inquired from the High Court in this country whether this potential liability could be covered by funds at the disposal of the court. They were told that there were no funds available to the court for that purpose. There was no communication at any time between Mr. Justice Nicholls and my Department.

When I learned of this situation, it seemed to me to be contrary to the public interest to allow the risk of the sequestration being frustrated in this way. On the one hand, it was not right to expect sequestrators to incur this increasing substantial financial liability themselves, even though, at the end of the day, they could look for reimbursement out of the union funds. On the other hand, it was totally unacceptable that the order of the court, made following the non-payment of a fine imposed for

[The Attorney-General]

deliberate contempt of court, should be defeated by the union's tactics of transferring its assets abroad and keeping them abroad. I therefore sought and obtained authority to give the sequestrators, on behalf of the Government, an undertaking to indemnify them against the costs and expenses that were reasonably and properly incurred by them in carrying out their duties in pursuance of their appointment by the court. In the knowledge that that undertaking is available, they are now pursuing actions in various jurisdictions abroad to recover the assets which were surreptitiously removed from this country. The contempt of court committed by the NUM will therefore be punished and the law will be properly upheld.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I thank the Attorney-General for responding to the Opposition's request for a statement. However, would it not have been better for him to volunteer the information himself, rather than entrusting the matter to the press spokesman at No. 10, presumably after he had been briefed on the law by the Attorney-General's Office? Given the Attorney-General's frequent incantations about his independence, does not this politically incestuous handling of the issue dent his claim more than a little, as his high office is not seen to be independent?

What is the Attorney-General's power under common law to give this indemnity? As the common law is developed through precedents, what precedents are there for this indemnity? As a matter of policy, have the Government decided to reinforce the law of contempt? What evidence was there of the risk of the public interest being frustrated, as the senior partner of Price Waterhouse and Co. is quoted on the tape as saying that the firm did not ask for this help, and it was unsolicited? As Price Waterhouse did not ask for the indemnity, does intend to use it, does not the Attorney-General feel that a hypothetical, or even real, need to protect the courts is outweighed by the disadvantages of his being seen to be intervening in civil litigation? Whatever his motives, is not the cherished impression of the independence of his high office tarnished?

The Attorney-General: I find it absolutely astonishing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is one of Her Majesty's counsel and sits from time to time as a recorder, does not seek from the Dispatch Box to support the enforcement of a High Court order.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman had read the statement that I made to the House with the care that I should expect of him, he would have appreciated that the purpose is to ensure that the law is upheld and for the High Court's orders to be successfully carried out. By that I mean that the orders of the court should not be frustrated. We heard not a single word about that from the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. John Morris *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) again at the end.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Is it not a principle of the common law that where there is a grievance there should be an effective remedy? Would it not be a blot on the fair face of British justice if a plaintiff were debarred through lack of means from effectively obtaining this remedy?

The Attorney-General: I would always agree with that proposition, but the sequestration was not ordered to enforce the judgment in favour of one of the parties to the action. It was ordered following the non-payment of a fine imposed for deliberate contempt of court by the National Union of Mineworkers. Not only did the NUM make it clear that it would not obey the court's order, but it tried to defeat the order by transferring assets abroad.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Has this ever been done before? Is this an innovation which seems to many to have occurred, not because of the honour of the Attorney-General, which I respect, but because the Government are involved in the dispute? That is the impression in the country. I repeat the question: Is this the first time that this has been done? Is it not being done because the Government are heavily involved in the mining dispute?

The Attorney-General: This is the first time that it has been done. My researches show that this is the first time that when an order for sequestration has been made—*[Interruption.]* Such an order is made only when the court is satisfied that the person against whom the order is made has the funds to satisfy it. It is known that as long ago as last March the NUM had taken the money out of the country.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Do not the Law Officers of the Crown have a duty to the Crown to ensure that orders made by Her Majesty's judges on behalf of the Crown are not frustrated because those who are instructed by the court to carry out those orders do not have the means to do so? Is not the precedent the fact that never before has any body such as the NUM sought so perniciously to frustrate the workings of the common law of England?

The Attorney-General: With respect, I agree. It is important to remember that the sequestrators went back to Mr. Justice Nicholls and spoke of the difficulties they were having in being required either to find a bond or to give a personal undertaking about any damages that might be awarded against them in the action in Dublin if that action failed. They were not doing this for fun. They had been asked by the court to carry out this onerous duty. One can understand why they went to the court to seek assistance and to find out whether any funds could indemnify or guarantee them against the ever-increasing costs. The judge said that no funds were available which he could direct to be awarded to them.

Mr. Barron: They said that they did not want the money.

The Attorney-General: I am speaking of how the indemnity came about. After that, there was a real risk that the sequestrators, Price Waterhouse, might withdraw—*[Interruption.]* They have said only that they did not seek funds from me. They sought assistance from the court and the court was unable to give it. I, as the guardian of the public interest, have no alternative but to give it.

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): But is the Attorney-General not aware that, by paying the hounds after the NUM's money, the Government are directly participating in the strike because they are trying to cripple

the union financially? Does he agree that this is an act without parallel and that it should now be stopped? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman further aware that in the end the Government and those hounds whom he is paying will not pay the cost because the Government will force it from the miners who will pay in the end?

The Attorney-General: I regret very much that the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great regard and respect, should fail to make the distinction between the Government and the courts.

Mr. Mason: The Government are directly involved.

The Attorney-General: Everything that has happened, from the first action—brought by two working miners, not by the Government—to the injunction to the union and the executive that they should not call the strike official, to the imposing of the fine of £200,000 and to the entry of the sequestrators, has nothing to do with the Government. They have been carried out by an independent High Court judge. — [*Interruption*]. The only thing that I have done—it is so simple—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is simple all right."]—and so self-evident — is that I have said that if the sequestrators were unable to go on because they were not in funds, the Government would indemnify them. That was done so that the court's orders would not be frustrated.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the contempt by the NUM leadership strikes at the very root of the rule of law? Does he agree that, if such contempt is allowed to continue, it will undermine the basis on which our society exists and that his action in providing an indemnity will be widely welcomed throughout the country, since he has correctly identified a matter of great national interest?

The Attorney-General: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Attorney-General accept that there is a fine dividing line between the province of the judiciary and the province of the Executive? Is he aware that it appears to many people that such a blatant act by the Attorney-General oversteps that line? The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he sought authority to give the indemnity. From who did he seek that authority? Were the Prime Minister and other Cabinet members involved in giving that authority?

The Attorney-General: I consulted relevant Ministers. That is all that I shall say about that. It is important to remember—*[Interruption]*—that there are two alternatives. One was that the sequestrators did not manage to obtain any money and had to give a financial undertaking to the court in Dublin—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to make a sensible and important point to the House.

Mr. Flannery: You are not doing it very well.

The Attorney-General: I shall start again. There were two alternatives. One was that the sequestrators would be advised by their lawyers that they could not accept an open-ended financial commitment in the case in Dublin and would therefore withdraw. The other alternative was for them to be supported, if possible by the court. They went to the court and were told that the court did not have the funds to do that. It seems so simple that an order of the High Court should be enforced. As guardian of the public interest, I was the only person who could do that.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the argument presented against his action is absolutely bogus, that the country will learn the attitude of Opposition Members, which is to uphold contempt for the rule of law, that the law would be an ass if the orders of the court could not be enforced and that the country is wholeheartedly behind my right hon. and learned Friend in taking seriously his position as the protector of the public interest in this matter?

The Attorney-General: That is put as well as, if not better than, I put it myself.

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): Some individuals—wrongly, in my opinion—have taken civil action against the NUM in the courts. What does that have to do with the Attorney-General?

The Attorney-General: Again, the hon. Gentleman is completely missing the point. I am not concerned in the matter and never have been. It has always been a case of two working miners against senior officials. The Government are neither concerned nor involved. There is no Government counsel or advice.

At the end of the day, the court made an order which was deliberately and flagrantly ignored. The court then imposed a fine of £200,000, which was ignored. The court then put in the sequestrators, who are liable to run out of money——

Mr. Flannery: What—Price Waterhouse?

The Attorney-General: There is no reason why Price Waterhouse should involve its partners in ever-increasing financial risk. That cannot be the responsibility of any ordinary commercial firm.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is it not a sad day for the Labour party when there is a deliberate contempt of court by a major union that regards itself as above the law and says so, but no Opposition Member is prepared to uphold or support the enforcement of the law?

The Attorney-General: After the intervention by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), I sought to say that we would have liked to hear an Opposition Member say that he wanted the order of the court to be enforced. We have not heard that from one Opposition Member.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does not the Attorney-General agree that, as this precedent has been created, any future plaintiff who finds—as many have over the years—that the defendant has moved his assets can now receive an indemnity from the Government while tracing takes place? Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that this unique precedent has been created for purely political purposes?

The Attorney-General: I can just envisage the hon. Gentleman, who is a solicitor, seriously advising his clients in that way.

Hon. Members: You have done it.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): Assuming that the Attorney-General has much unprecedented power, is it not the case that he has had that power for centuries? Have there not been cases of contempt involving sequestration over the centuries? Why has he chosen to use this power now, in this particular case and at this particular time? Should not the right hon. and learned Gentleman answer

[Mr. Tony Blair]

that question to avoid the charge that he has acted not as an officer of the Crown but as a servant of the Government?

The Attorney-General: Sequestration can apply in a number of cases. It can be applied for on behalf of one party to an action who has succeeded against the other party. But this is sequestration not on behalf of either of the two plaintiffs, but because it is a contempt of court and a fine was imposed by the court. It would not go to the benefit of either of the plaintiffs. It is an attempt by the sequestrators to enforce the order of the court. There was a real likelihood that that order would be frustrated——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): That is the court's province, not yours.

The Attorney-General: In answer to that I must tell the House that the court was powerless because it had no funds.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that his explanation is anything but satisfactory? Indeed, he shot himself in the foot two or three times. A serious aspect of the matter is that his legal impartiality is now under question. How can he tell the House that, since the order was imposed by the courts, Price Waterhouse could not fund the carrying out of the duty placed on it by the courts? Indeed, suggesting that is, to some extent, a slander on Price Waterhouse, which can easily afford the funds. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the money will be obtained and the miners will have to pay for all the legal proceedings. Therefore, his statement is most unsatisfactory.

The Attorney-General: The problem is that, if someone is determined to approach the matter with such prejudice — in the way that the hon. Gentleman has demonstrated—there is no point in my seeking to make him see the ordinary, straightforward, honest approach that needs to be taken. I, as guardian of the public interest, have a duty to ensure that the orders of the courts are enforced.

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the vast majority of people in this country will fully understand the very clear explanation that he has given for his actions——

Mr. Flannery: Speak for yourself.

Sir Ian Percival: The people will have great respect for my right hon. and learned Friend's courage in taking his action and will share the view that it is a sad day when not a single voice is heard from the Opposition Benches upholding the rule of law. Will they not see it for what it is — an attempt by the Opposition to make cheap political capital out of my right hon. and learned Friend's determination to ensure that the rule of law prevails?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. That was the reason—and the only reason—that I granted the indemnity.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): As the Attorney-General is the protector of the public interest, where in law does he have the right to involve political Ministers in advice on and discussions about such an extremely sensitive matter?

The Attorney-General: It is not a matter of whether someone is to be prosecuted, where the law imposes a single duty upon me, but with a right — as Lord Shawcross said clearly in 1946 — to consult, although not to be bound by advice. This is an entirely different position. There was a risk that the law would be frustrated. I therefore consulted certain Ministers and drew to their attention what had happened, especially in Dublin, and gave advice on what I thought was the proper course to adopt, and in the end was authorised to grant indemnity.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that this House has the responsibility of Supply. Will he tell us under which Vote he has made these moneys available?

The Attorney-General: That is entirely a matter for the Treasury. The necessary documents were laid before the House yesterday by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is clearly contrary to the public interest that the NUM should defeat the court's orders by salting away money outside the jurisdiction? Does he further agree that he is doing no more than his public duty in granting the indemnity? Is it not almost certainly in the interests of the ordinary miners within the NUM that the money is brought back into this country with all possible speed?

The Attorney-General: That appears to be the view of the judge who ordered the appointment of a receiver. The House must realise—however unpalatable it may be to Opposition Members, especially the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who never stops intervening from a sedentary position — that the courts are the Crown courts and that the pubic interest requires that their orders should not be defied.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Is the Attorney-General aware that it is absolutely right that the sequestrators should be enabled to carry out their job, but as the High Court has made this judgment, is it not right that it should will the means to carry out that judgment? If it cannot do so, will the Attorney-General make a statement about the situation and look into the possibility of finding the means for its judgment to be carried out? If there was no consultation between the judge and the Attorney-General, could the Attorney-General tell the House from whom he understood that Price Waterhouse had approached the court?

The Attorney-General: As for willing the means—that is the reason why the sequestrators went back to Mr. Justice Nicholls—it was hoped that he would have the means. But he does not. The High Court has the means to pay witnesses, and small items like that, but not to provide the sort of funds that might be necessary in this case. As for the information which was obtained, it was obtained partly from the registrar as a result of inquiry and partly from the newspapers, because the Dublin case was quite widely reported. I am not sure whether Clifford Turner, the solicitors, provided information.

Mr. Barron: May I thank the Attorney-General for at least being honest enough to admit to the House that the action which he has supposedly taken was not asked for by the sequestrators? Would it not be more truthful if he went on to say that the person who brought the action to

bear was the very person from whose office Mr. Bernard Ingham yesterday gave a press conference before this House knew anything about it—namely, the right hon. Lady the Prime Minister? That is where the political involvement relating to this court action came from. It would be more honest for the Attorney-General to stand up and admit that to this House than to try to hide behind this obnoxious way of saying in effect that he knew that he had to pay it but that nobody had asked for it to be paid.

The Attorney-General: The entire initiative came when the matters were put before me.

Mr. Tony Banks: By whom?

The Attorney-General: Nothing came from No. 10. *[Interruption.]* I am speaking of the time when I first looked into the matter and the matters were put before me. As a result, I consulted certain colleagues, informed them of the position and obtained the authority to give the indemnity about which I have told the House.

Mr. Redmond: Will you confirm that by your actions you are seeking to——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not me.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Attorney-General confirm that, by the actions which have been taken, he is seeking to influence matters which are now before the courts? Will the Attorney-General be honest enough to tell the House when this idea first entered his head and who put it there?

The Attorney-General: The matter was put before me within 48 hours, if not a day, of the failure of the sequestrators to persuade the judge to will the means, to use the words of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth), because he did not have any means that he could will. It was thereafter, as a result of further inquiries, that I realised that there was an appreciable risk that the sequestrators might say that they could not go on.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): How did you know?

The Attorney-General: I spoke to them.

Mr. Orme: They did not answer.

The Attorney-General: After I had obtained the authority, I spoke to the sequestrators and was told that in their own minds they had set a limit beyond which they would not go. They had not reached the limit, but they were not far from it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If the matter was as simple as the Attorney-General keeps saying, why is it that nobody else who has held his office from either party, for very many years, has discovered this simple way of dealing with matters? My impression is that the Attorney-General has been incapable of explaining the matter simply to the House. In fact, he has had a tottering time. The Attorney-General ought to know that the sequestrators could get hold of £200,000 quite easily, because £200,000 is to be found in those areas where miners are working. That money has not gone to the national office. If the sequestrators wanted to get their hands on £200,000 they would only have to go to Nottingham, Leicester, South Derby. All the money is there. Is not the truth of the matter that what the Attorney-General and in particular the Prime Minister are up to is using the judges, the police and all the echelons of the establishment in order to smash the NUM? They hope that if they get away with that, the result will be that the rest of the trade union movement will fall like a pack of dominoes. It is a political decision from beginning to end and the country, thank God, is beginning to see just how much this lousy, rotten Government are involved.

The Attorney-General: I think that the country has now heard that broken record so much that they are fed up to the back teeth with it.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the Attorney-General tell the House whether or not Price Waterhouse would have pulled out of their duties if he had not given this guarantee to them?

The Attorney-General: I cannot say that. All I can say is that there must be a limit to how much an ordinary firm is prepared, at the request of the court, to take on in a duty of this kind without being able in the end to be absolutely satisfied that it will recover its money. It is the partners' money and other people's money. It is not just the firm's money.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Is the Attorney-General aware that there is as much sorrow as there is anger on this side of the House that the Government, having brought the police into disrepute, during the course of this dispute, now appear to be bringing the courts and the law into disrepute? Will the Attorney-General reflect on the political nature of the decision and now answer the specific question which was put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on whether or not an important precedent is being set?

The Attorney-General: No precedent is being set, because I do not think there has ever been a case in which an order for sequestration has been made in which it was discovered, when the sequestrators went about their duties, that £8,250,000 had been squirreled out of the country and had to be obtained from places as far apart as Dublin, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there are some rebellious and politically unmanageable elements to be found on his Back Benches but that, when he upholds the due processes of law and facilitates their implementation, there is unequivocal support for what he does?

The Attorney-General: I shall not comment on the first part of my hon. Friend's question, but I am very grateful to him for what he said subsequently.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): We know of the attitude of the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) towards what happened at Grunwick, but is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that today he has lost a great deal of credibility? The reason is that he has acted as a pawn of the Government in trying to undermine the strike of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Attorney-General: I could not have believed that not a single Member of the Opposition would be prepared to speak in support of the law.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not a fact that on the issue the Government, and in particular the Attorney-General, who has fought with his back to the wall, who has not properly answered a single question today and who has repeatedly

[Mr. Flannery]

lost his temper, are impailed upon the horns of a dilemma because they have been asked questions this afternoon to which they have no answer? Will the Attorney-General tell us which law of this country allows the Attorney-General and the Government to come forward with moneys which could not be obtained by the two scabs who were getting money from business men all over the country, and which sets a precedent that he has been unable to explain to the House in any acceptable way? Is it not a fact that during the last half hour his personal credibility has been totally destroyed?

The Attorney-General: Every Minister has a power to give an indemnity in the right circumstances. I gave an indemnity for one reason only; that is, that I believe that the rule of law——

Mr. Flannery: Which law?

The Attorney-General: —and the orders of our courts should be enforced.

Mr. Flannery: The right hon. and learned Gentleman still has not answered.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does not the Attorney-General now appreciate that for him to have acted in an unprecedented and highly politically partisan manner has compounded the grave dismay which he caused earlier this year when he seemed to be offering advice to judges in advance of court proceedings concerning the miners' dispute? Will he now confirm to the House that the Prime Minister was consulted and agreed before he gave the indemnity that he has given? Will he also confirm that the expenses of court receivers who have been appointed, including active members of the Conservative party, are also covered by the indemnity?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman knows that that last comment is ridiculous. I confirm that I consulted the appropriate Ministers; that includes a Treasury Minister because Treasury approval for the payment, if it were ever called up to be made, would have to be given. That is as far as I am prepared to go.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does the Attorney-General accept that Price Waterhouse received special treatment? Is that treatment now to be the normal course of events in similar cases?

The Attorney-General: I have said many times to the House that, despite constant references to similar cases, this is a unique case so far as the NUM is concerned. It is a unique case, in which the NUM has deliberately sought to put beyond the reach of the courts over £8 million. That is unique.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Attorney-General and several of his hon. Friends seem to be suggesting that somehow the NUM has acted illegally in moving money abroad. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not accept that that money was moved abroad lawfully largely because the Government removed exchange controls? If those exchange controls had not been removed, the money could not have been shifted. As that was the Government's action, would it not be more appropriate for the Conservative party, rather than the present Administration, to pay the sequestrators' expenses?

The Attorney-General: One of the problems is that the sequestrators' expenses have been grossly inflated by the money having been moved abroad because action has had to be taken in the Isle of Man, Dublin, Switzerland and Luxembourg in addition to the ordinary costs here. Therefore, that has amounted to a great deal of money. That is one of the reasons why it is a much higher figure than it otherwise would be.

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): After the exchanges over the past 40 minutes, would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the one fact which the Opposition appear to be determined to ignore is that the sequestrators were appointed by the court for the purpose of enforcing the order of the court? Is it not right that, if my right hon. and learned Friend did not support the court in that action, that would be an attack on the rule of law in Britain which hon. Members opposite might well come to regret?

The Attorney-General: I am very grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. I have sought to say that in a variety of words. I am grateful to him for the clear way in which he has expressed it.

Mr. John Morris: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman realise that he has failed to answer a single one of my questions, but instead sought to question my integrity? He may not be aware that on the Floor of the House in a debate in May, and on radio and television, I have repeatedly said that the law must be upheld and that whoever is in breach of it must be punished. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may wish to reflect on that and reconsider his comment.

Why does the right hon. and learned Gentleman say that the court is powerless? Mr. Justice Nicholls did not ask for his help and Price Waterhouse did not solicit his help. When he tells the House that there must be a limit for ordinary firms, what evidence is there for that and for the decision that he has taken? Will he be good enough to place that evidence in the Library?

Lastly, why does the right hon. and learned Gentleman arrogate to himself the decision on the gravity of the offence? Is that his role? Is that not for the courts themselves? Given that he has revealed that there is no precedent at all for this, now that he says that he is the guardian of the public interest, what precisely is his authority at common law for his decision?

The Attorney-General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman asks why I say that the court is powerless. The judge made it clear that there was no way in which he could assist when Price Waterhouse sought assistance for its case in Dublin. I should have thought that a fine of £200,000 for a deliberate contempt of court was in anybody's eyes a serious offence. Nothing more needs to be said about that. *[Interruption.]* It is a matter of opinion. Hon. Members do not have to agree with me. I happen to think that it a serious offence.

I have said many times that there is no precedent of which I know in which, when an order for sequestration has been made, it has been found that a large sum of money, in excess of £8 million, has been put, so far as possible, beyond the reach of the courts. The authority for the indemnity is the authority under which any Minister has the right to grant one as long as it is put before the House at the necessary time, as this one was.

Statements by Ministers

5.27 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that last week at Scottish Question Time there was considerable debate on teachers' pay. That matter has been raised on a number of occasions since and there is to be an Adjournment debate tonight. I am advised that at approximately 4.10 pm the Secretary of State for Scotland put in the Library the answer to a written question from the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). I am equally advised that he held a briefing beforehand with the Lobby to advise it of his written answer. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you do not have the power to make a Minister make a statement, but is it courteous to the House and within the procedures of the House for a Secretary of State to discuss that matter with the press before his written answer is available to hon. Members in the Library?

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The reply that the Secretary of State gave and placed in the Library is not worth wasting the time of the House on. The whole thing is a lot of rubbish. It is not worth wasting the time of the House by making a statement.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I first dissent from the view taken by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing)? The answer given by the Secretary of State for Scotland was full of ambiguities and could be considered by many to be a bit of a con trick. Nevertheless, it would have been advantageous for Scotland if that answer had been given in the House so that we could have put many important questions to him. Last week, Scots Members were placed in a difficult situation, as indeed you were, Mr. Speaker, by the lack of a statement. Something must be done in future to make the Secretary of State for Scotland answer for his important decisions to Members representing Scottish constituencies.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. When Ministers of the Crown are constantly and continuously making fairly important decisions that will involve widespread disruption in classrooms in Scotland in the form of written answers rather than statements on which they can be cross-examined, it must surely be within the power of the Chair to protect the rights of Back Benchers and somehow to bring influence to bear to stop that practice in future.

Mr. Speaker: The House well knows my view. I stated it yesterday and I state it again today. The House of Commons should always be told before the press. If there is an embargo on those matters they should be held up until the statement has been made, if a statement is to be made. Whether written answers are given is not a matter for me. There is an Adjournment debate tonight and no doubt those matters willl be aired then.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Skinner: This is a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has been drawn to my attention that there is more than a little controversy over Stansted airport. I am not involved in any way, but I listen to what is going on and I know that representations have been made for statements to be made by the Government and for leave to table private notice questions, for example. However we shall not go into that because—[AN HON. MEMBER: "What is the point of order?"] Mr. Speaker decides whether there will be private notice questions.

We understand, Mr. Speaker, that you are placed in a difficult and sensitive position. However, the Secretary of State for the Environment is involved in the Stansted issue. Apparently he has said that he is not having anything to do with the decision-making and that has been given to his No. 2, "Supergrass" — the Minister for Housing and Construction. It is reported that Mrs. Jenkin has said on behalf of her husband and for herself, "We do not want the airport here." I should like to know who will make the decision. I think that you should call the Secretary of State to account, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter on which I cannot, and perhaps should not, rule.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Further to your previous reply, Mr. Speaker. On previous occasions when I have raised with you the issue of the Secretary of State for Scotland making statements to the press before he has issued them to the House, you have said that you disapprove of the practice and that it should not happen. May I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker? What sanction does the House have when the Secretary of State, in spite of your ruling, continues to flout the advice and continues to treat hon. Members with contempt?

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. An important debate is to follow points of order and in fairness to those who wish to take part in it, I shall deal only with this issue. I shall take that course unless the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has something vital to raise with me. It is not a matter for me whether written answers are given or are not. If a written question is tabled, it will receive an answer. That cannot be a matter for me, and I cannot offer any advice on it.

Entry Certificates

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I apologise for delaying the House, Mr. Speaker. My point of order relates to a point of order that I raised yesterday. I have made further inquiries since asking you yesterday about the procedures that the Government intended to pursue to implement a decision announced on 22 November to impose a charge for entry certificates. I have discovered that the imposition of the charge was implemented by statutory instrument on 22 November by the Foreign Office. As there is widespread concern about the legality of this procedure, it seems that the Government are guilty of sharp practice. I should like your advice, Mr. Speaker, on the remedies that are available to hon. Members and others who question the legality of the Government's decision, bearing in mind that the statutory instrument was introduced on the day that it was said by the Minister responsible that the charge was to be imposed.

Mr. Speaker: I shall look into that matter and communicate with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Sir, I have a profound interest in these matters. The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) involves many of my constituents and possibly dependent relatives overseas. For the first time in our history, we are charging Commonwealth citizens a certain sum for entry certificates—in other words, visas—when they have a lawful right to come here. This will be a controversial matter. I wish to tell the Leader of the House to think about the matter because I shall be raising it on Thursday during business questions and drawing attention to early-day motion No. 200.

[That this House requests a reconsideration of a proposal made on 22 November to introduce, for the first time, a charge for entry certificates for Commonwealth citizens; and points out that refusal of an entrance certificate, simply because the fee cannot be paid, would not be lawful under the Immigration Act 1971.]

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will take note because——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is only Tuesday. The hon. Gentleman should not raise with me today what he wishes to talk about on Thursday.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I take another point of order, I shall deal with the statutory instrument.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Statutory Sick Pay Up-rating Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

European Community Budgets

[Relevant Document: "Developments in the European Community, January—June 1984", Cmnd. 9348.]

5.35 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before we proceed with the main debate I seek your guidance on the main document that we shall be considering, which is Cmnd. 9348. I am sure that hon. Members who have studied the document will have found what appears to be a serious arithmetical error on the final page, which will place the House in total confusion in its approach to the debate.

One of the fundamental issues which I am sure will be debated is the trading balance. The figures set out in the final column tell us that exports of £3·6 billion and imports of £12·6 billion produce a balance of minus £3·9 billion. Obviously, that cannot be correct. I do not know the precise figures, but the trade balance and the consequent loss of jobs will be a fundamental issue in the debate. I appreciate that those in the Foreign Office are not always as good at sums as those in the Treasury, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to state the real figures. Alternatively, could we adjourn the debate until we know the real position?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to what appears to be a slight error. However, I am not very good at arithmetic either. Perhaps the best thing would be for the Government Front Bench to investigate the matter. I am sure that it will be dealt with during the debate. Perhaps we should now get on with the debate.

5.37 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8322/84, Preliminary draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 for 1984; 8879/84, Letter of amendment to preliminary draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 for 1984; the unnumbered document, Draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 for 1984; Document No. 10222/84, European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 of the European Communities for 1984; the unnumbered document, Draft general budget of the European Communities for the financial year 1985; Documents Nos. 9482/84, Letter of amendment to preliminary draft budget of the European Communities for 1985; 10690/84, European Parliament's amendments and modifications to the Draft budget of the European Communities for 1985; 8454/84, Amended proposal for a Council decision on the Communities' system of Own Resources; 8445/84, Commission proposal for a Council regulation introducing reserve measures to cover requirements in 1985; 8514/84, Commission's communication on the budgetary requirements of the Community in 1984 and 1985; 5899/84, Amended proposal for a Council regulation amending the Financial Regulation of 21st December 1977 applicable to the general budget of the European Communities; and the unnumbered document, Budgetary discipline: common position of the Council of Ministers; and welcomes the agreement on budgetary discipline providing for the firm control of agricultural and other expenditure.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the names of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and some of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Rifkind: The debate takes place in the aftermath of the Dublin summit, where a number of important matters were considered by the Heads of Government. The Heads of Government discussed and endorsed the annual

economic report prepared by the Commission on economic development in the Community. I am sure that both sides of the House will be delighted that the Heads of Government endorsed the report, which showed that the growth expected in the United Kingdom was likely to be greater than that in any other European Community country in the forthcoming year.

It is of interest that the economic policy that was proposed and endorsed by the Heads of Government was one that emphasised the importance of keeping inflation low, controlling public expenditure and pursuing an economic policy very close to that of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give way later to my hon. Friend. I ask him to be patient. I am dealing with matters that are of importance to the House. It was of significance that a summit which dealt with a wide range of issues was able positively to endorse an economic strategy which was identical in all important essentials to that of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I am happy to agree with the Minister that an important document was placed before the Council. I draw his attention to the section on page 31 which observes that programmes of public investment should be strengthened, especially in countries where the construction industry is under-utilised. As one worker in four in Britain's construction industry is idle, how does he square that observation in the report, which he so warmly endorsed, with the simultaneous decision of the Government to lop £500 million off the construction investment?

Mr. Rifkind: That is because the main conclusion of the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers observes that the overriding consideration must be to keep the maximum constraint on expenditure, to reduce it where possible and to concentrate available resources on the reduction of taxation.

I shall concentrate on budgetary discipline, but before doing so I shall make further comments on some of the important issues that were discussed at the Dublin summit. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the completion of the internal market. That is something to which the Government have given enormous importance in recent years. We were delighted when Lord Cockfield was given responsibility in the recent announcement by the President Elect of the Commission to take responsibility for that matter.

In the early 1950s the European Community decided to complete within 10 years the elimination of all tariff barriers within the Community. It succeeded in fulfilling that target. We hope that it will now be possible to achieve by 1990 the completion of the elimination of non-tariff barriers within the Community. That is a short, although not unreasonable, period, especially when we consider that we are seeking to implement the commitments entered into by the Community when the original treaty was signed.

The proposed enlargement of the Community is important to the House and relevant to budgetary discipline. Enlargement is at a crucial stage and the United Kingdom has some strong views on the matter. The Government have stated their great belief that it would be in the Community's interests to come to an early and successful conclusion on the current negotiations on enlargement, enabling Spain and Portugal to join the Community. A wide range of issues are involved, some of which are of less importance to the United Kingdom than to other countries. The negotiations on fruit and vegetables, olive oil and wine are more significant to existing Community members from the Mediterranean area, for whom the accession of Spain and Portugal will mean important competition, than they are to the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom considers other parts of the negotiations to be equally crucial; for example, the fisheries' negotiations, which are of particular interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House. We have emphasised that the common fisheries policy, which was agreed only after many years of anxious negotiation, should not be jeopardised by the accession of a country with the largest fishing fleet in Europe. The Community has adopted a negotiating mandate with Spain, and we should insist on the Community protecting the interests of British fishermen and fishermen from other members of the existing Community. That aspect is crucial in the negotiations.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Bearing in mind that there are about 17,000 Spanish fishing vessels — more fishing vessels than Britain has fishermen—is it likely that the negotiations will result in a diminution of that Spanish fishing fleet in the years immediately following accession?

Mr. Rifkind: As I understand it, the bulk of the Spanish fishermen fish in various parts of the world in waters far from Europe. That results from bilateral arrangements between Spain and various other countries, primarily in the Third world. It is primarily for Spain to decide the future size of her fleet. We are determined to ensure that that fishing fleet does not pose a threat to the already precarious livelihood enjoyed by many fishermen in the United Kingdom and other existing member states.

Industrial tariffs are also important to the United Kingdom. We are all conscious of the fact that in recent years there has been a substantial disproportion between the tariff that must be met by British manufacturers on exports to Spain and the tariff enjoyed by Spain when exporting to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Budgen: For how long has this problem existed? How long will it be before the problem is resolved?

Mr. Rifkind: The problem has existed since the conclusion of the agreement in 1970 between Spain and the European Community, at a time when Spain's industrial structure, especially its vehicle industry, was much weaker and smaller than now. It is important and, indeed, essential, when considering the transitional arrangements on industrial tariffs which Spain will properly enjoy, that special attention is given to a form of accelerated reduction of the high tariffs on industry, of which the motor vehicle industry is perhaps the most important category for the United Kingdom. I assure the House that that aspect will pre-occupy the United Kingdom and other Community countries.

I have said that competition from Spanish and Portuguese fruit and vegetables, olive oil and wine is of

[Mr. Rifkind]

less direct significance to the United Kingdom, but we are concerned about the financial implications of accession. When the Community is beginning to control the agricultural expenditure of its northern members, it is essential that we should not agree to the accession of new Community members if that will create comparable problems for southern members of the Community. Recent agreements on olive oil and wine will help to safeguard the position.

Much of the discussion has concentrated on economic questions, but I emphasise that the United Kingdom remains convinced that the political dimension of assisting Spain and Portugal, which not long ago emerged from a dictatorial form of government, to entrench their new democratic institutions is important to Spain and Portugal and to western Europe as a whole.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): I understand, although I do not agree with, the Government's obsession with bringing Spain and Portugal into the Community. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that if we do not obtain satisfactory arrangements on fishing, trade and all the other matters which bear directly on United Kingdom interests we shall not agree to Spain coming into the EEC?

Mr. Rifkind: The Community has taken a long time to come to a decision about Spain, because the United Kingdom and certain other countries with a particular interest in fisheries and the other matters to which my hon. Friend referred have attached great importance to those issues. Having spent so many months reaching a satisfactory Community position, we have no intention of abandoning that stand in the subsequent discussions with Spain. The conclusions must be satisfactory to the interests of those affected by the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I assume that my hon. Friend the Minister is saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) that the Government are satisfied with the conditions and that the conditions have now been met. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that, if Spain and Portugal come into the Community, there will be no average increase in the cost of the common agricultural policy; in other words, that by bringing Spain and Portugal into the Community, their share of the cost of the agriculture policy will not lead to the cost of that policy overall becoming pro rata greater than it is at the moment?

I believe that the Government's policy was that they would not agree to an increase in Community own resources except in respect of policies which the United Kingdom wished to support. One of those policies concerned the accession of Spain and Portugal. The Government have justified no other policies in terms of an increase in own resources. May we take it as read that, if it is not agreed that Spain and Portugal should join the Community, there will be no requirement to increase own resources?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend will be aware that I did not intend addressing the matter of own resources during this debate, because it goes beyond the pure question of enlargement. Enlargement is undoubtedly an important component in these discussions. We maintain that, because of the various reforms introduced at the present time, the cost of the CAP will lead to agriculture representing a smaller share of Community expenditure, notwithstanding the enlargement of the Community.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend has made a profound philosophical point. He has said that by entering the Community the nature of the people in both Spain and Portugal will change and that they will have a continued interest in a particular form of internal government. My hon. Friend stated that as though it were a self-evident truth which any sensible person should understand immediately. Will he explain it a little further?

Mr. Rifkind: I did not put it in quite the way so helpfully suggested by my hon. Friend. Having assumed democratic institutions, the Spanish and Portuguese Governments — as did the Greek Government before them — I believe it is important for the development of their democratic identity that they acquire membership of a community that is entirely democratic, in the sense hon. Members understand democracy, and consists entirely of parliamentary democracies.

We believe that the full integration of Spain and Portugal within the family of the democratic countries of western Europe will be assisted by their membership of the European Community. That is not just the British view. It is the view held by every Government within the Community as well as the Governments of the applicant countries. I accept the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) that that does not necessarily make it the correct view, but it is the view that we hold, and as yet we have heard no convincing reasons to suggest otherwise.

I mentioned the political considerations a few moments ago. It is interesting to note that the country which recently suggested that it would deliberately delay the accession of Spain and Portugal if certain other conditions were not fulfilled was Greece, the most recent member of the Community. Its position has been influenced by its determination to obtain substantial extra resources through the system of what is referred to as the "integrated Mediterranean programmes".

The British Government's view on that is clear. With the other member states of the Community we have endorsed a policy which accepts that those countries which will be most directly affected by enlargement are entitled to some assistance through integrated Mediterranean programmes, but we have insisted that those programmes must be integrated into the structural funds which currently exist.

Mr. Budgen: What does that mean?

Mr. Rifkind: I mean the regional, social and other such funds. It is not acceptable to create a separate new fund for that purpose. We have also said that the sums that can be made available in the foreseeable future can only be modest, taking into account the financial pressures that exist on the Community as a whole.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is the Minister saying that in the view of Her Majesty's Government regional and social funds, for as far ahead as we can see, will be entirely cosmetic?

Mr. Rifkind: No, on the contrary. The regional and social funds already represent substantial sums, and all the Heads of Government have agreed that there should be a significant increase in the size of those funds.

Mr. Budgen: Why? We are reducing them.

Mr. Rifkind: I assure my hon. Friend that I have not suddenly announced a new statement of policy. My hon. Friends have been aware for some months that that is the position which has been agreed by the Community. If my hon. Friends are anxious to see agriculture represent a smaller and smaller share of Community expenditure, it is not unreasonable that other forms of expenditure should increase.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I must be allowed to continue. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to intervene in the debate.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The Minister is clearly not giving way.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I should prefer not to at this stage.

I come to another matter which relates to budgetary discipline. It is the supplementary finance that has been requested for the current year. The House will recall that on 10 July, when asked about the matter in the House, I said that the Government's view would be that only when we were satisfied that the likely overspend during the course of the current year had been reduced to the current minimum would we be prepared to consider whether, and if so to what extent, it was appropriate to produce supplementary finance to assist the Community.

That examination has not been cursory; it has been extremely rigorous. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has been fully involved with other Finance Ministers in the Community to ensure that those sums are reduced to the absolute minimum. As a result of their efforts the original sums proposed by the Commission have been reduced by more than half. We believe that they have now reached a level which is the irreducible minimum, given the obligations which the Community has under its existing rules.

We also said earlier this year that our attitude towards supplementary finance would depend upon two further conditions being satisfied. One was the payment of the refund to which the United Kingdom was entitled during the current year, and the House will be aware that that sum has now been released and been paid to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Budgen: We have paid for it.

Mr. Rifkind: We have not paid to receive the refund. My hon. Friend is wrong about that. The refund was provided for in the original budget, and through payments out of the original budget. The supplementary finance about which we are talking is not connected to the refund which the United Kingdom has already received. I can give my hon. Friend a complete assurance on that.

The second matter to which hon. Members will be aware the Government attached considerable importance was satisfactory conclusions on budgetary discipline. I should like to deal with the conclusions on budgetary discipline which were endorsed by the Heads of Government at the Dublin summit.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Before the Minister moves on to the disciplinary mechanism, can he reassure us about the repayments of the 1984 reimbursable loan, which is the subject of Cmnd. 9395 and another procedure? Is there provision in the 1985 budget for the repayment of that loan? He may not be able to answer now, but perhaps he could arrange for an answer to be included in the reply to the debate. There is some disagreement about the liability for the loan and the authority under which any such loan is repayable.

Mr. Rifkind: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has heard the question and will seek to respond to it in due course.

Mr. Robin Cook: I wish to ask a question about procedure, and it may give advance notice to the Economic Secretary. I understand that the final appeal in the case ex parte Smedley will not be heard until tomorrow and that there will be no judgment until Thursday. That will make it difficult for the Government to table an order for debate next week. In the event that the House cannot debate and therefore condescend on the order next week, may we have an assurance that no moneys will be paid to the EEC in advance of the House returning from the recess? Where does that leave the EEC budget, which runs out on 31 December?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is as aware as I am that we do not know when the judgment in the case to which he has referred will be announced. I cannot anticipate the business for next week which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House may wish to consider. It goes without saying that if we are required to receive the authority of the House before supplementary finance can be provided, until that authority has been obtained we cannot provide it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can accept that that is the position.

I shall return to the main subject which I wish to raise, which is budgetary discipline and the conclusions which were endorsed by the Heads of Government at the Dublin summit. We must study the background to the subject and realise that for most of the life of the Community there has been nothing that could properly be referred to as budgetary discipline. Over the years that the Community has operated, decisions have been taken on expenditure, and only once they have been reached has it been thought necessary to ensure that the revenue is available to provide for the resulting costs.

It was that provision which the United Kingdom Government first identified as being unacceptable and which we have striven over the past few years — successfully I believe — to persuade our fellow Community Governments to agree was unacceptable as a way in which the Community deals with its economic affairs.

The first important milestone was reached when the Community Heads of Government some months ago endorsed the principle that in future revenue should determine expenditure, and not the other way around. It was crucial that that principle be endorsed, because it was a denial of the Community's recent history. It was appropriate that that should be made clear.

The conclusions that were endorsed by the Heads of Government last week provide for a reference framework that will identify the Community's total expenditure in a given year, and, within that reference framework, provide that there should be a financial guideline which will control agricultural expenditure. It also provides that,

[Mr. Rifkind]

should there be growth in agricultural expenditure, that growth must be less than the growth in the own resources base of the Community as a whole. The effect of that when implemented will be that agriculture will increasingly represent a smaller and smaller share of total Community expenditure.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend share my anxiety that among the budget discipline documents we see such phrases as "exceptional circumstances in article 2"; in article 5 "barring aberrant circumstances"; and in article 6 "amend the reference framework", and that those words can mean—as they usually do in European Community jargon—that while the Community starts out with good intentions, they are infinitely variable afterwards, depending upon those rather ill-defined circumstances?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend asks a perfectly reasonable question. I shall be coming to the points that he has raised. I have explained the general way in which it is proposed that budgetary discipline should apply.

Essentially, three criticisms have been levelled at the proposals. First, it has been suggested that as the proposals are not in the form of a regulation they are not legally enforceable and are thus of limited value. Secondly, it is argued that because decisions will be taken by a qualified majority United Kingdom interests may not be properly protected. Thirdly, there has been criticism of the provision for exceptional circumstances to alter decisions already reached. Those are reasonable concerns, and I intend to deal with each of them in turn. Before doing so, however, I wish to make two general points.

First, the United Kingdom objective has always been to ensure that Community expenditure is dealt with on more or less the same basis as national expenditure. In other words, we have never sought to suggest that there must be an absolute straitjacket on expenditure, but simply that Community expenditure should not be handled according to rules which no national Government would consider appropriate for their own national circumstances.

Secondly, we have been the initiators, as it were, of most of the concern about this in the Community and I freely accept that the position that we have reached is not perfect in every respect. If it had been left entirely to us, further improvements could have been made, and still could be made, to certain proposals to make budgetary discipline more effective. We see this as a dynamic process. *[Interruption.]* I wish to be completely honest with the House. We have never suggested that the solution was perfect. As the motion states, it provides

"for the firm control of agricultural and other expenditure."

That is the position to which we adhere. There may well be ways of making that control even more effective in years to come.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that under article 1 of this so-called strict budgetary discipline the Council of Ministers could agree by a majority to spend any amount that it wishes, without any limit at all? In other words, even if we think that the Council of Ministers is crazy and spending money like water, there is nothing to stop it deciding by a majority to spend double the amount that we consider necessary.

Mr. Rifkind: I said that I would deal with the specific criticisms, of which that is one. If my hon. Friend will also allow me to continue, he will have the answer to his question.

First, there was the criticism that the absence of a regulation meant that the proposals were not legally enforceable. If there were a regulation or a treaty amendment there could be no question but that the rules for budgetary discipline would be completely enforceable, but the opposite does not necessarily apply. The mere fact that there is not a regulation does not mean that the European Court would not find the rules to be enforceable.

Mr. Marlow: What is the disadvantage of a regulation? Why not make it a regulation, to be on the safe side?

Mr. Rifkind: For the United Kingdom there would be no disadvantage in a regulation. As I have said, there were proposals which we regarded as preferable. It is no secret that we should have preferred a regulation.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clywd, North-West): Is it not a trifle ironic that those now pressing most strongly for enforceable regulations are always the first to demand that we retain a national veto to be used whenever we feel that we are being inconvenienced?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the paradox and inconsistency of some of the interventions.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rifkind: No. I have been very generous about interventions. Many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, so perhaps they will keep their comments for their own contributions.

The Council of Ministers itself has identified these conclusions as binding upon it. Whether they are legally enforceable can be determined in the last resort by the European Court. We believe that they are binding, and all the Heads of Government have endorsed them as such. The European Commission, too, has accepted that it will be bound by them in its proposals to the Council.

Mr. Budgen: If all the other countries have the political will to curb excess agricultural expenditure, why did they not agree to a regulation?

Mr. Rifkind: The attractions of budgetary discipline were received by the various states with varying enthusiasm. Some Governments are less enthusiastic than others. Nevertheless, to the best of my recollection, when the Council of Ministers endorsed the proposals only two of the 10 states entered any reservation to the effect that they did not regard the conclusions as binding on the Council as a whole.

The second criticism, that the requirement for a qualified majority constitutes a major flaw in the proposals, does not hold water. First, it ignores the important fact that the Commission has said that it will regard itself as bound to put forward proposals consistent with the rules of budgetary discipline. Under article 149 of the treaty, when the Commission puts forward proposals a decision not to comply with them requires unanimity on the part of the Council. Secondly, even in a situation in which a qualified majority would be relevant, even in the enlarged Community any combination of two large states and one small state could prevent the qualified majority being obtained in the Council.

Mr. Marlow: What security is that?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend's question implies that only the United Kingdom has any interest in budgetary discipline, but that is not remotely the case. In considering any increases in Community expenditure which may be proposed in years to come we must consider also where the burden of financing them will fall in the light of the Fontainebleau conclusions, which provide for a two thirds refund to the United Kingdom of any new expenditure. That means that the maximum proportion of funding for new expenditure that will fall on this country is not the original 21 per cent., but 7 per cent. For France it will remain 27 per cent., and for Germany 32 per cent.

That being so, the suggestion that Britain will invariably be more concerned about budgetary discipline while France and Germany have no interest in the matter flies in the face of common sense. Indeed, a number of smaller countries have an equal and increasing interest in budgetary discipline and can be expected to support us in rejecting any unreasonable proposals. Therefore, notwithstanding article 149 and the need for unanimity when the Commission puts forward proposals with which certain people disagree, even when a qualified majority is appropriate there is reason to assume that in the vast majority of cases any unreasonable proposal will rightly be dismissed.

The third criticism was about the reference to exceptional circumstances, and related matters. Not just in the Community, but in any national Government, a budget that has been fixed may have to be altered during the year because of exceptional circumstances. That in itself is not an unreasonable proposition. The main safeguard, however, has not been mentioned. Within the conclusions that have been adopted, although exceptional circumstances may result in increased expenditure, the provisions also require that that additional expenditure should be clawed back in the following years. Therefore, the overall requirement to control expenditure is safeguarded.

Mr. Budgen: "May be" clawed back.

Mr. Rifkind: Not "may be". Under the conclusions adopted, additional expenditure is required to be clawed back.

Mr. Forth: Following that line of logic, what would happen if there were three consecutive years of fine harvest?

Mr. Rifkind: The Community cannot in future assume that the interests of the farming community are the only considerations to be borne in mind. In the circumstances envisaged by my hon. Friend, we would have to consider the overall interests of the Community and the expenditure that would have to be incurred to meet that situation.

Given that the overwhelming part — some 93 per cent. — of any new expenditure will not fall on the United Kingdom, it is reasonable to assume that other member Governments would be as concerned as Her Majesty's Government about the implications of such expenditure.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: May I refer my hon. Friend to article 5? He says that the money would be clawed back. Will he tell us what is meant by the reference to "barring aberrant developments"? That phrase seems to me to imply that the money will be clawed back unless the Council considers that there have been what it would call aberrant developments.

Mr. Rifkind: We are seeking to ensure that any proposal to provide for unreasonable increases in expenditure can be blocked in the various ways to which I have referred. We have never sought to impose a rigid straitjacket on Community expenditure. What we have sought to ensure, and what I believe the conclusions adequately represent, is effective control of expenditure.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: What about article 5?

Mr. Rifkind: I refer those who doubt what I have said to various reactions to the proposals and the conclusions on budgetary discipline. Dr. Stoltenberg, the Federal German Finance Minister, stated in a debate on these matters in the Bundestag:

"I believe that we now have, for the first time, an effective instrument to bring about a sensible control of expenditure".

The French Permanent Association of Chambers of Agriculture — a body with a great interest in these matters—said:

"Heads of State and Government have just decided a real financial straitjacket for the CAP".

The president of the Italian farmers association said that the proposals that had been agreed represented a "complete change in direction of the CAP."

Hon. Members: What about Mr. Rocard?

Mr. Rifkind: The French Minister of Agriculture was at one stage quoted as being hostile to the proposals, precisely because he was concerned about how effective they would be. The French Government and Mr. Mitterrand have emphasised that their primary objective is to ensure proper budgetary discipline. We welcome the fact that the French Government share with us the belief that that must be the supreme consideration. That is why, despite the no doubt understandable reservations of Mr. Rocard, the French Government remain absolutely committed to the proposals.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way on one final point? I give an undertaking, binding in Community law, that barring either exceptional circumstances or aberrant developments, this will be my final intervention. Does my hon. Friend agree that the imposition of the milk quota was the first tentative attempt to control agricultural expenditure? Will he tell us how those milk quotas have been applied in each state?

Mr. Rifkind: On the basis that this is to be my hon. Friend's final intervention, I shall be delighted to comply with his request. As a result of the quotas, the United Kingdom has experienced a significant reduction in milk production. Belgium was required to cut production by 2·7 per cent., but the latest information suggests a cut of 3·7 per cent. Denmark was required to reduce production by 5·6 per cent. but so far has reduced production by 6·3 per cent. Neither Greece nor Ireland, which under the original proposal were permitted an increase, has increased production by anything like the amount proposed.

Mr. Rocard has recently made it clear that French milk production this year is expected to be significantly below the quota.

Mr. Budgen: What about Italy?

Mr. Rifkind: I have given my hon. Friend a certain amount of detailed information. He may be disappointed

[Mr. Rifkind]

to hear that most member states are carrying out their obligations. I suspect that that was not the answer that he expected to get and that it was not his intention to assist the Government in their hour of need.

My hon. Friend rightly mentions Italy. Italy is the one country which has not so far made any serious attempt to carry out its obligations under the agreement. In consequence, the European Commission has begun infraction proceedings against Italy in the European Court. The United Kingdom and many other countries have made it clear that it is essential that if any country is expected to carry out its obligations, all countries must do so. That is the only way in which the system can operate effectively.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): I entirely accept all that the Minister has said about milk quotas. However, he has told us only how the national quota has operated in each nation. Who decided that there should be regional quotas within nations? Was that a national responsibility, or a Community decision? In either case, what is the legal basis for it?

Mr. Rifkind: I cannot answer that specific point in detail. However, our main concern must be to achieve a substantial reduction in overall milk production. We would also expect that the detailed provisions agreed upon by the Heads of Government have to be accepted and implemented according to the details agreed. There would be no basis for a system of implementation different from that orginally endorsed by the Council of Ministers. Nearly all member states have substantially reduced production. Italy is the one main exception to that general principle, and we are pleased that the Commission has begun infraction proceedings.

Mr. John David Taylor: Most nations, including the United Kingdom, are now below their national quotas. However, for some reason, we still have to pay super levies to the EEC. Indeed, our British super levy was seized last night.

Mr. Rifkind: No, that is not quite correct. I understand that as a precautionary measure the Commission has taken a decision which applies to all Community countries, in part because we have made it clear that our attitude towards the payment of the super levy will be influenced by whether other countries also carry out their obligations. However, no specific action such as the right hon. Gentleman has referred to is being taken.

We believe that the proposals on budgetary discipline should commend themselves to the House. As I have sought to explain, they provide effective——

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I am sorry, I shall not give way. The proposals provide effective and appropriate ways of controlling expenditure within the Community.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way? I will give the same undertaking as that given by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen).

Mr. Rifkind: If my hon. Friend will give that undertaking, I shall be happy to give way.

Mr. Marlow: We are all most grateful to my hon. Friend for his courtesy in answering all our interventions. However, as he has explained the budgetary discipline, it will, in legal terms, hold as much water as a leaky sieve. We are concerned, therefore, about people's intentions.

We understand that next year the Community will spend £1,000 million more than it is entitled to raise. How can we at this stage have any reassurance about the intentions of the nations that make up the Community and that they will behave in this way?

Mr. Rifkind: Precisely because one of the reasons why the Council of Ministers is in conflict with the European Parliament is that the Council of Ministers has insisted on putting a draft budget to the Parliament which is within the 1 per cent. ceiling. If the Council of Ministers had not been determined to insist on that, no doubt my hon. Friend would have complained that that showed a lack of willingness to observe the rules of budgetary discipline.

Way back in 1979, curiously enough also at a Dublin summit, the Government initiated what we believe to be necessary reforms in the EEC. Since then there has been a major transformation in the rules which are applied and in the thinking of all Governments in the Community on this matter. The issue was perhaps best summed up in an article which appeared in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on 1 December 1984. It said:

"It is true that she"—

meaning the Prime Minister—

"has every reason to be pleased with the outstanding diplomatic victory she won this year, after five years of hard struggle. For it was in November, 1979, at the Dublin European Council, that she entered on the battle to obtain a reduction in the British contribution to the EEC budget, a drop in the EEC budgetary expenditure and, in particular, in the Common Agricultural Policy. She has won on all fronts, and it is understandable that yesterday she should have termed 1984 'A very important year' for the Community."

I endorse those comments and, on that basis, invite the House to accept the motion.

6.21 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I wondered for a moment whether I had entered into an agreement with the Minister that, if he gave way to me twice, I should not attempt to speak in the debate. I am relieved that I still reserve the right to speak.

The Minister, in conclusion, painted a glowing picture of the past 18 months as a progress of triumph, suggesting that the EEC has retired to a succession of summits for meditation and negotiation and has emerged from that process strenghtened, purified and with a new commitment to relaunch the Community and its objectives. I find it extremely difficult to recognise that picture in the documents that litter the Table from which I am speaking. Those documents paint a picture of an institution that is in financial shambles. It is stumbling towards the end of 1984 grasping for temporary expedients to keep the cash flow. The expedient on which it has hit to get to the end of this year is a whip-round of member states. It is not clear whether that whip-round is a loan or a grant. When he spoke to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury described it as a reimbursable advance. As the Committee elicited from the Economic Secretary, it is an advance, but it is by no means clear whether it is reimbursable. However it is described, it is clear that there is a large gap in the budget for 1984

which has been plugged only by payments from sources outwith the resources of the treaty and by a special arrangement.

It is difficult not to agree with the Court of Auditors' statement that the Commission's estimate of a shortfall of more than £1·6 billion in its original calculations is evidence of

"the need for greater accuracy in the preparation of original budget estimates".

We do not find such "greater accuracy" in the 1985 budget. The draft budget provides sufficient revenue to meet expenditure for the first 10 months of the financial year. A letter, attached to the draft budget, expresses the hope that, on arrival at the last two months of the year, some way will have been found of meeting expenditure. It is extraordinary that a responsible public institution should enter the financial year on such a basis. If Hackney or Islington borough council introduced such a budget for the forthcoming year, Treasury Ministers would be the first to denounce them as introducing an illegal and irresponsible deficit budget.

In these documents we see an institution that is wallowing in a financial crisis that is deeper than anything that it has experienced since the relaunch of the Community in Stuttgart 18 months ago. Against that background we must judge the wider issues, to some of which the Minister addressed himself. The Minister did not address himself to one document. That perplexed me, as the document was before the Government at the summit only last week and it received the attention of the Council when it met in Dublin. As the Minister failed to refer to it, perhaps I can help to redress the balance. I refer, of course, to the document prepared by the Dooge committee. It prepares the way for European unity. It is impossible to take exception to elements of that report. Section 2, for example, has a chapter headed,

"The Promotion of the Common Values of Civilisation."

I do not think that even the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) would take exception to such a document. However, it is clear that the document tends towards European union. That is made clear in chapter 4, which consists of only two paragraphs and calls on the European Council to agree to an intergovernmental conference to negotiate a draft European union treaty. The report is studded with footnotes bearing the name of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who, I understand, is a member of the committee. There is a footnote attached to chapter 4. I looked down the page eagerly to see what reservations the Minister had entered against the proposal, only to discover that his reserve is founded on the ground that the proposal is premature in an interim report. I had expected a more substantive reservation about a provision for European union. I do not know about the Minister, but I am not entirely confident that such a proposal would find a majority in the House. If we were to take a snap vote of those right hon. and hon. Members who are present, the Minister might be in some difficulty.

Mr. Budgen: But what about the Whips?

Mr. Cook: I welcome the insight offered by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen).

At no stage have Treasury Ministers come to the House to justify entering a European union. If they have no serious intention of entering such a union, they should at the very minimum tell their colleagues on the Dooge committee rather than hide behind the subterfuge that the conclusions are preliminary and that the report is only interim.

Sir Anthony Meyer: It would probably not be worth while taking a snap vote in view of the utter failure of Labour Members, apart from two conscientious exceptions, to attend the debate.

Mr. Cook: The numbers of Labour Members present make up precisely the same proportion of the parliamentary Labour party as do the numbers of Conservative Members present of the parliamentary Conservative party. I should naturally welcome a larger attendance to hear my pearls of wisdom, but we are represented equally.

Other items in this report are worth singling out for the attention of the House. The Dooge report contains a provision to limit the veto and to provide for more majority voting. Again, the Minister has entered a reservation on this item of the text, but he is quoted as having

"accepted the principle of a more frequent use of majority voting".

If that is the case, the House is entitled to know on what issues he is prepared to accept more frequent majority voting. On what issues is he prepared to abandon the use of the British veto?

Similarly, there is a provision for the European Parliament to have control over the revenue side of the budget. At any rate, I believe that is what the committee is recommending, because it is not immediately apparent from the language used. It wants to give the European Parliament

"responsibility in decisions on revenue as the coping stone of the establishment of a new basic institutional balance"—

whatever that means. The Government have entered no reservation on that proposal. Does the Minister accept that the European Parliament should have control over the revenue side of the budget and in what way?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman has properly read the report, he will see that the United Kingdom reserve, which I introduced, refers to that whole chapter. We have not accepted the recommendations of the majority of the committee to increase the powers of the Parliament. The only point we wished to put forward was that there should be an improved conciliation procedure on the basis that has been discussed by the Council of Ministers, but blocked by one country up to now.

Mr. Cook: I am satisfied with that response and happy to accept the Minister's explanation. However, if he has entered a reservation against the whole of that chapter, it becomes even more meaningless to me why the Government are prepared even to temporise on the question of having an inter-governmental conference to render all this into a treaty of European union.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend both for giving way and for drawing the attention of the House to these proposals which have not yet been to the Scrutiny Committee. These proposals are fundamental and relate to the constitution and treaties of the EEC. Can he say more about the vires and authority of the committee to which he has referred? Was it not formed after the Fontainebleau summit and was not that meeting outside the terms of the treaty? Will he invite the Government to tell us what

[Mr. Spearing]

authority this committee, which is suggesting changes to the treaty, has and with what authority the Minister sits on it?

Mr. Cook: I am not entirely sure that it lies in my mouth to answer for the Government, but my hon. Friend has given me an opportunity to refresh my memory of the text. The reservation to which the Minister referred applies to section B. No reservation has been entered by the British Government to any part of section C which deals with the increased revenue powers of the European Parliament.

Mr. Rifkind *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: I am going only by the text which was placed in my hand by the Library. The Minister may, if he wishes, check the text and make appropriate corrections, but the only reservation entered on section C is by the Greek Government.

Mr. Rifkind *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: The Minister shakes his head and says that it is not true. I take exception to that observation. I can only go on what is in the text as published, in which—and he is welcome to check it—there is no British reservation.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman implies that the reservation applies to one particular page. It refers not to section C or D, but to the whole chapter dealing with the powers of the European Parliament. As I sat on the committee, I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance that the reservation applies to the whole section on the powers of the European Parliament, including the proposal to provide it with powers over revenue.

Mr. Cook: I can only suggest that the Minister takes this matter up with whoever drafted the presentation of the text, because it is quite clear that footnote II refers to section B and that the reservation entered in respect of section C was entered by the Greeks. I should have thought that had the British Government wished to enter a reservation to section C as well as to section B, they would have entered the footnote on both occasions. However, the Minister may wish to consider the matter.

Mr. Budgen: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in general the powers of the Council are set out in the written constitution of the EEC? Was not the Luxembourg agreement a significant derogation from that, because after France had left for a period it became necessary to introduce the practice of allowing a nation state to exercise a veto when it said that its essential national interests were at stake? What has now happened is a promise to use the Luxembourg veto less generously.

Mr. Cook: It is plain from the text that the British Government appear to have committed themselves to accepting majority voting on more frequent occasions, and that implies a more restrained and less regular use of the British veto. There is a school of thought, of which the hon. Gentleman is a distinguished exponent, which takes the view that that is entirely desirable. If so, that case should be argued in the House by the Government. They should clearly tell us the occasions on which they wish to restrict the use of the veto and the occasions on which they would be happier to see an issue resolved by majority voting.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is implying that somehow this is a new development. The Government have made clear on numerous previous occasions their belief that, in those areas where the treaty does not require unanimity, all member Governments should ensure that the veto be used only in a genuuine case when vital national interests are affected. Of course there have been occasions when various Governments have applied the veto when it would have been difficult to substantiate the view that a vital national interest was at stake. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other British Ministers have said that we believe that it is in the interests of the Community as a whole for the use of the veto to be kept to a minimum where vital national interests can be said to apply.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful that we have had this exchange, because it is becoming clear that the Government have moved some way down the road of the Dooge committee to an extent that I had not previously observed. It may be remiss of me, but I do not recall the Prime Minister's clear statement that she is willing to contemplate more majority voting.

Mr. Rifkind: I undertake that this will be my last intervention. The hon. Gentleman is remiss. If he looks at the document "Europe—The Future", produced by the Prime Minister for the last summit, and which has since been made available publicly, he will see in it an explicit reference to the need for the veto to be used only as a last resort. There is a suggestion that when it is used, an explanation might be useful as to why the issue is a vital national interest. In that way we could seek to minimise the use of the veto and not allow it to be used unreasonably. Those matters have been aired publicly on many occasions.

Mr. Cook: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, and I must apologise to the House for having let pass underneath my nose one of the many documents relating to Europe which come before the House. I accept that on this occasion I have been remiss. However, if the Government are willing to entertain a position in which they are more reluctant to use the British veto, it would be nice to know how they define the occasions on which they believe British use to be justified.

There is a considerable amount of merit in the idea of enlargement. I believe that there is something in the Minister's point that, by bringing in Spain and Portugal, enlargement would give added strength to the democratic institutions which are still taking root in those countries. I also believe that enlargement would bring an element of fluidity to the Common Market, which would be welcome to those of us who believe that the Common Market stands in need of substantial change. Yet, if the Community is serious about enlargement, it should put its house in order before inviting the Spaniards and Portuguese to share our present problems and, thus, to complicate them.

The Minister was censorious about the Greeks. It would be unrealistic to imagine that only the Greeks stand in the way of Spain's and Portugal's membership of the Community. If the Greeks had not objected, the French or the Italians would have done. If the Greek objections were

met, I should be surprised if one or other of the Mediterranean countries did not raise an objection. Be that as it may, it is now obvious that there are two question marks over enlargement.

Will it happen at all, and will it happen by 1 January 1986? The retiring President of the Commission, Mr. Gaston Thorn, has made it clear that he does not expect enlargement to be completed by 1 January 1986. The Minister did not condescend to speak about the implications of that. What does the shift in enlargement mean for the decision on an increase in own resources? Conservative Back-Bench Members asked the Minister about that, and I wish to press the point.

The Government's position on the increase in own resources has gone through many phases. In February 1983 the Government took the view that there was enough money in the kitty, even if enlargement took place. They now believe that there is not enough money in the kitty, even if enlargement does not take place, and they want an increase in own resources to take place in advance of enlargement. Between them, there was a flitting phase in which the question of the increase in own resources was tied to enlargement of the Community. Even now the Minister still partly justifies an increase in own resources by reference to enlargement.

I invite the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to answer several points when he replies. The House is entitled to greater clarity about where the Government stand should enlargement not take place on 1 January 1986 or should it recede into the indefinite future. If it is not going to take place, is it possible to defer an increase in own resources? If an increase in own resources is required, we are entitled to know how much less that increase need be, if enlargement has not occurred and the increase is required only to pay for the return of our rebate.

What will happen to our rebate for 1984, which is payable next year? The 1985 draft budget made no provision for our rebate. The Strasbourg assembly has included a provision for a rebate on the expenditure side. Its motivation, with which hon. Members will be wearily familiar, is that it wants a rod with which to hit the back of the Council, for reasons which have nothing to do with British contributions. I am sure that the House will be united in resisting that provision.

If we consider the draft budget, even without the amendments of the Strasbourg assembly, we find, curiously, that the Commission has not made provision for the British rebate payable in 1985 on the revenue side either. Will the Economic Secretary tell us where the rebate is? Is he confident that the Government will secure it? How will they do so? If they secure it by means of an abatement, when will he proceed to deduct our refund from our payments to the Community? Will it start in January? How much will he deduct from our contributions to take account of the refund to which we are entitled for 1984?

That naturally and logically brings me to the budgetary discipline package, which is the sister to the rebate agreement, to which the Minister referred at length. We shall presumably have an opportunity to debate the matter again when we eventually debate the order which is at present before the courts. I noted what the Minister said about the objections to the document on budgetary discipline. I noted that he said that, although it had no legal status, it did not necessarily mean that the courts could not found on it. That is doubtless the case, but it does not mean that the courts would necessarily found on it; even less does it mean that the Commission is likely to take any action before the courts in respect of that agreement.

The Minister did not respond adequately to the point raised by Conservative Members about the aberrant developments, in the event of which rebate — read "clawback" — would not operate. Agriculture, as Conservative Members are fond of reminding the House, is a chancy business. There are many changes with the seasons and with the harvest. It would be difficult to find a year when the CAP operated in which one could not find something to tag as an aberrant development to justify clawback not being stimulated.

A basic reason for not being over-persuaded by the Minister's arguments is the patent fact that he has failed to persuade the farming community that the impositions in the budgetary discipline document will bite. We do not need to search for quotations from the German Parliament or from Italian or French farmers. We need simply look at home. After the text on budget discipline was produced, *Farmers Weekly* stated:

"Farmers have nothing to fear from the EEC budget discipline agreement drawn up in Brussels to control the common agricultural policy because it is so full of escape clauses".

Michel Rocard's name has already been taken in vain. After the final agreement, he said that the French had agreed to it because it provided sufficient flexibility for the CAP to continue unimpaired.

There is another reason why we should be sceptical about the extent to which a common position would be sufficient to control expenditure on agriculture in future, and the extent to which we can rely on our Community partners to observe that voluntary undertaking. It is provided by the way our partners have operated recently. The Minister attempted to persuade us that milk levies and quotas were being observed by our partners. Michel Rocard assured the French nation, even if he did not mention this at the Council of Agriculture Ministers:

"No dairy farmer will have to pay super levy on over-production in 1984-85."

For the removal of doubt, Alain Clauzier, who is a principal agricultural commentator in the French press and a large farmer, said more bluntly:

"Delaying payment of the super levy didn't make any difference to us in France . . . We weren't going to pay it anyway, we're not worried about what anyone else in the Community thinks."

There is an entertaining footnote to that exchange in the dispute between the Strasbourg assembly and the Commission about the 1985 budget. The assembly provided for the insertion in the budget of revenue of 120 million ecu from payment of the milk super levy in November. The Commission has since deleted that insertion on the ground that it does not expect to receive any payments of the super levy. That speaks volumes for its confidence in the system which it set up.

However, we need not found our nervousness about the efficacy of the document on budgetary discipline on the milk quotas alone. Paragraph 11.7 of the White Paper is fascinating. It deals with infraction of Community law and cases referred by the Commission to the European Court. During the past five years, 173 cases have been taken to court, only seven of which involved the United Kingdom. We are almost at the bottom of the league, with only the Danes below us. Italy accounts for no fewer than 61 of the 173 cases, and France accounts for 27. In 1983, there was only one case against the United Kingdom, but 12 each

[Mr. Cook]

against France and Italy. Some of us believe that it is a bit rich in those circumstances for the French and Italians to lecture the British about being non-communitaire.

What is even more striking is that, although the British are punctilious about agreements made in the Council, our partners take what might charitably be called a more creative attitude. Given their record of imaginative interpretation of Council agreements, one is bound to be sceptical about the extent to which the agreement on budgetary discipline, which does not even have the merit of the legal status that resulted in those infractions being brought before the courts, will bite. Its failure to bite is fairly clear from the 1985 draft budget, because there is a danger that the formula for budget discipline will make things worse next year. It provides that 1985 will be one of the two base years. Therefore, the agricultural community has every incentive to bid up expenditure to establish a high base rate for future years.

The draft budget proposed by the Commission includes a dramatic increase in the agriculture budget. In the draft budget sent to the Strasbourg assembly the proportion of expenditure on agriculture increased from 66 per cent. to 72 per cent. Since then the Strasbourg assembly has added 1·3 billion ecu to agricultural expenditure. I noted that 5 million ecu relate specifically to additional help to beekeepers. The money has been doled out carefully among different agricultural interests.

The Commission responded to the increases by advising the assembly that they were illegal, to which the assembly retorted that the draft budget was illegal anyway as it did not cover the full 12 months. There is some justice in the charge levied by the assembly against the budget, but that was not an elevated set of exchanges between the two bodies. This is not an institution trembling on the verge of relaunch.

It is worth noting what has been cut to make room for the additional agricultural expenditure. The 1985 aid budget has been cut, and the proportion for aid has been reduced from 3·5 per cent. to 3·2 per cent. For the first time, the EEC will be spending less on aid to the Third world than it will spend on the salaries of the bureaucrats in Brussels, who will now swallow 3·4 per cent. of the budget—*[Interruption.]* Those are the figures provided in the draft budget.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage) *rose*——

Mr. Cook: I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will contain his impatience, but I should tell him that we have not yet reached a position in which hon. Members intervene by means of a megaphone.

The cut in aid is pertinent, because last week we heard a statement, in response to the Dublin summit, in which the Prime Minister referred to the Community's commitment, given at the European Council, to provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain to the countries of north Africa. In their innocence, the Opposition welcomed that commitment, because they imagined that if the European Council was to will the food, it would find the funds to pay for it. We were wrong. We learn now that the food aid budget will remain at a fixed ceiling. Even as we speak, according to *The Guardian*,

"Community officials are working against the clock—and in some cases against their own consciences—to divert food aid from countries such as Bangladesh",

to Africa. We understand from the report that the Prime Minister was a main opponent of any increase in expenditure. In that she was at least consistent. She is imposing on the Community budget precisely the same strictures as she imposed on the British overseas aid budget, thus requiring any additional aid to Ethiopia to come from our overall aid budget.

Mr. Jackson: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for interrupting him earlier. He was wrong to say what he did. He should be aware that the Community has a separate budget for overseas aid in relation to the Lomé convention. He referred to food aid, which is only a small proportion of our total effort.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is correct, but I am referring to the appropriations included in the draft budget, which provides a reduction in the proportion for aid from 3·52 per cent. to 3·2 per cent. of the 1985 draft budget. The aid provision in the draft budget is less than the provision for expenditure on administration in Brussels. An institution that gets its priorities so markedly wrong is in severe need of outside advice to rethink its priorities.

In common with many hon. Members, I receive large volumes of mail from constituents who are deeply moved by what they see on their television screens about Ethiopia. A point that they raise repeatedly, and which plainly distresses them, is a simple equation. They see Europe stuffed to capacity with surplus grain—stuffed so much that the grain is overflowing into barns in Switzerland and Austria because the Community can no longer contain it—and they also see, not too far away from Europe, people perishing from hunger. They then make the reasonable equation that some of the surplus grain could be used to relieve the suffering and deaths that they have witnessed.

The 1·2 million tonnes of grain is not a large amount; it is less than one fifth of our intervention stocks and less than one tenth of the intervention stocks that we are likely to have next spring when they will reach their peak. It is less than the amount of wheat used by the Community for conversion into animal feedstuffs to feed the animals of the Community.

What happened, and what continues to happen, in Ethiopia is an appalling tragedy, but it was also an opportunity for the Community to redeem itself and to prove that there was some purpose, for the good of humanity, in the large surpluses produced by the CAP. The halting response of the European Community until the Dublin summit, and the hypocritical response given there, have knocked what last hope there might have been of the CAP redeeming itself by giving that necessary food aid to north Africa. Instead, the whole episode has sharpened the moral offensiveness of a system that extrudes ever-swelling surpluses in a world where two thirds of mankind go to bed hungry.

We are left with a draft budget for 1985 in which an offensive and extravagant agricultural system absorbs an even higher proportion of the budget than it did this year. Not only that, we have a document on budget discipline that cannot provide us with a guarantee that expenditure will not swell further. In the meantime, the trivial resources allocated to other projects are cut. The communiqué after Dublin called upon the European Council to implement without delay its commitment to transport policy. The Commission's draft budget cuts

expenditure on transport. The communiqué after Dublin called upon the European Council to adopt further measures to strengthen the technological base of the Community. The draft budget presented by the Commission cuts expenditure on science and technology.

Had the Commission set out to confirm our prejudices about the mistaken priorities of the Community, it could not have done better than to present us with the 1985 draft budget. The House does not have the power to alter that budget. That is one of the unsatisfactory features of the position in which we find ourselves. However, we have one power. We can resolve that, in the light of the priorities displayed in this 1985 budget, it is inconceivable that there could be any rational and principled case or any consistent intellectual argument mounted to persuade the House that there is a basis for us to vote an increase in own resources to provide for even larger expenditure on the same priorities in 1986. I hope that the Minister, who is a rational and intellectual man, will take note of that, and will not put the House in the embarrassing position of having to vote down the increase.

7 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "Council of Ministers" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"but regrets that the arrangements made at Fontainebleau and Dublin provide for a major increase in public expenditure and that the restraint mechanism on agricultural spending has no legal force and would, even if effective in practice, provide for substantial further increases in this area of spending."

My hon. Friend the Minister did not say whether my amendment would be acceptable to the Government, but I thank the Chair for selecting it for debate, because it enables us to focus our attention on the basic issue of budget discipline, the issue on which the Minister concentrated.

Although we have had a bit of fun this afternoon, the whole thing is deeply depressing. It is clear that we shall throw away the one chance that this country has had in over 12 years to achieve reforms in the Common Market, and the only chance that we shall probably ever have to secure budget discipline. My hon. Friend the Minister gave way several times, but whenever there was a specific issue about whether or not there was any substance in the budget discipline, he made it clear that all that we would rely on in the Common Market was the goodwill of those taking part in the meetings of the Council of Ministers. He quoted the paper *Le Figaro*, which said that it liked what was going on. He quoted Italian farmers, who said that they thought that it was a grand idea and he told us of the French Agriculture Minister who was hopeful that France might, some day, abide by the milk quotas. However, when we come down to the details of the budget discipline, it is obvious that it is nothing more than a sick joke.

I shall go through the specific questions that I put to my hon. Friend the Minister but which, sadly, he was not able to answer. We are told that there are strict financial guidelines. Was there anything in the guidelines that would prevent the Council of Ministers, by a majority, from increasing the total expenditure to any sum that it thought fit, whether by 20 per cent., 30 per cent. or 40 per cent.? Under article 1 of the new so-called budget discipline agreement, there is nothing whatsoever to stop such a thing happening.

Mr. Marlow: If there is a new limit on own resources of 1·4 per cent. VAT, will that not limit what the Council of Ministers may agree?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend may hope that that is the case, but I remind him that there is already a restriction for 1984 and there will be a restriction for 1985, as in both these cases there is a legal limit of 1 per cent. VAT. My hon. Friend is aware that, despite the attempts of that great British democrat Mr. Oliver Smedley to dissuade the Government from apparently abusing the law, we shall be giving more money to the Common Market this year above the legal limit. Next year, there is such a crazy budget that we shall obviously greatly exceed it.

I again put to the Minister and to the Treasury a simple question. Is it true that, despite all the talk of strict financial discipline, there is nothing in article 1 that will prevent Ministers from deciding to spend any sum that they might want, whether we like it or not?

There is then the question of the agricultural budget. What has been set as the basis for a major step forward is the principle that the Common Market will be able to increase the amount that it spends on agriculture only by roughly the amount of increase in own resources. There are severe problems here. First, the base on which we are working and on which we shall assess all the percentage increases is actual spending in the year 1984 and the envisaged spending for 1985. Surely Ministers are aware that 1984 was a year of horrendous over-production, a year in which mountains reached the most crazy levels. What is proposed now is that agricultural spending should be based on this year and on a prediction for next year, when agricultural spending is estimated to rise by about 15 per cent.

At the moment, the wheat mountain exceeds 4 million tonnes, the barley mountain is over 1 million tonnes, and the beef mountain, the height of which is continually soaring, is about 500,000 tonnes. We have all-time high mountains of food, expenditure on agricultual dumping and destruction of food. Despite that, the Government are asking us to regard it as an achievement that future agricultural spending will be based on this year and will not increase by more than Community own resources.

Even that has an escape clause, as the Minister is aware. In article 2 of the so-called binding agreement——

Sir John Farr (Harborough): My hon. Friend refers to horrendous over-production, but he will recognise—I am surprised that he has not done so already—that none of that over-production has been done by British farmers.

Mr. Taylor: How right my hon. Friend is. Britain does not have a problem of over-production, although we over-provide on some things—for example, marginally on dairy and cereals. However, if the Common Market were ever to do anything about the agricultural policy, British farmers would suffer. Sadly, that is why the Government have never proposed a reform of the CAP. We hear my right hon. and hon. Friends talking, year after year and month after month, about the need to reform the CAP, if only these wretched Continentals would agree. As we know, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) is well aware, at the Stuttgart summit we agreed that we would not seek any reforms in the basic structure or policies of the CAP and seek only modifications or adjustments in the CAP.

[Mr. Taylor]

The Government have said that they want to persuade the Continentals to reform the CAP but, sadly, there has been no sign, apart from the general broad sentiment, that the Government have any wish to reform the CAP. I do not believe they do, and I am sure that the Minister will accept that. Some people may think that there is a need to reform the CAP, but how do the Government intend to go about it? They have said that they want moderation in prices, but they know that that will not solve the problem and would not be acceptable to our colleagues. They say that change must be gradual, but they do not say in what direction the change will be. We are facing a crisis of over-production and all that the Government intend to do is to spend more.

Even if we were just to say, "Spend more from the increase in own resources," there is an escape clause in article 2 of the so-called solemn and binding agreement which says that account will be taken of "exceptional circumstances". Is there not something else in this binding agreement? The Minister said that we should not worry, because if the Community overspends one year, we can claw back the money the next. I asked him a specific question which, sadly, he did not answer. That concerns article 5, which says that, if there is overspending, even on top of the increase in own resources, we shall not claw back if there are what are called "aberrant developments". Nobody knows what those are, or what exceptional circumstances are.

Mr. Johnston: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he wants a solemn and binding agreement so rigid that no exceptional circumstances and no aberrant developments of any kind would affect it?

Mr. Taylor: I am almost a little impatient with the hon. Gentleman. He knows what the score is. There is no control in this so-called budget discipline. The Liberals have talked about the Common Market with much enthusiasm, but if they are that enthusiastic, they would grab the one and only chance that we have to achieve any reform of the CAP and the Common Market. The Community has run out of cash, and all that we shall do is give a lot more money to the Common Market so that it can spend much more on agriculture and other such things. In exchange, we have only a worthless piece of paper, which provides no protection.

These days we are accustomed to talking about the Common Market's great triumphs. The other day we talked about the great achievement of handing over 5 million people to red China with the assurance that the same would not happen to them as happened to the people of Tibet or Zimbabwe. This agreement is not an achievement in any sense. We are talking about a worthless piece of paper which gives no guarantees.

The Minister told us not to worry too much because he is confident that under the arrangement the percentage spent on agriculture will be down a little. That can be achieved only by spending more money on other things. For example, I might tell one of my hon. Friends that I am worried about the percentage of his income that he is spending on gin and whisky. He might come back and say that I should not worry because he was going to spend more on gin and whisky, but so much more on tobacco that the percentage total expenditure on gin and whisky would be reduced. That is what is happening. We are about to spend much more money on agriculture, on dumping and food destruction, and nothing in the agreement can prevent it.

My hon. Friends will have been receiving large numbers of letters from pharmacists and doctors who are worried about the change in the prescribing of drugs. The Government say that the change is vital and that it will save £100 million a year. University students were not happy about something that the Government planned to do and which we were told was vital because it would save £30 million. We hear talk of the need to reduce the pensioners' heating allowance, which could save us about £50 million.

How many of my hon. Friends are aware that every week — not every year — the Common Market spends £100 million on destroying, dumping or storing food? We are experiencing a crisis. What are we doing about it? The Government plan to give more money. The only protection that we have is the goodwill of Community members. We shall have to rely upon their solemn resolve to face up to their responsibilities and to try to reduce spending.

It is difficult for me to go back to my constituents and tell them that it is vital to reduce the pensioners' heating allowance, that it is vital to reduce the percentage of rate support grant and limit a doctor's right to prescribe whatever medicines he thinks fit because we must control public spending, when the Government are providing enormous additional sums which the Common Market will waste. It does not make much sense to cut spending on regional grants in Britain if we put more money into the crazy Common Market regional fund. It does not make much sense to cut out welfare payments if we put more money into the Common Market welfare fund.

Conservatives should unite on this fundamental issue. We should not bury our heads in the sand. The only way to achieve change is to control the money supply, say that there can be no increase in resources and that reform must come from within.

There is a strategic aspect. So long as this crazy spending on agricultural surpluses continues, we are providing a massive boost and subsidy to the Soviet Union and its immediate supporters. I do not think that people are fully aware of the immense boost that we are giving to the Soviet economy and war machine as a direct result of the CAP.

We were talking the other day about sending an extra £19 million to Ethiopia on the strict understanding that we cut aid to Bangladesh. How many people are aware that every week—not every month or every year—we send 164,000 tonnes of cheap, subsidised food from the Common Market to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and other essential parts of the Soviet bloc. What price do we charge? A recent parliamentary answer gives the information. We are sending beef at the equivalent of 40p a pound, sugar at 7p a pound, flour at 5p a pound and wine at the unbelievable price of 7p a litre. At one time I thought that that was a secret plot by the Common Market's Right wing to spread alcoholism in Russia and so undermine the people's will.

If those prices were reflected in the Russian shops, it would not be so bad, but the Russian housewives, I am sad to say, do not gain advantage. The Soviet state machine shoves up the prices and keeps the difference. We are talking about a massive sum which is a direct aid or subsidy to the Soviet Union and others. I do not mind paying high taxes in Britain to provide an Army, Navy and

Air Force to defend ourselves against Russian expansionism, but it is crazy and nutty that I should have to pay additional taxes to subsidise the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and the Soviet war machine.

Despite the ever-growing surpluses, the Common Market has begun a system of super-subsidies. A recent example is the special sale of butter to Russia at 17p a pound in blocks of 50,000 tonnes. Is there anything in the Government's proposals which will reduce those figures? There is not. The figures and the mountains will continue to rise and nothing will be done about it. We know that to be so in our heart of hearts.

If hon. Members are not worried about subsidising Russia they should, for God's sake, worry about what they are doing to the Third world. It makes me sick to hear some of my right hon. and hon. Friends talk all this Brandt nonsense and how they want to help the Third world, when they are the architects of the most vicious policy against the Third world—the common agricultural policy.

Why are Third world countries unable to provide food for themselves? Why are they unable to pay their debts? Why are they unable to buy British machines? The reason is that we are deliberately depriving the Third world of a fair price for its agricultural produce by dumping food on the world market.

If one produces sugar in the ideal place in the world for that purpose, one receives about £90 a tonne. A farmer in Norfolk producing sugar beet receives about £350 a tonne. The world price is so low because we are dumping. It is not just a question of what we dump because everything is comparable — wheat with rice, and so on. We are causing hardship and damage, distress, starvation and misery in the Third world as a direct consequence of the agricultural policy. The Government plan to do nothing about it. That is wrong and shameful.

I have been speaking for just over 15 minutes and many other hon. Members want to speak. I hope that the Government and my hon. Friends will be wary about what they are doing about relations with the United States of America. It is abundantly clear — it was one of my original reservations about the EEC — that if the Common Market is to have any meaning inevitably it will conflict with the United States. We are seeing more and more signs of that. We forget at our peril that the United States pays for most of western Europe's defence. It pays 52 per cent. of the total cost. The Americans are becoming a little fed up. Motions in the Senate stress the need to reduce spending by the United States in western Europe.

What worries me is that the Common Market seems to be going out of its way to make life difficult for America, to be unfair and unreasonable. A good example is the recent Common Market outrage about the export of steel pipes and tubes to the United States. Our friends in the Commission said that the Americans were imposing outrageous and illegal restrictions on Common Market imports. They said they would have to retaliate and impose restrictions on American goods.

The Common Market came to an agreement. In 1982 it was called an exchange of letters. We said that we would restrict our exports of pipes and tubes to the United States to 5·9 per cent. of the US total market. In fact, our exports were not kept to that figure but soared to 14 per cent.— more than double the share that had been agreed. I asked the Government why we did nothing about that. They said that, as the agreement did not establish a binding limit on EEC exports of steel pipes and tubes, there was no question of the Government or any other EEC member seeking to impose a limit. In effect, they were saying that the agreement into which they had entered did not matter a damn.

The Government objected strongly when the Americans stepped in and said, "Sorry, we are going to impose the 5·9 per cent. limit until we obtain an agreement that will work." I am sure that there is some way in which the Government could claim that that was not fair or right. The fact is that we reached what the Americans thought was an agreement on 5·9 per cent., yet we exported 14 per cent. and did nothing about that. Indeed, the Government said in Parliament that they were not prepared to do anything about it, but they then objected like crazy when the Americans wanted to do something about it.

The same applies to the dumping of food. There are informal agreements on which parts of the world countries can dump food in. We are moving into areas that the Americans have traditionally regarded as their dumping grounds. I am concerned that the activities of the Common Market, especially those of the Commission, are deliberately creating a conflict between Britain and the United States, and that that conflict will grow.

Of course, there is also the effect on our country. Let us consider what is happening to Britain's trade. The figures for manufacturing trade in the White Paper are wrong and do not add up. I pointed that out to the Minister during a point of order. The White Paper puts exports at £3·6 billion and imports at £12·6 billion, with the difference being £3·9 billion. That is not even——

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): I have been advised that there is an error in the printing. The figure for exports should be £8·7 billion, not £3·6 billion. The figures will then be reconciled.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. However, I find it difficult to understand how the difference between £3·6 billion and £8·7 billion can be a printing error. I appreciate my hon. Friend's courtesy in intervening on that point.

We must ask ourselves about the implications. My worry has always been for the British economy. We have hooked ourselves on to an area of structural decline and become a peripheral part of it. We are in an area that is destined to have higher unemployment than the remainder of the world, and we are especially vulnerable. The trade factor shows exactly what is happening with the movement of decision-making and investment towards the centre of the Market.

Our amendment is about the budget discipline only. I know that the Minister is one of the most honest Ministers in the Government. He must accept that all we have in the discipline document is a form of words that means absolutely nothing and will give us no security. All we have to rely upon is the word and the goodwill of Ministers in the Common Market who have made spending a total nonsense. They have spent money like water — wastefully and irresponsibly. There is not the slightest sign of any solid common sense in the EEC.

We will do just as well without the discipline document as we will do with it. The real crunch will come when the House must decide whether to vote for more resources. Nothing that has been said today should make the House do anything other than say no on that occasion.

7.24 pm

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) is a populist doctrinaire. During these debates he repeatedly produces an effective and fluent blend of facts and prejudices which are difficult to tackle in an ordered manner. I wish to take up some of his points, which I have heard not for the first time.

These debates are important—something upon which, at least, the hon. Gentleman and I can agree. It is a great pity that they are conducted again and again before a practically empty Chamber and a virtually empty Press Gallery. That is, perhaps, a measure of the mistaken set of priorities on which we conduct a great deal of our political dialogue. We often ignore that which is of quite great importance in favour of the transient and sensational.

As a pro-Community Member, I admit that I find it depressing that those who consistently oppose the Common Market again and again appear in these debates and express their views. Those of us who do not take that position, who I believe to be the majority, are often absent.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Johnston: Before I give way, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that in doing so I am not setting a precedent.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I appreciate that he cannot see everything as it is. Those of us participating in the debate are concerned mainly to reform the Community. Just because we do not believe that the sun shines out of the back of the Community's head does not mean that we want to get out of it.

Mr. Johnston: The hon. Gentleman could have fooled me.

I want to direct my remarks to the Minister. I want to raise questions on a number of important issues. I hope that he can answer some of them when he replies to the debate and will correspond with me on the remainder. One asks questions in many of these debates, but receives no answers.

We did not hear that magic word "Spinelli". We did not hear the less onomatopaeic word Dooje, which was raised by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). There was no reference from the Government to the important development — whether or not we agree with it — in current Community thinking about the institutional change that may be required. When the Minister replies I hope that he will say something about the Government's thoughts: not necessarily that we must accept Spinelli hook line and sinker, but that he will address the basic question whether the Government think that the present treaty is adequate or whether it requires some change, and if so in what direction.

It is evident that the Government would agree with Spinelli on the tearing down of internal trade barriers and on having real freedom of movement. No doubt the Minister has seen the article in *The Economist* of 24 November, from which I shall quote briefly. It is entitled, "How Europe has failed". The thrust of the argument is not that advanced by the Minister for Southend, East, that the failure is to attempt to get together, but approaches the matter from the other side, namely that we have not got together sufficiently, and consequently our economic performance had been hindered.

The article states:

> "In producing the new generation of digital-telephone switches, North America relies on three companies, Japan on two. In western Europe nearly 10 companies produced these switches, at an R and D cost of $500 million—$1 billion per company, which they then could not sell anywhere in the EEC except their home countries because each government protected its own."

I want to know the Government's view on that sort of integration. There is no doubt that if, on a Community-wide level, we want to compete effectively with the United States and Japan, there will be some areas where firms will suffer and go to the wall. That is not an easy matter. It is a difficult issue. Let me quote again from this article:

> "Government procurement accounts for an immense market —equal to some 17 per cent. of European Community GDP. European Governments have wielded their purchasing power for ill in two ways. The first is by discriminating in favour of domestic producers. This has been most flagrant in telecommunications, but it happens with all high-tech products. In October the EEC Commission issued a declaration which feebly 'urged' member states to open 10 per cent. of their telecommunications purchasing to products from other EEC countries. The other discrimination in European public procurement is in favour of big companies. Government contracts can be a lifeline for small firms and new industries."

If the Government, as they are continually telling us, are in favour of breaking down all the non-tariff barriers, do they also recognise that the logic of that position means that both in Government support policy and in inter-governmental co-operation within the Community we shall have to look at ways in which competing firms within the different countries of the Community can be integrated in some way? In some cases it will mean that some firms will be forced to the wall. In forcing them to the wall, a more effectively competitive position will be created. That is not an easy matter, but it is part of the logic. So Spinelli, we would presume, is all right in certain respects.

May I also take the opportunity to remark that in the exchange between the hon. Gentleman the Member for Livingston and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), who has temporarily left us, about majority voting, it seemed to me that at least on the face of it the Government were moving in the proper direction.

Secondly, I wish to ask a few questions about the Parliament. The hon. Member for Livingston perfectly properly referred to the Dooge committee. It is much to his credit that he did. It is remarkable that the Government made no reference to it at all. The hon. Member for Livingston and the Minister had an exchange of words about what exactly the Government's position was on the potential budgetary powers of the Parliament. After some pressure from the hon. Member for Livingston, I understood the Minister to say that he had more or less reserved the whole chapter on the Parliament. This is very interesting, but it tells us nothing about the Government's view on what kind of changes, if any, there should be in the Parliament.

If there is to be greater integration, and if more is to be done trans-nationally, does this not mean a stronger Parliament? Or is it, contrary-wise, the Government's position—I suspect that it would be the position adopted by the hon. Member for Livingston — that democratic control is exerted, not through the Parliament, but through the Council of Ministers, and that therefore one has a route to the fabulous veto which everybody goes on and on about?

When a Parliament is elected on a Community-wide basis, it develops Community-wide attitudes. The Budget Committee met on 3 and 4 December and was unanimous

in rejecting the budget. There was not a single voice, not even an abstention, against its rejection. That means something. *[Interruption.]* I did not quite catch what the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said. However, few Members of the European Parliament would be able to match the hon. Gentleman in that regard. There is no doubt that in the eyes of many Members of the European Parliament the conciliation procedure is farcical and not at all meaningful. The Council is not operating the treaty as it stands at present while there is any chance of change.

Mr. Robin Cook: I shall not detain the hon. Member for long, but he referred to the exchange that I had with the Minister. For the avoidance of doubt, perhaps I could confirm for him that it would appear that the reservation to which the Minister referred applies to the whole section on the European Parliament. There would appear—the Economic Secretary might wish to refer this to his officials—to be a misprint on page 20, by which footnote 2, which gives effect to this, appears at an earlier point in the text where it clearly intrudes upon section B. It was that which led me to the reasonable assumption that it referred to section B. But since footnote 2 appears to predate footnote 1, which comes later in the section, there has obviously been a misprint, which the Economic Secretary might wish to have corrected.

Mr. Johnston: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, on which there is really no need to comment any further.

What about the uniform electoral system, for example? Does the Minister envisage any change taking place there before the next European elections in approximately five years' time? We in the Liberal party and our Social Democratic colleagues remain politely bitter about the last result and about the fact that 2,591,652 people voted for the alliance in the United Kingdom and obtained no representation at all, while fewer than double that number voted Labour and obtained 32 seats. Obviously that has affected the political balance within the Parliament and distorted it in a way that is not reflective of the general position in the Community as a whole.

Turning, thirdly, to the Commission, we know that the Prime Minister is in favour of one commissioner per country. I suspect the reason why the Prime Minister agrees to this position, which, on the face of it, looks very fair, reasonable and rational. Why do we have two commissioners for the large countries and one commissioner for the small countries? In a sense, it was to protect the realistic political weight of the large country. If one then proceeds to the argument that Britain should have one commissioner and that Luxembourg should have one commissioner, I suspect that at the back of her mind the Prime Minister is also saying, "We want a weak Commission, anyway, do we not, so it will not make any real difference, will it?" *[Interruption.]* I did not quite catch what the hon. Member for Livingston said, but I am sure that it was quite helpful.

Do the Government have any views on the reform of the Commission, apart from that which we do know about? What about the idea of the President of the Commission, when he is chosen, having the opportunity or the power to select in some way or another his commissioners, his team, who are to work with him? It does great credit to the diplomatic skills of Mr. Delors that he managed so quickly to sort out the portfolios last weekend. Nevertheless, the power of the President is very much limited. Very often, for various reasons which have nothing to do with any kind of nationalism, he is lumbered with people whom he would not otherwise have chosen.

The staff of the Commission were referred to by the hon. Member for Livingston in various critical comparisons of cost, but it must be said that there is a fair amount of crisis in terms of staff pressure within the Commission. There is the problem of older people who are holding on to fairly key positions which were inherited some time ago. Beyond that, the plain fact is that the Commission is being asked by each member country to do more and more things and does not have any opportunity, through its staff, to be able effectively to do them properly.

My fourth question relates to economic initiative and economic convergence. This point has been touched on in previous exchanges. I had an exchange with the Prime Minister on 5 December, when the right hon. Lady said:

> "The hon. Gentleman mentioned convergent economic policies, but the Community is not meant to be a mechanical redistributive mechanism." — [*Official Report*, 5 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 359.]

What is it supposed to be? *[Interruption.]* I thought that the hon. Gentleman was interested in reform and improvement. The Community was established to provide the sort of cauldron within which economic activity could be more effectively pursued, but there was also, undoubtedly, the concept of redistribution. Why else have a regional fund? Why else have a social fund? There was the concept that the poorer countries would be lifted up and that wealth would be shared out, and an attempt was made—idealistic, perhaps too idealistic even, but a good idea—to create opportunity at a roughly equivalent level througout the Community.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the original intention was to bring up the peripheral areas of the Community. How does that balance with the argument for enlarging the Community yet again? Spain and Portugal—possibly others—now want to join the Ten. They are poor countries by industrial standards. When will we be able to cope with the peripheral regions of the existing Ten and still enlarge the Community?

Mr. Johnston: The hon. Gentleman was an effective chairman of the Regional Committee of the European Parliament. If he will wait one minute I shall come to his point, which is linked with the social and regional fund.

The hon. Member for Southend, East made much of mis-expenditure in the Community. He referred to the regional fund as a silly fund—or a word to that effect. The regional fund now is so small that it has a limited effect and certainly nothing like the remarkable effect that many of us hoped it would have when the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and I were in the European Parliament, when George Thomson was in charge of establishing that fund.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Johnston: If the hon. Gentleman will permit me to finish my point I shall give way, despite what I said earlier about a precedent.

The total EEC budget that we are discussing is about 2 or 3 per cent. of the Community's GNP. The regional and social funds, taken together, are less than 10 per cent.

[Mr. Johnston]

of that 2 per cent. That is tiny. How can one ever expect any convergence to be achieved using that sort of mechanism? It is not possible in a thousand years. No wonder Mr. Papandreou is making the point that he is making.

What is the Government's view on convergence? On page 18 of "Developments in the European Community January-June 1984" I find that the regional fund had £1,222 million in 1984, of which £1,157 million was what is called quota. In other words, it is already allocated between countries. It has very little to do with the central evaluation. Only £65 million was non-quota. There was a time when it was hoped that a much larger proportion of the regional fund would be non-quota and allocated by the Community according to the guidelines laid down by the Commission and advised upon by the Parliament, rather than simply as a result of a haggle between countries in a way that was most unsatisfactory.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way a second time. I shall give the usual undertaking that, except in exceptional circumstances, I shall not interrupt him again.

The hon. Gentleman is putting the case for a regional fund. One way that he has suggested is that money could be moved from the richer to the poorer parts of the Community. Sadly, we are one of the poorer parts of the Community and are net contributors to the EEC budget. Therefore, the fund has not worked in that direction. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is as sad about that as I am.

The other way in which the fund could work would be to have a series of policies devised at the European level which would apply throughout the Community. We have a regional fund at the moment and various policies within that regional fund. The main one relates to industrial training. The Government have also said that they want to spend more money on regional policy. Why is money spent on training better allocated at the Brussels or Strasbourg level than by national Government?

Mr. Johnston: There are fairly obvious reasons for that. If guidelines are laid down which are agreed to by all the individual countries, I do not see why that should not be the basis of the distribution. In fact, it must be the basis of the distribution if one is to have a Community-wide policy.

I come next to the question of enlargement. I should have liked to see the date of 1 January 1986 achieved. I agree with what was said by the hon. Member for Livingston. He quoted Gaston Thorn. I spoke to him last weekend and he repeated that he was very doubtful whether it was possible, particularly as it was unlikely that Papandreou would withdraw his veto.

Why is Papandreou pressing that? It must seem to him that this is the last opportunity that he will have. He is using the same sort of tools to bring pressure to bear as the British Prime Minister used. The British Prime Minister used those tools to achieve budgetary discipline and a rebate for the United Kingdom. Papandreou is doing so in order to achieve greater expenditure from the regional and social funds within Greece. He knows that if he does not get it now it is unlikely that he will get it after enlargement. It would not be possible to deal effectively with the problem, not so much of Spain, but certainly of Portugal and Greece, unless there was a considerable increase of own resources. There is no balking that question.

I hope that everyone remembers that if Spain fails to get in that will have an effect not just on Gibraltar and negotiations there, but a direct effect on the referendum on Spain's membership of NATO. Therefore, those matters cannot just be put into compartments.

The question of political co-operation is dealt with in section IX. On Iran and Iraq it says:

"The Ten noted with concern the continuing conflict . . . They appealed to the two parties to look for a peaceful solution".

It is not a particularly good example of co-operation if Britain has so increased its trade with Iran that it is thereby able to obtain the necessary income to purchase weapons, as I suspect it in part does, and to obtain from Britain motor parts and vehicles which can be used in the war effort, while on the other hand France directly supplies weapons to Iraq. That is not a good example of political co-operation within the EC.

The paragraph on the Arab-Israeli dispute says:

"They called upon the Government of Israel to put an end to its policy of establishing settlements in the Occupied Territories."

Good. That is an essential pre-requisite to a settlement in the middle east. What pressure, as a consequence of that, has the Community put on the United States? UNESCO is not mentioned, but one wonders what the logic is when the Government argue in favour of political co-operation and yet refuse to observe the unanimous request of all the other members of the Community that we should not withdraw from UNESCO. Indeed, the Minister knows their views.

In conclusion, let me quote the Minister of State. As I noted it, he said that "of course there are certain proposals which, if we had been left to ourselves, we could have made better." There is a certain arrogance in that which is perhaps not typical of the Minister. He does have glimmerings of open-mindedness. However, it is rather redolent of speeches of the hon. Member for Southend, East. As the Americans and the Japanese streak ahead of us and our unemployment queues lengthen, I find it extraordinary that the House spends its time lauding itself and endlessly going on about the virtues of the British veto, irrespective of whether it is applied by a Right-wing Conservative Government with Right-wing views or a Left-wing Labour Government with Left-wing views. I sometimes feel that instead of being in the Chamber of the House of Commons I am in a neolithic political tomb.

Mr. Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Johnston: If the Community is to proceed, it must set aside national prejudices and develop a coherent, common will.

7.50 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): This debate will be the last for some time in the long series which we have had on the reform of the framework of the European budget. It is an opportunity for us to take stock of what has been achieved and to consider future prospects.

There can be no doubt about the cost to Britain of the long dispute that we have had with our partners about the framework of the budget. I emphasise that the quarrel was not of our making. The problems flow from the budgetary arrangements which were agreed among the Six before we

joined the Community, and they were anticipated by Britain in the negotiations for accession in 1972 and 1973, when we obtained assurances from the Community. Nevertheless, the cost of our efforts to get the Community to honour the commitments which it made in 1972 and 1973 has been high. There has been the disillusion among the British people, which is amply reflected in these debates. There has been the disillusion also of some of Britain's friends on the continent, who have never really understood what we have been worrying about. There has been the narrowing of the focus of our national vision of Europe. Perhaps most important of all, a series of concessions have been made and British interests have not pressed because of the overriding importance which the Government have rightly attached to making progress on the reform of the budget. Have we reached the end of this painful and debilitating argument, or will there be more to come? I must tell the House that in my opinion the answer to the question must be no.

In logic there are three possible solutions to the problem of imbalances in Britain's net contribution to the Community budget. First, there might be a corrective mechanism to reduce the gap between contributions and receipts. Second, there might be a reduction of spending on agriculture in the Community's budget. This is criminal because such spending falls most heavily on the United Kingdom with its relatively low share in European agriculture. Third, there is the idea of increasing Community spending on non-agricultural policies from which we are net beneficiaries. These three solutions are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, we have heard Ministers saying over the years that they expect all of them to play their part.

I wish to consider the implications of the Fontainebleau agreement and of the new text on budgetary discipline for those three solutions. Take first the Fontainebleau agreement, the essential feature of which is its provision of a new corrective mechanism to replace the temporary agreement of May 1980 and the failed mechanism negotiated at the Dublin summit in December 1974.

The Fontainebleau mechanism has been hailed as a permanent solution. Is it? Part of the agreement specifies:

"The corrective formulas will form part of the decision to increase the VAT ceiling to 1·4 per cent., their durations being linked."

There is no doubt that, from the British point of view, that formula represents a real achievement. We have obtained an abatement of two thirds of our net contribution over the period of the 1·4 per cent. ceiling, and we have succeeded in getting those arrangements embodied in new legal institutions and procedures which will become vested facts and will give us acquired rights. So much on the positive side. But what happens when the 1·4 per cent. ceiling is reached? Will the British abatement continue at two thirds of out net contribution at that time? Will we be able to retain that abatement while insisting on no increase in the 1·4 per cent. ceiling? If there is an increase over the ceiling, will our two thirds abatement be able to continue without challenge?

The answer to these questions is that no one knows. We are told that the abatement formula and the increase in own resources are linked. That is the phrase in the agreement. However, the character of the link is not specified. From close observation of the subject for some years, it is my belief that when the time comes there will be several different views about the nature of the link. We shall have the advantage of the principle of special treatment for Britain having been conceded and of the practice having become established, so I doubt whether we shall once again have to face fundamental arguments about whether or not we should have any rebates at all. However, I have no doubt that the idea of a two thirds reimbursement will come under heavy pressure in future.

In view of this prospect, Britain continues to have a special interest in the level of the Community's farm spending, which is the root cause of our special problem, and in the balance between that farm spending and spending on other policies.

What will be the impact on that balance of the new agreement on budgetary disciplines? Let us consider, first, the new discipline on farm spending. I do not quarrel with the Government for having been driven back from their original position that budget disciplines must be written into the treaty. Nor do I complain especially that it is envisaged that spending on agriculture will grow at a rate that is "no greater than" the rate of increase of own resources rather than the initial British phrase which called for a rate "markedly below" the growth of own resources.

However, nothing in the budget discipline agreement has changed the fact that the Community's spending on agriculture is determined essentially by external factors, especially by the state of harvests around the world and the movement of currency rates of exchange. Essentially, the new agreement introduces a new element into the Community's procedures for making decisions about agriculture. It provides that if there is evidence that the Commission is satisfied that the Agriculture Ministers are contemplating decisions that will cost more than is provided by the so-called "reference framework", Finance Ministers will be called in before any decision is made.

I have no doubt that this is a valuable innovation, and I am sure that the Finance Ministers, and my hon. Friend especially, will breathe heavily over the shoulders of their agriculture colleagues. But how likely is it that they will take a view that is radically different from that of colleagues in the same Governments who face the same political pressures? In my view, the physical presence of Finance Ministers around the Council table will constitute a factor of restraint, but no more. Therefore, I predict that until we have terminated the open-ended nature of CAP price supports—as we have now done in the milk sector — we shall continue to see spending on agriculture overshoot regularly. I must say that I find somewhat unconvincing the reasoning of my hon. Friend the Minister about the effect of majority voting.

What is to happen to the third possible solution to the British problem—that element in Community spending from which we might hope to make a net benefit? I refer to the non-farm spending — the so-called "non-obligatory" expenditure. My first fears were that the Government would lock Britain into a straitjacket in which non-farm spending would be bound to be as restrained as spending on agriculture. Happily, those fears have turned out to be mistaken. The budget discipline agreed for non-farm spending is essentially no different from the arrangements which already exist, by which the Council has sought always to stay within the maximum rate.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Why does my hon. Friend think it is good for the Common Market to increase its expenditure on non-agricultural items?

Mr. Jackson: I was about to explain that, because I expected that point. Briefly, I believe that it is in this area that we shall find a long-term solution to our problem of long-term imbalance.

Because the budget discipline for non-agricultural spending is no different from what we already have, the possibility remains that, from time to time, the Council may agree to spend more on non-agricultural policies than the amount prescribed by the maximum rate—although I note with regret that the Council will be able to do so only on the basis of unanimity. Therefore, in spite of my gloomy prognosis for the continuing growth of farm spending, the possibility remains that non-farm spending will grow just as fast, so the overall balance between farm spending and non-farm spending will not worsen—indeed, it may even get better. But if farm spending regularly overshoots, as I fear it will, that balance will turn ever further against us.

Where will that non-farm spending go? That is the $64,000 question. If I am right in saying that the Fontainebleau agreement does not solve our problem in perpetuity, and that the growth of agricultural spending is unlikely to be as constrained as we would like, the third solution—the growth of non-farm spending—will be very important to us in the long term. That is the answer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). We know that heavy claims will be made by other member states, especially after enlargement. Will the British Government be in there fighting for the share of that new spending that we will need if we are to turn the balance of our net contributions permanently on to a more favourable basis? I must confess that I am concerned that the Government have not yet come fully to terms with the problem.

So great is our concern with budget discipline that we run the risk of overlooking opportunities for doing ourselves a good turn through Community spending. I shall give a simple and topical example. It is now becoming apparent that Britain is almost isolated on the exceedingly sensitive issue of acid rain. We face the possibility that we may be outvoted on this question, and the probability that, in due course, we shall have to find the money needed to deal with the problem.

If we were not so worried about budget discipline that we had almost given up ways of spending Community money to Britain's advantage, we might have anticipated that position, saying, "All right, we shall go along with the majority on acid rain, but, since there are so many coal-fired power stations in Britain, and because this is so self-evidently a Community-wide transfrontier problem, we are looking for substantial support from the Community budget for the adaptation of our power stations." I have no doubt that, if such a programme were agreed, it would involve spending well beyond the limits of the budget discipline agreement. I would not worry about that. My concern is rather that it would worry the Government. Indeed, I fear that that consideration would be uppermost in their mind. With regret, I must say that such an attitude could be simply described as cutting off one's nose to spite one's face.

8.3 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): My remarks will be confined to the sections in the draft budget and the White Paper on the fishing industry. I should like to concentrate on the issues of maritime inspection and controls, Community education and vocational training and the adjustments of capacity in the fisheries sector.

The fishing industries in the Community operate within the framework of a common fisheries policy. That framework may be altered, following the accession of Spain to the Community. Earlier this evening, the Minister assured the House that the outcome of the negotiations would be satisfactory to the British fishing industry, and I hope that events bear that out.

The EEC's fish police inspectors are beginning to make their weight felt. There have not yet been any convictions, but fishermen are certainly aware of their presence. The problems of foreign overfishing have been with us for many years, especially in the case of the fleets from Denmark, Holland and the Republic of Ireland. Where such vessels are involved, excess captures have reached absurdly high levels—so high that one can say that orders placed with Dutch yards for new and large vessels have been made on the basis of illegal fishing. That is absurd. It looks as though the EEC will take legal action following a report drawn up by the EEC's fisheries inspectorate. Similarly, the Danish Government have decided, at long last, to take action against the owners of some 70 vessels for illegal fishing.

In *Lloyds List* of Friday last week, Ian Strutt said:

> "The Danes were thought to have caught 150,000 tonnes of juvenile herring last year which would have matured into an adult stock of around 1 m tonnes.
>
> Catching of juvenile fish was thought to be continuing this year until the Danish Government decided, for the first time, to take mass action against the fleet."

The policing of the Community's fishing effort has had partial success, but much more needs to be done. I still believe that we need an expansion in the EEC's fisheries inspectorate. I should like to hear the Government's view on that matter.

Item 4300 in section III B of the draft budget refers to

> "Measures establishing a Community education and vocational training policy in the fisheries sector."

Yet the sum of money to be committed to achieving that commendable objective is about £80,000. To say the least, that is a derisory figure. If the aim is to move towards a common training and educational programme for EEC fishermen, we shall not progress far on that pittance. One essential feature of such a programme is, or should be, the interchange of those directly involved in the training of fishermen. How on earth can that be achieved, given the miserly sum of £80,000? At the very least, that sum should be trebled.

Training programmes and financial assistance should not be confined to the established educational and training bodies. They do a good job training fishermen, but we must not lose sight of the fact that many of our fishermen, especially in Scotland, live in remote communities far removed from the technical and nautical colleges that provide that training. In those circumstances, the group training associations play an important role, and I hope that they are here to stay. They were created by the sea fisheries training council, which is now defunct, and I hope that they will continue to flourish under the umbrella of the Sea Fish Industries Authority.

I am bitterly disappointed that the draft budget contains no proposals for the payment of compensation for those fishermen made redundant by the EEC's fisheries policies. I refer to the document that mentioned the adjustment of capacity in the fisheries sector. No mention is made of the

fishermen displaced by the pursuit of this policy. We must remember that many of those fishermen were placed in the nasty, brutal front line of the fisheries dispute in the 1970s between the United Kingdom and Iceland. Those fishermen have been badly served by both Conservative and Labour Governments. I go further, and say that they have been betrayed by successive Governments.

While for many of those fishermen it is desperately late in the day, natural justice demands that they be given some compensation. The EEC should examine forthwith the means by which redundancy payments could equate with the financial assistance offered to those vessel owners who tie up, scrap or effect a change in the use of their vessels.

The Commission should devise a financial scheme of income guarantees for redundant fishermen in line with some aspects of the provisions available to coal and steel workers. I do not believe that such payments should be derived from a levy on each tonne of fish landed at United Kingdom ports. Some other means will have to be found. Other means have been found to compensate vessel owners so why not for the fishermen who crew those vessels?

The Commission should also investigate the possibility of a common state retirement and pension policy for all fishermen aged 55. Fishing is the most dangerous industrial occupation in Britain today. It is far more dangerous and causes more injuries and death than coal mining. No fisherman in his late fifties should be forced to go to sea. We should be talking about compensation for fishermen along the lines of that offered to redundant steel workers.

I remind the House, if it needs such a reminder, that fishermen are almost always denied redundancy payments by their employers and the state. I can give an example of that from my family. A brother of mine was given the princely sum of £385 by his firm after 19 years of service with it. The firm received £400 per gross registered tonne for each vessel that it decommissioned. It seems that the European Community believes that GRT is more important than fishermen.

Many of the vessels for which decommissioning compensation is being given were built with the aid of generous grants and loans from the Treasury. In terms of employment rights, fishermen are second-class citizens. I can give an example of that. At a recent industrial tribunal hearing in Hull, when several fishermen were claiming redundancy payments because their firms had accepted decommissioning grants and tied up their vessels—case numbers 4227/84, 7760/84, 14443/84 and 2792/84 of 24, 25, 26 and 27 September 1984—the chairman said:

"These men were on individual contracts and when they finished the voyage, and settled up, and were off articles and off pay, they were not employed, they knew they were not employed, they knew they were unemployed when they signed on as being 'available to work'; for their own reasons the applicants chose to stay loyal to"

their firm and

"for their own reasons they chose not to work elsewhere, they chose to remain with this employer and did not seek to go elsewhere or leave the trade".

The chairman found that, as a result, those claimants could not be offered redundancy. I find that disgraceful. I only wish that those fishermen could be offered a measure of hope, but reality precludes that. The Community's recalcitrance on the important issue of compensation to the crews of fishing vessels is a matter of deep regret. It is a disgraceful state of affairs.

I believe that much more could and should be done for the fishermen who catch the fish that are so vital to our maritime communities.

8.14 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) is not here because I wanted to refer to his remarks about the large surpluses of some products that are built up in the Community. Surpluses are bad, unwelcome and expensive. The two fashionable surpluses—wine and butter—are not produced by British agriculture. It is almost impossible to run farming anywhere in the world as an exact science because of the vagaries of the weather, which can make one year's surplus into a deficit the following year.

The point that my hon. Friend was making—it was a fair one—is that it is expensive to have large surpluses produced by the CAP. Homes have to be found for the surpluses. He cited the example of outrageously cheap butter and other commodities being sent to Russia. The EEC countries and others will not always be in surplus. Famine in Ethiopia has caught the headlines, but only three or four years ago central and south central Africa suffered from famine. There are now countries in Africa, including Ethiopia, that are importing food but which for years were net exporters.

We must look sensibly at surpluses and not condemn them out of hand as my hon. Friend would have us do. We need sensible surpluses. The excess must be available for despatch wherever in the world it is needed. Until a few weeks ago, that happened to be Russia. I am glad to see that large supplies of food are now reaching Ethiopia. In December, 100,000 tonnes of food, including 30,000 tonnes of corn from the EEC and 8,000 tonnes of corn from Britain, are going there. Next month, 150,000 tonnes of food will go to Ethiopia.

I should like to see the CAP, with all its imperfections, geared to maintaining—as far as the weather permits—the reasonable, healthy food surpluses that may be needed in other parts of the world. I do not regard as immoral or wrong a reasonable surplus of commodities that can be made available to countries which may be in need of food today and which are likely to be in need of food in the future.

My hon. Friend mentioned the enlargement of the EEC and the accession of Spain and Portugal. That was designed to be agreed by the end of this year. It has now been slightly postponed. We in Great Britain have a great deal to fear from the expansion of the Community. Its enlargement poses a threat to British horticulture. Hundreds of horticulturists in this country are likely to face the chop once Spain becomes a member of the Community unless long transitional arrangements for its membership are made.

Portugal and Spain are substantial manufacturers of footwear, and Portugal is also a substantial manufacturer of knitwear. The House may not realise—I hope that when it realises this it will care about it—that last year Portugal exported no fewer than 48 million pairs of ladies' tights to Britain. Exports of knitwear to this country are also increasing, resulting in substantial job losses in the British knitwear industry. In the past couple of years, between 5,000 and 6,000 jobs have been lost. In five categories alone, between 1982 and 1984, Portugal's exports of knitwear to Britain increased by 100 per cent.

[Sir John Farr]

In the last year for which figures are available, 48 million garments were imported from Portugal, equivalent to the loss of about 2,400 jobs. The United Kingdom knitwear industry is now losing 50 jobs per week. We must face those facts and recognise that, unless proper safeguards are established, the accession of countries such as Portugal to the EEC will greatly accelerate the loss of jobs in areas such as mine in the east midlands.

What kind of European Commission will be running our affairs in the future? We hear that there has been a big change and that we now have one of the most Leftward-looking as well as one of the most inexperienced Commissions in recent years. I believe that it includes two British Commissioners. In view of the inexperience and certainly the Socialist inclinations of the Commission, the Government should consider carefully several times any recommendation that it may make.

In the things that matter to my constituents the EEC seems to do its best to make itself unpopular. My constituents are neither anti-EEC nor pro-EEC, but they are not impressed by the ridiculous suggestions from the Commission that the Government and both sides of the House have to resist. The recent proposal for standardisation of the clock throughout the EEC was, I am glad to say, rejected by the Government, the Opposition, all the big unions and the CBI. Trivial suggestions of that kind to achieve some federal idealist dream help to bring the EEC into disrepute as a sensible and serious unit.

My constituents like their British passports and do not want mauve EEC passports. They also see no reason why we should join the European monetary system. We have managed very well without it for many years. My hon. Friend the Minister did not mention that, although pundits say that a decision is to be made very soon. I hope that before deciding whether Britain should join the EMS the Government will take careful soundings so that there is no repeat of what happened last week in relation to education. Although sterling is now of limited international consequence, many Members on both sides still believe that it has a role to play which is far better performed outside the EMS.

Another row is blowing up about milk quotas. Last spring, all member countries except Ireland agreed to reduce milk output. As Members on both sides have pointed out, however, some countries have implemented that agreement far more energetically than others. Strangely enough, a country that we have learned not to trust in international affairs — France — seems to have offered no sign of any intention to comply with the reduction in quotas. When this matter is next discussed in the Council of Agriculture Ministers, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will insist that a clear performance chart for member countries be made available and that countries which have fallen by the wayside and virtually ignored the reduction in quotas must be dealt with through the special penal levy to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State referred.

My constituents are also angered at the apparent decision by the outgoing Commission to take Britain to the international court in an attempt to dismantle our ban on imports of fresh milk. In the many debates on the subject at the time, it was clear that this was essential not only for the British dairy industry but to ensure continued doorstep deliveries of fresh, wholesome milk. Our overall trading deficit with the EEC is about £2·4 billion per annum, of which £2·1 billion is due to our deficiency in food, beverage and tobacco trading. Imports of fresh milk on top of that would not only threaten doorstep sales but cause many more redundancies in our industry as well as making it even more difficult for our farmers to meet their milk quotas, as they now do.

What about the future? I believe that the projected increase in VAT contribution to 1·4 per cent. in 1986 and 1·6 per cent. in 1988 is to be deplored and when the House debates that I shall seek to intervene to register my protest. I hope that the Government will comment on whether Britain's reservation about increasing our percentage quota has been raised energetically enough at EEC meetings.

It is transparently obvious to some of my hon. Friends that Britain is the largest net contributor to the EEC, and has the most to lose. The rest of the member states are, by and large, net beneficiaries — France, Greece and Italy, for instance — and they have the most to gain. We should have retained the 1 per cent. of VAT. Otherwise, it is so easy in the bottomless pit of European money for our hard-earned contributions to sink without trace. All that we will have left to remind us of what we have paid may be a European anthem and a common European currency with which to pay for it.

I suppose that, for the future, one must stay in.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Why?

Sir John Farr: That is a good question. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and develop that point.

My own view is that we must be much more selective. We must stay in only if we can see that to do so clearly benefits Britain and our electors. So far, our membership of the EEC has had some very unfortunate results. For instance, my constituents fail to understand why a student from the EEC should be allowed a privileged position compared with a student from the old Commonwealth. They fail to understand why a relation or friend from a Commonwealth country such as New Zealand or Australia cannot come here to stay or may have great difficulty in obtaining a work permit, while foreigners from the nine countries can walk in on privileged terms. Such matters make the EEC very unpopular with my constituents.

Britain pays a big levy in order to belong to this club. One of the arguments on which it was sold to us was that in unity there is strength. However, those who sold the package to us forgot to add that, in order to obtain that strength from unity, we would have to pay a very large annual subscription. My constituents have yet to be convinced that that subscription is worth while.

8.32 pm

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): The Order Paper shows that in this debate we are discussing many aspects of the EEC. We are discussing the details of the 1984 budget, the various stages of the 1985 budget, the Fontainebleau agreement, the White Paper and budgetary control—a wide variety of issues. That may be why the debate has become somewhat fragmented. It may also explain why so few hon. Members attend such debates. It is regrettable that we do not direct our attention to a specific EEC issue.

I wish to concentrate my mind on a crisis within the EEC which will be with us within 48 hours. I refer of

course to the probable rejection of the 1985 budget by the European Assembly in Strasbourg on Thursday. We already know from this morning's newspapers that the budget committee of the European Parliament last night almost unanimously rejected the 1985 budget. Only two members voted against that decision—two memberss from Denmark who, it is said, oppose the Common Market. All the other members of the committee voted to reject the 1985 budget. Among them were British Labour Members of the European Parliament, and British Conservative Members. They all united to reject the budget approved by the members of the Council of Ministers, including our Government's representative. We know why that has happened. The meeting at Fontainebleau, to which the Minister referred in his excellent opening speech, has played a part.

The Minister concluded by praising the efforts of our Prime Minister at Fontainebleau. I should like to associate myself with his commendation of the role played by the Prime Minister in the past few years. The European Economic Community has treated the United Kingdom badly in budgetary affairs. We have had an unfair burden to carry. The Prime Minister has been in a difficult negotiating position but, for standing firm for our rights, she deserves our support.

However, we must also pay attention to the speech made by the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). The hon. Gentleman and I have worked together in Strasbourg and later in this place for some six years. He is one of the great optimists of the European Community. Never until now has he been critical of the EEC. Never until now has he displayed pessimism. We must, therefore, now take his opinions seriously. As a former rapporteur of the EEC budget committee in Strasbourg, he knows what he is talking about. The hon. Gentleman says that the Fontainebleau agreement is not a long-term settlement, and that there is no real budgetary control. His speech will be well worth reading tomorrow in the *Official Report*.

The 1985 budget is likely to be rejected for various reasons. British Labour MEP's will vote against it because they wish to undermine the achievements of our Prime Minister at Fontainebleau. They wish to undo the settlement of the British rebate. They dislike that settlement. They wish to bring it back to the floor of the European Parliament.

Why do the Conservative MEP's also oppose the budget? Why do other Members from other countries oppose it? They do so because of the issue of the powers of the European Assembly. That is the kernel of the problem—the contest between the national Parliaments and the European Assembly. Until that key issue is clarified, there will be crisis after crisis over European bugetary affairs.

The situation is chronic. Under article 201 of the treaty of Rome, only the Council of Ministers has power to raise revenue. However, under article 203 of the treaty, responsibility for expenditure is shared by the Council of Ministers and the European Assembly. When there is an assembly with no responsibility for the raising of revenue which yet shares responsibility for expenditure, there is a chronic problem which will continue to breed political irresponsibility. That is the situation today.

The European Assembly Members are rejecting the 1985 budget in pique. They are piqued, first, because they were not involved in the settlement of the British rebate at the Council meeting at Fontainbleau and, secondly, because they wish to bring that matter back into the 1985 budget. There is another reason for their annoyance. They recognise that the budget as proposed by the Council of Ministers will not cover expenditure for 1985. Within the 1 per cent. own resources limit, the budget is legal; but the Members who reject the 1985 draft budget wish to proceed to exceed the 1 per cent. VAT limit and to go straight to the 1·4 per cent. figure for own resources.

Such a move would be illegal. It would pre-empt the general understanding that there would be discipline before we adopted the 1·4 per cent. VAT figure. That is the key issue—Members of the European Assembly are determined to rush the Community into 1·4 per cent. before discipline in the budget has been created. That can happen in two ways. Either the budget can be rejected or it can be amended, at which point it becomes a disputed budget. However, whether it is disputed or rejected, there will be no budget within a few weeks on 31 December.

Some of us know what all that means because, as Members of the European Parliament, we lived through such an experience years ago. It means the one-twelfth system by which the Commission is limited from 1 January to spend one twelfth per month of what it spent this year or of the draft budget for 1985, whichever is the smaller. The effect of that is serious for the United Kingdom. It must be spelled out that those who are opposing the 1985 budget are acting in pique because they have limited power and in support of an expanded budget which would be illegal because it would be over the 1 per cent. VAT limit. It would also be against the interests of the citizens of the United Kingdom because the one-twelfth system will result in reduced expenditure through the guarantee fund for the agriculture industry. That is serious for our farmers.

The United Kingdom has benefited more than any other country from the expansion of the European social fund, money from which goes to areas of high unemployment to provide training. The 50 per cent. of the fund which may be used by the end of March will not be available if the 1985 budget is thrown out. Moreover, there will be a reduction in EEC development aid to Third world countries if the budget is not accepted. That, too, will not be popular in the United Kingdom, where there has been much public interest in African countries, especially Ethiopia. The effect of rejecting the budget on fishing areas is more than likely a stop on FEOGA grants to the fishery section so that the money can be used in other ways.

Such limited expenditure, which would affect the United Kingdom as I have just described, could continue for many months. Last time, it nearly took until 12 July—an appropriate date for us in Northern Ireland—before the issue was resolved. The problem might not be resolved until 12 July 1985. By then, the United Kingdom will be suffering in many ways. However, United Kingdom people and United Kingdom interests will not be all that suffer. The European Parliament will be damaged. That Parliament has not caught the imagination of the United Kingdom electorate and many of its Members are elected by less than 10 per cent. of the electorate. That is not a tribute to democracy and it does nothing to enhance the status of the European Parliament. By next summer, the Strasbourg Parliament might have to crawl back and accept what the Council of Ministers has suggested. That

[Mr. John David Taylor]

happened last time. If that happens, far from strengthening the European Parliament and increasing its credibility, its standing will have been damaged even further.

It would be in the interests of the people of the United Kingdom and that of furthering the cause of the European Parliament for that Parliament to sit back and reflect on what it is doing and to decide to support the Government and the 1985 budget.

8.45 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): These debates are usually rather depressing affairs in which we rehearse familiar arguments and make the same speeches. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) went a long way to bringing a sense of reality into our proceedings. He did well to draw attention to the imminence of the crisis in regard to the future of the European Parliament. He put his finger unerringly on the central issue.

It might surprise my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) to learn that I have always believed that there is great danger in the form and functions of the European Parliament as it was conceived. It has the power to spend money, but no responsibility for raising it. That is why I was so ferociously opposed to the Labour Government's proposals for devolution in Scotland and Wales. I do not oppose devolution, but their proposals were disastrous.

The Frankenstein is well and truly out of the bottle, if I have not mixed my metaphors too much, and we are now faced with a Parliament which is determined to assert its authority as a directly elected body, however slim that authority might be in view of the small turnouts for European elections. Moreover, it is on a collision course with the British and other European Governments. I have little doubt that one of the results will be a growing demand in Britain and elsewhere to do away with the European Parliament, although that means rewriting the treaty. Such pressure will not be easy to resist.

However small my enthusiasm for the European Parliament and however grave my misgivings about the form in which it was set up, I must utter a solemn warning. In order to abolish it, we shall have to rewrite the treaty. I am convinced that it will turn out to be impossible to conclude a new treaty which gives us even part of the satisfaction that we derive from the imperfect operations of the present Community. The outlook of the statesman who concluded the original treaties in 1957, to which we acceded many years later, meant that they were prepared to see the wood and not be blinded by the trees. They were prepared to subordinate the short-term interests of their countries to secure advantages which could be achieved only by a pooling of effort. I find no evidence of any such readiness among leaders of any of the countries that constitute the present Community. Much as I deplore the weaknesses of the present Community and regret the wrong functions given to the European Parliament, we must live with the present treaty and try to make it work.

By the same token, I share many of the pertinent criticisms of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East of a CAP which piles up ludicrous surpluses and seeks ways of funding ever larger surpluses.

I must also reflect that had we followed the policies advocated by the Labour party and a few Conservative Members—it is not unfair to include my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East among them—and bought our food in the cheapest markets, we would today be bidding against those countries stricken by famine for the world's limited supplies of cereal. I do not believe for a moment that that would place us in a better situation.

I have never made any secret of my view that the European Community is unsatisfactory. However, it is the best Community we have, even though it is just not good enough. The Community in which we presently live is rapidly losing out to the rest of the world in industrial innovation, the creation of new jobs and raising the living standards of its people. It is failing to do the job it was set up to do. It is not even a Common Market. We shall not get even half of what the Community should be providing unless we are prepared to go forward rather than backward. We should not go backward by saying that the only things we want from the Community are those which advantage us. Frankly, we cannot run any kind of alliance, let alone a community, on that basis. We must go forward and strengthen the decision-making processes of the Community. Therefore, we must take seriously the proposals circulating in the European Parliament in respect of institutional reform. I believe that the Parliament is out of its depth on financial matters, but on institutional matters I believe that it may have a lot to teach us.

Nothing alarms me more than the gap which is now opening up between the common thinking within the European Parliament among parties of all nationalities—not, perhaps, among the British Labour group, but that group is all alone in the world — on the need for institutional change and more effective ways of taking decisions, and the total refusal on both sides of this House even to consider those ideas, let alone to consider accepting them seriously. We must move towards a system in which the use of the veto is altogether exceptional. No one is suggesting that we should give up the veto where vital national interests are at stake, but unless the nations which comprise the EEC are prepared to reconcile themselves to the fact that normally they will accept majority decisions and resort to the veto only in cases of acute national need, not much progress will take place.

The best that can be hoped for under the present system is the acceptance of what is familiarly known as two-speed Europe. That is frequently described as a great tragedy. I am not sure that it is, given the limitations of the present situation. We could possibly go along with a system under which, for example, the seven nations constituting WEU agree to co-operate more closely in providing a European pillar for the North Atlantic Alliance. Equally, those nations which are getting together to build up a European aviation industry could go ahead and build the aircraft, even if British Airways, for reasons of its own, prefers to buy inferior American aircraft rather than the superior European aircraft which are available.

The founder states have formed and operated a European monetary system that provides an element of stability to their exchange rates, but, for reasons best known to the Treasury, we prefer to remain outside that system. I believe that we would do very much better within it. We can operate that type of two-speed Europe for a certain time, but even that will not work without better decision-making processes. It is notable that among the institutions of the Community which do work — the

European monetary system and the Airbus consortium are two examples—there are institutions which are able to take effective and swift decisions.

8.54 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), who is sincere in all his contributions, has called for realism. I shall attempt to be realistic and shall echo some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) who made a distinguished and fundamental contribution.

The ambit of our debate is extremely wide. In fact, the motion contains four debates. There is a debate on the arrangements for finances for 1984, another on the draft budget for 1985 and its various appendices, yet another on the preliminary document on own resources — an important document arising out of Fontainebleau's success or otherwise — and a fourth on the disciplinary document. If that were not enough, we have in the italicised sentence of the Order Paper consideration of Cmnd. 9348, with its 122 paragraphs. In my capacity as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, I wonder whether the House has taken on too large a meal.

The main purpose of my speech is to draw the attention of the House to the reports of the Scrutiny Committee on some of the documents referred to in the motion. It would be wrong of me to try to deal with all of them—the debate is too wide for that—but I want to emphasise some of the current practical points that have been mentioned so far. We are now talking about financial control in the Community. The long-awaited crunch has happened. The Community has run out of money, and its various institutions and member states are asking, "What will happen next?" In the midst of this, as the right hon. Member for Strangford reminded us, the Assembly is attempting to increase its own power and, perhaps, credibility.

We must remember that the power of this House over its own Executive is through the control of money, but the mere fact that we are asked to debate instruments which relate to running out of money in 1984, and the fact that there is also Cmnd. 9395—named as the Undertaking, but we are not discussing it now—tells us that the hoop has been burst, provided that it is possible for the House to approve that document in view of proceedings elsewhere.

If the House approves that document, the increased expenditure for 1984 will be approved. It may be a relatively small amount—a matter of 1,000 million ecu —but that is the principle, as can be seen from the 34th report from the Select Committee on European Legislation. The Committee, of which the right hon. Member for Strangford and I are members, owes a great deal to the assistance we get from our clerks. Among the batch of documents on which we reported—they were largely financial—was a consultative document, No. 8514/84, and a letter signed by Mr. Andriessen. He more or less told member states, "The Community will run out of money in 1984. Please see what you can do about it". Paragraph 7 of the document refers to raising money for the current year. It states:

"Similarly, the Council cannot, if it is to respect in full all its obligations under the Treaty, advocate an upheaval of those policies which are financed by non-obligatory expenditure. The transfer of a major volume of non-obligatory credits to EAGGF Guarantee would mean a decimation of the Community's structural and sectoral policies."

It then states that the Commission will not cut those to maintain the obligatory expenditure of the Community. That is a major statement of policy. We must be under no illusion that Cmnd. 9395 merely maintains the obligatory expenditure of the Community. It also maintains the non-obligatory expenditure, which is nevertheless above the 1 per cent. limit.

The right hon. Member for Strangford referred to the 1985 budget. The Scrutiny Committee summarised the proposals in House of Commons 78-xxxv. On page 10 we set out a schedule of the draft budget for 1985 and the preliminary draft budget for 1985. The original preliminary draft budget came to a total of 28,000 million ecu. The present budget is 2,000 million ecu less, which makes a total of 26,000 million ecu. The reason for the reduction was to keep within the 1 per cent. limit. The Council makes it clear that expenditure will exceed that. It states:

"In deciding on a budget appropriation for the 1985 EAGGF of 18,000 million ecu, i.e. a reduction of 1,315 million ecu by comparison with the figure considered necessary by the Commission in the preliminary draft Budget, the Council for its part, while emphasising the need for rigorous market management, undertakes to meet by 1 October 1985 the additional budgetary requirements which will arise in 1985."

The 1985 budget is not realistic in the eyes of the Commission. The Council, in keeping with its legal obligations, has cut it to inside the 1 per cent. limit. However, at the same time it is saying that by October 1985 it will need more propping up. The Government may return to the House to ask us to approve yet another undertaking to fill the kitty, which may be empty sooner next year than it was this year. That is assuming that the own resources mechanism is not in place by then. It may be. We hope that own resources will provide repayments for 1984 and 1985, if they go through.

I turn to a change in the financial regulations. We commented on this in our report, House of Commons 78-xxxiii. It states that the Commission proposes

"that greater flexibility be given to the Commission to transfer funds between lines in this section."

In effect, that changes the appropriation. A reason why we have an appropriation Act is to maintain rigidly what the Government can spend between different votes. In the EEC it is not a budget but an estimate of expected expenditure. The financial regulation will give greater flexibility for transfer of appropriation between one heading and another. There is already a lot of that.

I turn to the question of monetary discipline. In our report, House of Commons 85-ii, the Scrutiny Committee draws the following conclusion:

"The Committee do not perceive any legal implications in the Conclusions as presented in this document but have already commented on the unusual nature of its status, and the fact that it does not have legislative form. They note that the text will arise for discussion between the Council and a delegation of the European Parliament scheduled for 21 November 1984 and will be presented for adoption thereafter."

I mention this because it is clear, not only from the report but from a letter which I received in the nick of time from the Economic Secretary, that before the disciplinary document was discussed and agreed by the Council of Ministers, a delegation from the European Parliament talked to the Council about it. That was before the House

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

talked about it. I received a letter from the Economic Secretary today telling me that, as a result of the Dublin summit, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Firstly, to invite the Commission and the European Parliament to examine with it ways in which the co-operation necessary for a budgetary discipline common to all three institutions may be brought about. Secondly, to invite a delegation of the Parliament to meet it shortly before the meetings at which the Council is due to fix the reference framework for the year."

There will now be regular consultation between the Council and members of the Strasbourg Assembly in respect of budgetary discipline. The points made by the right hon. Member for Strangford have been fulfilled completely, because the budgetary procedures will now include consultation with the Strasbourg assembly, but there will be no similar consultation with the House.

The present struggle — financial control over an executive not in Whitehall but in Brussels—is critical. I suggest that the same constitutional rules apply there as applied here hundreds of years ago and as still apply today.

9.6 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): In the few minutes available to me, I shall concentrate on a fairly narrow area, although I hope that Ministers will realise that I wished to say much more.

My hon. Friends will agree that when the Scottish National Farmers Union has met Ministers it has introduced sensible and realistic proposals. That body was the first to suggest to the Minister that quotas were the way to deal with the milk problem. The NFU accepted quotas, because it suggested them, but Scottish farmers are now unhappy because the super-levy is not working. They oppose the super-levy because they believe that, although they have honoured their side of the agreement, farmers in other parts of the Community have not.

The Scottish NFU believes that the way to deal with the over-production of cereals is to allow the price to dictate the market, but it qualifies that by saying, "We are prepared to promote the idea but we want the Government to be realistic. If the rest of the Community behaves as it has done with milk quotas, we want our backs to be protected."

I represent a constituency of 2,000 square miles which are largely agricultural. The vast majority of it is mountainous agricultural land, and some parts of my constituency include the most rugged agricultural land in Scotland. When I went to school, Scotland was split into three parts—the highlands, the central lowlands and the southern uplands—but some years ago we introduced a new animal called the Highlands and Islands Development Board. It would be hard to find a more misnamed organisation, because it does not represent all the highlands of Scotland. Indeed, a substantial part of the highlands of Scotland are completely outwith the board's responsibilities.

Unfortunately, the Europeans, hearing us describe an area of Scotland as the highlands and islands, naturally think that we are talking about all the highlands. There are communications problems, not only because of the language differences but because we cannot draw lines on the map to represent the mountain areas accurately, which causes problems. The constituency of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) adjoins mine. He will know that the northern stretch of the A9 that normally gets blocked in the winter months is in my constituency. However, that is not recognised and accepted as being as difficult for farming as the Inverness area. There is something wrong with this, and something should be done about it.

Areas such as Glen Lyon, Rannoch, Drumochter, which is next to Inverness, Glen Shee, Strathadle, Glen Prosen and Glen Clova are without doubt some of the most difficult farming areas in Scotland. Therefore, they should be treated as are the rest of the highland areas. *[Laughter.]* This is not a laughing matter. Labour Members would not laugh if they had to face the problems of farmers living in these difficult areas. They see their neighbours being treated differently because we have drawn a line on the map that does not represent the highlands of Scotland.

I make it clear that this is not a plea for more European spending. My farmers and I take the view that budgetary disciplines are essential if Europe is ever to work, but it must be seen to be fair and responsible, and at the moment it is neither.

9.11 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Once again we are discussing the payment of more money to the Common Market, and for what? Primarily, it is for the dubious privilege of buying dearer food. It is difficult to understand why the serried ranks on the Conservative Benches want to vote for this. I am struck by the painful and glaring contrast between the Government's stringency at home and their largesse abroad in the EEC. Recently we had the statement by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. After some arm-twisting, he had to climb down. To pay for that, he took a couple of million from university furniture and a couple of million from science. On these matters we get meticulous, penny-pinching economies, but just mention the EEC or the CAP and the Government open up their coffers and money is spent with gay abandon. They spend money like a drunken sailor with eight arms.

Why is a dash of monetarism not applied to the EEC? Instead, rather like the good fairy in a pantomime, the Prime Minister rushes in to play Lady Bountiful with our money. Gone are the days when she spoke of achieving a broad balance of our payments into the budget and about getting our money back, or when she went to the Dublin summit and claimed that she was not prepared to settle for half a loaf. Gone are the days when the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he was Financial Secretary, came to the Scrutiny Committee and said that our position must be that of the French and we must be roughly in balance. Gone are the days of resolute statements and firm intentions. All hopes have disappeared. We have been let down and strung along. We have been kidded and conned, and Agriculture Ministers are still coming along with their tree-grown theory of money supply.

There are two questions that have never been answered. First, why are we paying net any money to the budget? We are one of the poorer members of the Community, so why are we not a beneficiary? The bulk of this money goes to incentives for farmers to produce more food that cannot be consumed, so the second question is: why should there be any more money for agriculture? People keep going on about reforming the CAP, but if it were reformed it would not need any more money.

We should let the countries which produce the surpluses pay for them. Not only are we denied cheap food from overseas and forced to pay the higher EEC prices, but we pay for the surpluses of other member states, which are caused by the higher prices. We are doing violence to our national interest. The policy is anti-British.

The higher prices are a type of danegeld paid by Governments on the continent to assuage their agricultural populations and lobbies. I am not against such bribes, but I do not see why we have to pay them. It would make more sense to make deficiency payments to our own farmers to keep prices low and give us cheap food.

The Foreign Secretary said that the Government had no intention of introducing legislation to increase own resources until the Finance Ministers had agreed

"on precise measures to guarantee the effective implementation of budget discipline."

On the same day the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) said that it was wrong

"to proceed on the basis of fudge and hope—fudge the issues and hope that the outcome will be all right." — [*Official Report*, 10 July 1984; Vol 63. c. 894-907.]

Having read the documents, I am bound to say that the European political fudge-making industry has never been in better shape. We are in the ludicrous position of trying to persuade the EEC to spend less by offering it more money.

While farmers are encouraged to produce more, the budget will always push against the own resources ceiling. In the meantime, we continue to be Europe's major paymasters on a continuing and escalating basis. The truth is that the Prime Minister was out-manoeuvred at Fontainebleau. She conceded a 40 per cent. increase in tax contributions, without achieving the budgetary discipline and control of agricultural spending, in return for a refund mechanism the complexities of which serve only to conceal its imperfections. Had that mechanism been in operation from 1980 to 1983, our refunds would have been much less than they were.

Fotainebleau has provided no lasting solution to budgetary discipline and agricultural extravagance. When the EEC runs out of money again, as it will, we shall be asked to pay yet again even more. The threat is that VAT contributions will go up even further to 1·6 per cent. The prosperous farmers of West Germany were given a remission of 5 per cent. VAT, resulting in even higher prices and so even bigger surpluses. That is hardly a sign that the situation will improve.

Instead of resources determining expenditure, we have agreed to contribute £120 million to an inter-governmental whipround. Why is that? It is to bail out the CAP, to keep it going and to encourage its wasteful rake's progress. On the condition that we pay the extra £120 million, the EEC has agreed to pay us our 1983 rebate, which was agreed at Stuttgart.

The Government's "victory", or "diplomatic achievement", is that we can have some of our own money back if we pay in even more. The agreement on increasing our VAT contribution was to be conditional on the reform of the CAP. A requisite was the Council adopting measures guaranteeing budget discipline acceptable to Britain and the House.

The document is pathetic and hopelessly inadequate. It is not a regulation like the existing regulations that govern the budgetary procedure. Instead, it has the status of "Conclusions". What does that mean? I do not understand. It has no legislative force.

The sixth report for the 1983 Session of the Select Committee over which my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) presides with such distinction states:

"The result of any such controls would clearly depend upon . . .the extent to which it was enshrined in legislative form."

It has not been, and why not? The answer was given by the Prime Minister on 5 December. I do not know why the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) is making funny faces. I hope he understands that the debate can continue until 11.30 pm. The Prime Minister said:

"The text on financial budgetary discipline is binding on the Council itself, but is not being embodied into a treaty or technically — legally — into the budgetary process. — [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because one simply cannot get agreement from all 10 countries." — [*Official Report*, 5 December 1984; Vol. 69, column 354.]

We could not reach agreement, which is why it is not enshrined in legislation. Are the member states likely to agree in future? I do not believe that they will do so. Therefore, we have absolutely no guarantee, yet despite that we are increasing our tax contribution to the EEC.

In article 1 of the so-called "Conclusions" it is stipulated that the EEC will act by a qualified majority. Again, that gives the veto to other countries to stop a satisfactory position. It is in no way binding—it is as watertight as a sieve. Articles 2, 3 and 4 refer to account being taken of "exceptional circumstances". What are they? From my experience of the Common Market, there are always exceptional circumstances.

Article 5 provides for a clawback of any excess expenditure over the following two years, barring "aberrant developments". What is the EEC except an aberration? It is an institutionalised aberration. We have absolutely no guarantee in any shape or form.

Once again, we have been led up the garden path—and not only on this count, but on every count, whether trade, jobs, food prices, taxation, investment in or out or fishing. Whatever the count, this country — like the Scandanavian countries—would be better off not being a member of the EEC.

9.23 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): The Minister made an heroic effort at the beginning of the debate to prove to the House—*[Interruption.]* It was an heroic effort. I shall give the reasons for its failure later. He tried to convince the House that firm budget discipline had been achieved. As we listened to the debate, it became clear that with one or two notable and unconvincing exceptions—those sitting on the Liberal Benches — the Minister manifestly failed to achieve his aim. Even the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), on whose support the Minister could generally rely, was critical of the current position in the EEC.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the Minister's efforts failed. After all, it was only a short time ago—last July — that the Government told us that they were determined to bring this year's budget into balance and that there would be no question of any supplementary budget. However, by September it appeared that their resolve had weakened. Perhaps the Minister of State can blame his hon. Friend the Economic Secretary for that and move the blame for failure slightly away from himself, for

[Dr. Oonagh McDonald]

it was then that the Economic Secretary agreed to the supplementary budget that is the subject of the undertaking that is now being considered before the courts and that may be considered by us before the end of this month. However, the Economic Secretary takes an opimistic view of the supplementary budget — this extra payment of £120 million — since he described it as a reimbursable advance. Drawing upon his experience as a banker, he said that this is a payment made to the borrower in advance of the receipt of his own funds. Presumably he expects that next year the Commission will have sufficient funds to pay back to us what he is pleased to call an advance.

Perhaps another reason for the failure of the Minister of State to convince the House is that the Prime Minister cast doubt upon the firmness of the budgetary discipline which had been obtained at the Dublin summit. When my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) questioned the Prime Minister on 5 December he said:

"The Prime Minister has said that the Council has bound itself in respect of budgetary discipline. If that were to be so, would that not need financial regulations?" — [*Official Report*, 5 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 355.]

The Prime Minister said that she would have preferred financial regulations, but that she regarded the conclusions as binding upon the council. Even if the Government had achieved the kind of regulations that were wanted, that would still not have dealt with the fundamental problem facing the EEC with regard to its budget. Even if regulations had been obtained setting a ceiling on agricultural spending, we would have been left with a self-contradictory set of regulations. Some of the regulations already in operation in the EEC allow open-ended price guarantees and commitments in terms of agricultural spending. All that the financial disciplinary regulations would have done would have been to try to hold that down. There would have been a contradiction. Indeed, the notion of imposing firm discipline upon farm spending is like trying to hold down the lid on a pot of boiling water. Sooner of later, the lid blows off, and out comes the boiling water.

The Minister of State failed to convince the House because it is recognised that the Government have failed to achieve the original objective that they set themselves —the radical reform of the common aricultural policy. That is why, quite rightly, hon. Members on both sides of the House have continued their sustained criticism of the common agricultural policy. The CAP is responsible for the budget overspending. Unless the CAP is reformed, we can talk about firm discipline until the cows come home —an appropriate metaphor, perhaps—but we shall not get control of the EEC budget.

What we have been offered in terms of the conclusions reached by the Council are, as one senior EEC official described it. not worth the paper they are written on. Its legal status is doubtful and it is full of holes.

Even if, as the Minister of State suggested, the Commission were to take one or other member country to the European Court and try to apply the strictures of the Council to it—let us grant to the Minister of State that supposition — what I fail to understand is how there could be any success in the European Court if what one is trying to apply is a set of guidelines with such gaping holes in their application. Obviously, even in that situation, there would be every opportunity for the country allegedly in breach of the conclusions of the Council to wriggle out of any charge that the Commission wanted to bring against it. It is no good saying that people can be taken to court. They have to be taken to court with a watertight case. Without that it would be pointless.

Many points have already been well made during the debate. The references to "exceptional circumstances" and "unusual circumstances" in the various articles show that the rules cannot possibly apply. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) rightly asked, when do we find a situation in the EEC which does not have exceptional circumstances for the farming community? When can farmers not plead in their cause a gamut of conditions that they can pull into play, ranging from what is happening to the dollar to what is happening to world food markets whether in grain, sugar or whatever? Any of those situations can be used to justify whatever claim they wish to make.

We are left with a document whose legal status is unclear and whose guidelines cannot be binding because of the loopholes that they contain. We are also left with a series of conclusions that have as their major weakness that they set too high a ceiling on any future agricultural spending. That is because of the way in which the rules have been drawn.

Any of the major rules of the system can be breached or altered by a qualified majority vote in the Council. The way in which future calculations for agricultural spending are to be carried out will allow agricultural spending to rise both as a proportion of future budgets in 1985 and in the years thereafter and in volume terms. That is why the conclusions that have been adopted at Dublin cannot possibly prevent overspending in future. That is why the Minister of State completely failed to convince the House that we shall have firm control on agricultural spending.

Let us take one or two examples from what is happening now and see what confidence that will give us for the future. Look, for example, at what is happening with regard to milk production. The quota system that was introduced this year aimed at cutting EEC milk production by 7 per cent. Last Saturday the *Financial Times* pointed out that seven months after its introduction not one penny of the super levies have been paid and three delays to payments have already been agreed by the Commission. In October and on 1 December the *Financial Times* reported that the Commission had to take four EEC states to court over the milk super levy, and apparently those cases are still under consideration.

On 1 December the *Financial Times* commented:

"So complex are the rules that most member states are nowhere near completing the administrative arrangements to carry them out. Where they are reasonably well advanced, a number have tried strategems which the European Commission suspects are designed to soften the blow of quotas or enable their farmers to sell more milk."

West Germany is quoted as an example. It seems that it is defying the super levy regulations by exempting thousands of small farmers from more than half the reduction that is required. Although a reduced rate of cuts for small producers may be compensated for by the greater cuts that are made by large dairy farmers, the German move is believed by Commission experts to ignore both the letter and the spirit of the regulations and it has not been officially sanctioned.

We usually complain about the attitude of France towards Community regulations and Germany usually

claims the virtue of wanting stringent spending controls. In this instance it appears that even West Germany, one of the more virtuous members of the Community, is bending and twisting the milk quota rules to ensure that many of its dairy farmers are exempt from Community strictures.

It is claimed that the milk quota rules show that the Community is moving towards stricter budget discipine and is prepared to accept quotas. It is said that the Community is prepared to restrict production and thus to reduce spending on agriculture. After the best part of a year following the introduction of the regulations, we find that member states are not observing them. They are busy adapting, avoiding and evading the regulations. Italy is a notorious example. One of the documents before us tells us that there are 61 cases against Italy in the European Court. Italy is flouting the rules.

If we are asked to believe that the Council's conclusions will take us forward into the future, that the EEC will present us with a balanced budget year-on-year and fulfil the Community ideal in that way and that farm spending cuts will take place, we must realise that there is little evidence for that in what has been going on so far.

The Government are trying to con us into believing that farm spending is under control and that they have obtained everything for which they have asked. Ministers return regularly from Brussels, Strasbourg, Stuttgart, Fontainebleau, or wherever the latest summit happens to be, and say, "We have won again. We have obtained everything for which we asked. Everything in the garden will be lovely." It is the greatest con job in history. They do nothing of the sort.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) *rose*——

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Dr. McDonald: I give way to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen).

Mr. Budgen: Is the hon. Lady not being grossly unfair to the Government? It may have been a con job for the first time they tried it, but it cons no one now.

Mr. Dykes *rose*——

Dr. McDonald: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he was absent for most of the debate. As I understand it, he is not in the Chamber to reply on behalf of the Government. If he is, he is sitting in the wrong place.

I take the point of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. He is not deceived. Having read with interest the way in which he cuts through Ministers' condescending verbiage in Select Committee, I know that he is not conned by them. However, many members of the public believe the Prime Minister when she returns from a summit and tells us that she obtained everything for which she asked. It is our job in Parliament to make it clear that she has obtained very little of that for which she asked. In this instance she has returned with a 1985 budget——

Mr. Dykes: What did the previous Labour Government obtain?

Dr. McDonald: I shall educate the hon. Gentleman with a little history. One of the things that Conservative Members must understand — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman must not get over-excited. I heard his piece from a sedentary position.

The transitional arrangements did not end until 1978, so the problems with which we are now faced did not arise. They have arisen since 1979 and worsened. We are now left with the 1985 budget. The proportion of that draft budget spent on agriculture will increase to 72 per cent., and in the real budget the proportion will increase to 73 per cent. As a type of palliative, the regional and social funds have been marginally increased, although, once inflation is taken into account, they probably have only stood still.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) described in detail the cuts in aid which appal people in this country and other member countries — cuts in transport, science, technology, industry and other social measures. Those services are the immediate victims. Yet more and more money will be paid out next year to farmers. The laughable aspect of the whole business is that the budget will cope not with 12 months but with 10 months of a year and will immediately bring us into conflict with the European Parliament as it rejects a draft budget that is too stupid for words.

The Government, having come back for more money this year, once the court case is cleared up in the way they hope, will return next year with their begging bowl asking for yet more money from the suffering British taxpayer. In the following year, they will run into a further crisis, because the 1986 budget will also fail to meet the demands made on us. The Government will start talking about an increase in own resources from 1·4 per cent. No doubt by then the Government will have run out of goods, which have already been zero-rated, on which to oppose the imposition of VAT.

Ministers talk about firm controls on spending. Nothing they have said proves the point they wish to make. Next year's budget shows that nothing like that aim will be achieved. This year's budget shows that the whole of the Minister's work in Brussels has been a total failure. The British taxpayer pays the price, and it is up to him to realise whose fault that is.

9.42 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): As the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said, this has been a wide-ranging debate covering a large number of documents and a great many more Community topics. I do not have the time to enter into some of the wider considerations discussed by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I shall have to leave it to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) to debate with my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) whether changes in the treaty are needed. I believe that a great deal could be done within the existing treaty, and that is where the priority lies.

I note the comments of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about fisheries. I shall report what he said to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) asked about the subdivision within the United Kingdom which results in Northern Ireland having a problem with the super levy. I understand that that has happened, because national quotas are divided into separate sections according to what is technically the organisation of dairies

[Mr. Ian Stewart]

—in this case, the milk marketing boards—and, because there is a separate milk marketing board for Northern Ireland, that board is a separate entity.

General points have been mentioned in the debate. The hon. Members for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) have displayed a fundamental misunderstanding. They spoke as if the budgetary problems in 1984 and 1985 were somehow a condemnation of budget discipline. The point is that the difficulties of constraining expenditure this year and next have occurred because we did not have effective budget discipline. Had we had budget discipline, I have no doubt that many of the difficulties that we face would have been avoided.

The hon. Member for Newham, South asked whether supplementary financing would be reimbursable and what the provisions were in the 1985 budget. The 1985 budget was drafted and brought forward before the agreement on the supplementary finance was reached, and the proposals are that the advances should be reimbursable, starting in 1986. They do not appear in the documents before us today.

On the question of the overrun this year, the hon. Member for Thurrock sought to chide me for being reluctant to concede in July of this year that we should make a substantial payment for supplementary finance. I wonder what type of negotiations she thinks Ministers conduct if they do not try all along the line to ensure that they obtain the best deal. In this case, the amount of overspending was reduced to the irreducible minimum and the amount of supplementary finance required was also as low as possible. I should have thought that that was self-evidently in our national interest. Getting the figure down from well over 2 billion ecu in the original proposals to 1·35 billion ecu in the July Budget Council without conceding that we would agree to any supplementary finance was an achievement which the hon. Lady should be glad British Ministers could deliver.

Dr. McDonald *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: When we managed to agree a figure on 1,003 million ecu in September, that was less than half the original amount proposed. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would welcome the efforts that had been made on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Dr. McDonald: The Minister has misunderstood much of what has been said. On 10 July the Foreign Secretary said that

"we shall be pressing in the Budget Council next week for savings that will bring into balance the 1984 budget". — [*Official Report*, 10 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 897.]

That is fine as an intention. No one quarrels with that, but we are saying that the Government did not succeed.

Mr. Stewart: The Government succeeded in reducing the figures substantially. We forced the Commission to make savings in its market management, and we forced the Commission and Council to agree to offsetting amounts against agricultural expenditure so that we were left with a much smaller figure to finance. The fact that there was a residual figure shows that budget discipline has not applied until now. I and most hon. Members must wish that budget discipline had been in place at least two or three years ago. It would have prevented many of the problems that we have had to face in the past two years. They are still with us, because the Fontainebleau agreement was not put in place until the middle of this year, and the post-Fontainebleau package — of which budget discipline is a part — is only now being put in place.

The right hon. Member for Strangford said that it would be undesirable if the European Parliament were to reject the 1985 budget, because that would be flat against the interests of all member states, and the agricultural sector in particular. I entirely agree with what he said in a thoughtful and impressive contribution. I hope that before members of the European Parliament seek to reject the 1985 draft budget they will realise that the consequences for the people whom they represent and who elected them to serve there would be entirely adverse and would not assist the reputation of the European Parliament or its claim for a greater part in the affairs of the Community.

Mr. Marlow: In his brilliant introductory speech my hon. Friend the Minister of State unfortunately did not have time to touch on the proposal to increase the Community's own resources. I hope that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will deal with that. The increase in own resources means that the Community will be spending more taxpayers' money. Will my hon. Friend tell us where that will substitute for current United Kingdom policy so that we know what the Community will be taking over from us? If there are to be new Community policies, will he tell us what they are? If not, which of the current policies are to cost more in the future? The sum must add up somewhere, and I know that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary is very good at arithmetic.

Mr. Stewart: If I had not given way to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), I should have had more time to deal with the points that he has raised and which have been covered many times in the debate. I shall be coming to the question of own resources.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Am I correct in supposing that this debate can go on until 11.30 pm?

Mr. Speaker: That is certainly true.

Mr. Stewart: I think that I should also take the wishes of the House into account in measuring the length of my speech.

The hon. Member for Livingston asked how the United Kingdom would get its 1,000 million ecu refund next year. We intend that the own resources decision should be brought into play before the end of 1985 and that we should receive the 1,000 million ecu by way of abatement. We have also arranged, and the Council has agreed, a general undertaking attached to the 1985 budget guaranteeing that the United Kingdom refund will be paid without specifying the means whereby that is to happen. The actual decisions are for the future, but the Council has recognised the unreserved right of the United Kingdom to the 1,000 million ecu compensation in respect of 1984, to be paid next year in that way.

The European Parliament wished to place our compensation on the expenditure side, but we were able to resist that. It also wanted to go above the 1 per cent. ceiling for the 1985 budget, and we were able to resist that, too. Nevertheless, we must face the fact that this year and

next year there are temporary pressures on the budget because of the lack of a budgetary discipline system in the past.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Economic Secretary has just made a very important statement and I should like to press him a little further on it. The Fontainebleau agreement provided that the refund in 1985 in respect of 1984 would be payable by means of an abatement. If I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly, he does not envisage the refund coming into operation until the decision on the increase in own resources is taken. He will be aware that the date of that increase is a matter of contention in the Community and that the Germans are still holding out for 1 January 1986 so as to coincide with enlargement. Is the Economic Secretary saying that the agreement on our refund does not come into play if the date for the increase in own resources is not in 1985? More important, is he saying that the Treasury will not deduct the abatement from our payment to the EEC until the decision on own resources is reached? As I understand the Fontainebleau agreement, there is no reason why the abatement should not start running from January 1985.

Mr. Stewart: As I have said, it is our assumption and intention that the own resources decision should be implemented within the calendar year 1985 and that our abatement would come into play at that time. As it is possible that the own resources decision will not be implemented in 1985, however, the Council has agreed that the United Kingdom will be due to receive its compensation next year in any event.

I must move on to the question of budgetary discipline. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), who tabled the amendment, spoke of the budgetary discipline text as a worthless piece of paper. I take the strongest possible issue with my hon. Friend over that view. We undertook to arrange that measures necessary to guarantee the effective application of budgetary discipline would be put in place. The component parts of those measures are an overall reference framework covering all expenditure, separate provisions for an agricultural guideline and a maximum rate of expenditure covering non-obligatory expenditure.

My hon. Friend raised the question whether there was any limit on the reference framework which the Council could fix. The Council, being bound by the conclusions, will not fix a reference framework higher than that of the agricultural guideline and the maximum rate. It is limited in that way.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: I suggested that article 1 imposes no limit and that the Ministers can sit down and, by a majority vote, fix any ceiling that they wish. My hon. Friend now says that there is a restriction at the 1·4 per cent. figure. If the 1·4 per cent. limit is there anyway, what does article 1 provide which would not have been provided if that article did not exist?

Mr. Stewart: Article 1 refers to the reference framework itself and also to the agricultural guideline, but the reference framework is the total amount within which the budget must be set. The component parts of the budget are the agricultural expenditure and the non-obligatory expenditure within the maximum rate. As the budgetary discipline text provides for both those elements, that constitutes the reference framework.

Mr. Forth: Does not article 6 provide for the reference framework itself to be changed, and does that not render it meaningless?

Mr. Stewart: Article 6 provides that the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers may alter the reference framework, but that would be a matter of changing one of the elements within it. As the Council has bound itself in relation to the maximum rate, it would be able to alter the agriculture guidelines under the circumstances described in some of the clauses of the budgetary discipline text.

It has been said that because there is flexibility in the text it is useless, meaningless or full of holes. That is not the case.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Why?

Mr. Stewart: I shall explain why, if I am given a chance to do so.

The purpose of the budgetary discipline is to move away from a system where price and the price-fixing of agriculture settlements in the early part of the year determined the cost of the programme to a system in which an acceptable cost works back to the establishment of the prices. No one can say, with something as erratic as agricultural expenditure, that one can always predict in March the exact outcome later in the year. That is why neither this country nor other member states could have accepted an absolutely rigid system. That would not have been realistic.

Comments have been made about the legal nature of the budgetary discipline text. The consequences are binding on the Council. That is the important factor. They are incorporated in the budgetary procedures of the Community.

On the question of own resources, it has been suggested that we would have a 40 per cent. increase in expenditure. There will be no step change, because the base is fixed on 1984-85, and therefore increases will be related to that. The increase will be much lower—probably less than 20 per cent.—because Britain will pay less than 1 per cent. in own resources for the next few years even if the VAT ceiling is increased to 1·4 per cent.

We now have a satisfactory arrangement on budgetary discipline and I commend the motion to the House.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos 8322/84, Preliminary draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 for 1984; 8879/84, Letter of amendment to preliminary draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 for 1984; the unnumbered document, Draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 for 1984; Document No. 10222/84, European Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the draft supplementary and amending budget No. 1 of the European Communities for 1984; the unnumbered document, Draft general budget of the European Communities for the financial year 1985; Documents Nos 9482/84, Letter of amendment to preliminary draft budget of the European Communities for 1985; 10690/84, European Parliament's amendments and modifications to the Draft budget of the European Communities for 1985; 8454/84, Amended proposal for a Council decision on the Communities' system of Own Resources; 8445/84, Commission proposal for a Council regulation introducing reserve measures to cover requirements in 1985; 8514/84, Commission's communication on the budgetary requirements of the Community in 1984 and 1985; 5899/84,

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

Amended proposal for a Council regulation amending the Financial Regulation of 21st December 1977 applicable to the general budget of the European Communities; and the unnumbered document, Budgetary discipline; common position of the Council of Ministers; and welcomes the agreement on budgetary discipline providing for the firm control of agricultural and other expenditure.

Overseas Aid

10 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): I beg to move,

That the draft International Development Association (Seventh Replenishment) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved.

I understand that, with the leave of the House, we can take with this the second motion—

That the draft International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1984 Selective Capital Increase) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the Minister have the leave of the House?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Raison: The purpose of these orders is to authorise an increase in our subscription to the capital stock of the World Bank for the take-up of a further 529 shares, and a contribution to the seventh replenishment of the International Development Association.

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which is known more popularly as the World Bank, owes its existence to the imagination of those concerned with the immediate financial needs of Europe after the second world war. The creation of the World Bank, along with the International Monetary Fund, was an act of faith. Her Majesty's Government's participation was agreed by this House almost 40 years ago, in December 1945. Since then, the bank has, of course, changed its emphasis to tackle the problem of the world's developing countries.

The IBRD's basic aim, enshrined in its articles of association, is to promote economic progress in developing countries, other than the very poorest, by providing financial and technical assistance, mostly for specific projects, in the public and private sectors. Loans have been granted to Governments for projects in a variety of sectors — agriculture and rural development, education, energy, industry, population, health and nutrition, water supply and sewerage, transportation and telecommunications. There has also been some non-project lending, including structural adjustment loans. This recent form of lending is to provide financial assistance — foreign exchange — to a country which undertakes to make changes in its economic management. The bank's total lending in the year to June 1984 was $11·9 billion. The bank's goal is to bring its borrowers to a point at which they are fully able to turn to the world's financial markets to meet their needs. The bank has helped many countries graduate out of its lending programme. The most notable case is, perhaps, Korea.

The Bank has unparalleled first-hand knowledge of a wide range of developing countries' problems and an operating experience which is second to none. Moreover —we attach more importance to this—it has a first-class system of evaluating its lending operations.

The Government have consistently given the strongest possible support to the World Bank president and his staff. I welcome the opportunity provided by today's debate to reaffirm that support, and to pay tribute to Mr. Clausen and his team for their sheer professionalism and dedication to the formidable tasks in hand.

More directly, we support the bank's central aim of the alleviation of poverty and its concentration of resources in

key areas, especially in agriculture, rural development and energy. We welcome particularly the Bank's very useful country macro-economic and sector analysis work, as well as its willingness to do more in donor co-ordination.

I shall now deal more specifically with the draft International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1984 Selective Capital Increase) Order 1984. The purpose of this order is to enable the Government to make a further subscription to the capital stock of the bank of a sum equivalent to $63,815,915, of which only 8·75 per cent. — or $5·5 million — would be paid-in. The balance would be callable. A copy of the IBRD resolution No. 395 has been placed in the Library for the information of hon. Members, and the sum I have mentioned is the price of 529 shares as set by the terms of that resolution. The selective capital increase will add a further $8·4 billion to the IBRD's capital base. That will help the bank to maintain its lending programme at the current high level. The main purpose of the selective capital increase was not to provide additional capital, however, but to effect changes in shareholdings in the bank following the IMF eights quota review. The need for a long-term increase in the bank's capital base will have to be met by a general capital increase in about 1986.

As a result of the selective capital increase, and in the context of the negotiations on the seventh replenishment of the International Development Association, the ranking positions of the major shareholders in the IBRD have been re-aligned: the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany remaining respectively in first and third positions, Japan moving from fifth to second position, and the United Kingdom—formerly second—and France—formerly fourth—sharing joint fourth place. The United Kingdom has thus been given a lower allocation of shares, 529, under the Bank 1984 selective capital increase than would otherwise have been allocated to us. However, this does not mean that our support for the bank is in any way diminished. The World Bank shareholding is generally fixed in relation to members' economic and financial strength.

I turn to the International Development Association. As the House will know, the association is the soft loan affiliate of the World Bank. It was created to provide loans on highly concessional terms to developing countries which would have great difficulty in servicing borrowing from the World Bank itself. As the association is administered by the same staff as the World Bank, all that I have already said about that staff applies with equal force to the association's operations. With its concentration of resources on the world's poorest countries — some 60 per cent. to Commonwealth countries—the association's programme is almost a mirror image of the allocation of our own bilateral aid programme. Many in the House will be aware that negotiations on the IDA's seventh replenishment were tough, protracted and, in the end, disappointing. A total of only $9 billion was agreed, some 25 per cent. less than the nominal level of $12 billion approved for IDA 6.

Although at the final meeting of the IDA 7 Deputies in Washington last January donor representatives felt that the IDA was one of the most effective multilateral channels for transferring resources to the poorest countries, the United States' representative reiterated his country's earlier determination to contribute to the replentishment no more than $750 million in each of three years. The other countries represented were not prepared to meet the shortfall in the contribution of the major donor, and the size of the replenishment was predicated by the United States 25 per cent. share. The IDA management was given a mandate to try to raise additional resources to help close the gap between the $9 billion agreed and the level of $12 billion which most donors regarded as the minimum required by the association for its fiscal years 1985-87. As hon. Members will know, I was able to announce to the House on 27 January that Her Majesty's Government would be prepared to make a contribution to supplementary funding on the basis of the usual equitable burden-sharing among donors. Many other donors have expressed a willingness to contribute on a similar basis, but the IDA management has not pursued this question of supplementing IDA's general fund because of the declared non-participation of the United States and, in their absence, of Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The draft International Development Association (Seventh Replenishment) Order 1984 will if approved by the House, give the Secretary of State authority to make a United Kingdom contribution of £401,520,000. Payment to the association would be effected by the deposit of three promissory notes, of equal amounts, over three years from 1985, to be encashed over a period of years, with the costs being met as they occur from sums voted for overseas aid.

I do not propose to go into the detailed arrangement of the workings of the replenishment. They are set out in the report of the Bank's executive directors, together with the IDA resolution, dated 24 May 1984. Both have been published as a White Paper—Cmnd 9402.

I should, however, draw the attention of the House to changes in the shares of contributions of several donor countries. Five countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, Kuwait and Sweden — have reduced their percentage shares; while 10 other countries have increased theirs — the most significant being Japan, France, Canada, Italy, Norway and Finland. In our own case, our percentage share has come down from a very high 10·1 per cent. contribution under the previous replenishment to 6·7 per cent. I make no apologies for that. Our reduced share is not a reflection of any weakening of the Government's resolve to support the association. We have determined the level of our contribution in relation to the United Kingdom's relative economic strength among donors.

I am glad to say, however, that we were able to negotiate a package with our Japanese friends whereby their share of IDA 7 funding was substantially increased as par of the arrangement for the realignment of shareholding positions in the World Bank, to which I referred earlier.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Will the Minister explain more clearly what he means by his statement that we have determined the level of our contribution in relation to the United Kingdom's relative strength among donors? What sort of calculation did that involve?

Mr. Raison: It is based on the gross national products of the different donor countries. The 10·1 per cent. share that we had in the previous replenishment was far above our proportionate share of the world's economy. We have reduced it to a more realistic level.

During negotiations, we made sure that the combined share of the United Kingdom, France, West Germany and

[Mr. Raison]

Japan was no less than it was under the previous replenishment. In fact, it turned out to be slightly higher than last time.

The IBRD and the IDA are the world's leading development institutions. They constitute the cutting edge for change and for improvement in the social and economic conditions in developing countries. Successive British Governments have supported them, and our commitment now is as firm as ever. I commend both orders to the House.

10.12 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): We deplore the failure of the United States Administration to contribute to the supplementing of the international development association funds. We regard that as critical for the role of IDA. I shall develop that argument and its relevance to Government policy shortly.

We also deplore the fact that the Government's IDA contribution will fall from 10·1 per cent. to 6·7 per cent. We do not accept the Minister's argument that that reflects Britain's economic strength among donors, because we do not accept that the Government are fulfilling their potential in the international arena, nor that they are participating with other countries in the sorts of project for joint international recovery which the World Bank report for 1984 stresses as critical to the future prospects of less developed countries. The report states that the world's economy is now:

"balanced on a knife edge."

Students of economics will be familiar with what is known as knife-edge theory. It is that an economy, such as the international economy, can either hit the ceiling or the floor. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) is amused. I trust that during the debate he will argue for a recovery of the world economy rather than a continued collapse of trade among less developed countries, which has devastating effects on sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Srortford): I shall not argue on the merits or demerits of knife-edge economic theory. I shall argue about the effect of the amount of money and help that we give to ordinary people in extremely poor countries.

Mr. Holland: I would be impressed by the hon. Gentleman's intervention if we were to have a significant increase in the amount of money given, but the Minister has just said that we cannot have such an increase because of the position of the United Kingdom economy. Although he claims that this is an outdated economic theory—by which I presume he means a Keynesian economic theory —it is very much to the credit of the World Bank that it has not fallen for the manic monetarism of some other institutions and is arguing the case for global recovery. The bank stresses that, without that recovery, the prospects for some areas of the world economy, especially sub-Saharan Africa, are extremely dire.

As the bank stresses, after three years of almost uniterrupted decline in growth in trade, the improvement in the world economy during the past year was due almost entirely to the United States recovery. That recovery is no longer in question, but it will be deflated by the American Administration's cuts in expenditure, including social expenditure. If, as expected, that reduces American exports to the level where they were about two and a half or three years ago, that will take about $100 billion worth of demand out of the world economy. Although Third world countries are not in as strong a position as they should be, in terms of the United States importing from them, that in itself will damage Third world prospects.

It is a double blow for Third world countries that the United States Administration can neither contribute to the replenishment of IDA funds, nor can it sustain its recovery, which we were told was secure, in such a way that world trade and payments can increase. The figure of $100 billion in total demand from the North is the equivalent of 4 per cent. to 5 per cent. of Third world export trade. The collapse of that trade will be damaging and will certainly dwarf the replenishment levels in IDA funds at present.

As the bank stresses, strains persist in the international structure of trade and payments, and faced with the need to reduce imports, the developing countries have been forced to reduce the level and alter the composition of their investments. Capital formation has been shifted towards the energy sector and economic infrastructure at the expense of the social sector.

The position of sub-Saharan Africa will be dire. The list of human miseries in the African continent has been well highlighted by UNICEF in its report on the impact of recession on children, which showed how children have been the victims of economic decline. Much attention has been focused, and will be—with good reason—in this debate, on the drought in Ethiopia and the relevance of the World Bank's proposals to the African Continent. However, in a country such as Zambia, the height-for-age ratios have fallen in all age categories of children under 15. Child mortality in sub-Saharan Africa was 50 per cent. higher than the average in developing countries in the 1950s; it is now almost double that average. The bank claims that there must be improvements in countries' internal economic management. We do not claim that internal economic management cannot be improved. The bank also claims that additional external assistance will not by itself solve Africa's problems.

Net capital flows to sub-Saharan Africa are expected to fall from $11 billion to $5 billion. We are talking about a difference of $6 billion, which is double what the replenishment of the IDA from $9 billion to $12 billion would have been. It shows how devastating will be the effect of not achieving the aimed-for increase in the IDA replenishment. Some of the figures illustrate how serious the position is. Against gross capital flows in 1980-82 of about $13·1 billion, the projections for 1985-87 for sub-Saharan Africa are a total of $13 billion. But amortisation, or the paying off of debt, will increase from $2·3 billion to $8 billion, so that the net capital flow into the area will be halved—instead of being $10·8 billion it will be $5 billion.

The World Bank, under pressure from the Reagan Administration, has felt obliged to endorse the role of market forces, but, because of the increased amortisation payments, net private capital flows, which, for 1980-82 were $2·5 billion, will now be minus $1 million. In other words, not only is the United States Administration failing to increase IDA, but the private sector lauded by that Administration is taking resources out of the region.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my hon. Friend accept that, in the past decade or more, extremely high interest rates, for the most part led by the United States, have meant that when it comes to a crisis, rather than poor little kids in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the Third world being saved, the entrepreneurs in the casino economy—the bankers—are being bailed out? This results in the poor countries having to pay more and more to save their necks, when all that the Western economy is doing is bailing out bankers who should have had their fingers burnt. In other words, the bankers are all right when they are making a profit, but, when they look as if they will die, the so-called market forces do not operate and the bankers are saved by those who should be looking after the starving millions.

Mr. Holland: My hon. Friend has made a typically forceful and relevant point. It is apparent from the World Bank's recent statement that it is especially concerned about the impact of IMF policies on the countries that it helps through the development programme. In other words, the World Bank is concerned with long-term development prospects, issues and projects, but the IMF is concerned with short-term balance of payment adjustments. This has meant—I am glad to see that the World Bank has endorsed this in the case of Latin America—that the IMF has imposed a further deflation of some $30 billion in trade by imposing cuts packages on some of the leading Latin American countries. Therefore, while the World Bank is trying seriously to make a contribution to world development prospects, the IMF is making contributions to the global slump. My hon. Friend's point about the role of the banks is important. The banks have lost confidence in several less developed countries, and in so doing over the past few years have started for the first time in decades to draw resources out of the Third world.

If imagination and political willingness were shown by leading Governments, and this Government must still be considered one of the leaders among the official development donors, we would see a public institutional response to offset that decline in the private capital flow and in private capital lending to the Third world. That would mean a World Bank and IDA replenishment that was several times what we are being offered by the Minister tonight.

The bank is cautious about market forces in its annual report. I am glad that it does not simply want to let the market rip, and it is not waging a war against the mixed economy as the IMF is. It stresses the importance of other programmes such as health and education, as well as improved financial control. It stresses smallholders and co-operative agriculture as well as the promotion of private investment. That is right, as private investment will not come unless it is co-ordinated and promoted through public institutions and by public policy. But the bank is not being allowed to play the kind of role it should be able to play in the promotion of investment and world trade. Also, inasmuch as the bank is affected by the kind of monetarist market reasoning coming out of the United States, market forces alone, whether through smallholders or co-operatives, will not be sufficient to ensure the long-term development aids with which the bank is concerned.

It is relevant to compare the analysis of trade by the bank and that by UNCTAD. The UNCTAD statistical handbook lists the commodities on which the Third world depends. It refers to wheat, sugar, coffee, corn, rice, agricultural raw materials such as cotton, natural rubber and tobacco, and minerals and other materials. Between 65 per cent. and 95 per cent. of trade in those commodities is controlled by multinational companies. The donor countries in the development assistance programme, the funding countries in the World Bank programme and the funding countries on the IDA programme must face the fact that only a fraction of the value added from those exports goes to the less-developed countries. Typically, less than 20 per cent. goes to those countries and frequently less than 10 per cent.

If the bank is to fulfil its aim of long-term development, it needs to take a leaf from UNCTAD's book and confront the question of why so little of the value added in key commodities goes to the less developed countries. Countries such as Britain with a high share of multinational company activity in Third world countries should seek to ensure that a higher share of that value added goes to the Third world. If they do not those countries will not be able to offset their grave domestic economic problems in the current economic climate.

The World Bank report stresses the role of the aid donor. It deals with the longer-term agricultural development programme and the relationship between the bank, the British Government and other World Bank board members. The bank is not concerned with short-term issues. The bank is not the most appropriate agency to deal with the drought problem.

In the debate on 22 November I welcomed the possibility of the funds which the Government are not now to make to the IDA replenishment programme, because of the non-co-operation of the United States, being rescheduled to the World Bank's programme for Africa. However, there was nothing in the Minister's statement to confirm that. What is to happen to the £200 million which would have gone to IDA? Will it be allocated to the World Bank programme? What will happen in Bangladesh, for example? The Minister did not reply to my earlier question about that.

It appears that the 6,500 tonnes of food aid for Ethiopia was to have gone to Bangladesh. That is giving with one hand and taking with the other. The problem in Bangladesh is severe. The floods between May and September affected 20 million people and caused $800 million worth of damage. There is a 2·8 million tonnes shortfall in foodstuffs compared with a normal shortfall of 1·5 million tonnes. What is the Government planning to do about that? If they are not planning to reschedule the funds what will they do for Bangladesh and the food need there?

Any sure foundation for the World Bank's longer-term development programme in Ethiopia and Africa must be based upon an adequate response to the drought problems.

The Prime Minister has said that not only are the Government doing their bit, but that they are doing more than other countries. That claim is contradicted by the facts. The United Kingdom's contribution to Ethiopia before October this year was £1·2 million and £2·5 million worth of cereals. Since 1 October, the contribution has been £6·2 million plus two Hercules aircraft. Italy has given £16 million as well as two Hercules. West Germany has committed more than £7·5 million, excluding the EEC contribution. Australia has contributed £7·5 million, Canada £16·5 million and Bulgaria £10·5 million.

Italy's contribution is critical, not only in quantity but in quality. It sent 150 trucks plus spares to Ethiopia. The

[Mr. Holland]

trucks could double the aid distribution capacity of the Eritrean Relief Association and make a direct contribution because of which the World Bank's longer-term programme would be based upon the survival of agriculture in the critical drought areas in Ethiopia.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): The tenor of the hon. Gentleman's argument is probably that the problems in Bangladesh and Ethiopia are not for solution by individual countries but—especially in the latter case—can be solved only by the international community. Does he accept that when I was in Bangladesh some years ago there was no prospect that it would ever be able to feed itself in the foreseeable future? Surely these are matters for the international community as a whole and cannot be laid at the door of any one nation.

Mr. Holland: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that point. Bangladesh illustrates the problem to which he referred. When I was in Japan not long ago I spoke with members of its development institute, which had sent a team to Bangladesh for two years to study areas of potential comparative advantage that that country might have in the world economy. After two years, they decided that there were precisely none. In textbook theory that should not be possible—in the real world, it is possible. One reason is not only the technological change, which means that jute is not the export commodity that it once was, but that we now have a multinational division of capital and labour world wide. Thus reliance on low-cost wages alone with intermediate technology is not sufficient to guarantee Bangladesh an international future.

I would have agreed with the hon. Gentleman had he said that it was not for national governments alone to seek to solve the problems of a country such as Bangladesh. That must be supplemented by multilateral and international action. But it appears that the food aid allocated to Ethiopia has been diverted from Bangladesh—and it was a small contribution in the first place, some 6·5 million tonnes. Yet there is an 800-million tonne gap in the needs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the real problems for Ethiopia is that of the Eritrean people, and that assistance from the Government should be given through the Eritrean Relief Association to ensure that it goes to those in greatest need? I have tabled a question on that matter.

Mr. Holland: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is one reason why Ethiopia and Eritrea cannot wait for the World Bank's long-term development programme for sub-Saharan Africa. It is a point that the Minister seems unwilling to admit. The fact is that 85 per cent. of the drought areas in Eritrea and Tigré are outside the Government's control because they are in the hands of the Liberation Front, and 50 per cent. of Wollo is similarly outside the Government's control.

The Minister has chosen to react to the points that we have made several times by claiming that he has no desire to hype-up the political confrontation with the Ethiopian Government, and I appreciate that. However, he assumes that that would happen by dealing with the Liberation Front. If so—as we have said before, and now stress again—there is every reason to allocate a far higher share of food aid to the relief associations such as those in Tigré and Eritrea. I know that the Minister is doing that, but it is on a small scale. The caring British public, which responded so overwhelmingly to the drought crisis in Ethiopia, is beginning to understand that a far higher share of food aid is going to the Addis Ababa Government that to the liberated areas—30 times more.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Would not my hon. Friend accept that a large proportion of the food aid which is going in through the good offices of the Addis Ababa Government and the relief agencies is finding its way into parts of Tigré and Wollo which are not necessarily under the control of the Government and that the practical logistics of moving grain mean that the grain must go that way?

Mr. Holland: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point and I respect it, not least because he has been to the areas concerned and seen what the problems are. But the fact at the moment is that no long-term development programme such as the World Bank is proposing for sub-Saharan Africa will start at rather than behind the post unless the current drought can be tackled. If millions of people leave their farms because of the current drought and have to go to the main towns of the area for food aid distribution, there will be no chance of a harvest next year. It is totally different case from Bangladesh where floods this year left deposits and sediments which may mean a good harvest next year. That is not the position in sub-Saharan Africa.

I put this point to the Minister because it is directly relevant not only to laying the foundations for a longer-term World Bank programme but also to the concern shown by the British public. If he cannot call for a cease-fire and cannot persuade the Council of Ministers of the EEC to call for a cease-fire in Ethopia, is he so timid that he cannot at least call for no attacks upon properly marked food convoys and for an assurance that airstrips for flying in food aid which the liberation fronts have offered to construct should not be bombed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. We are discussing the operations of the World Bank and the association and the levels of contributions thereto. We must not stray too far into the unilateral contributions of the British Government.

Mr. Holland: I am grateful for your guidance on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we are talking not simply about the bilateral contribution of the British Government but about the role played by the EEC and the relationship between short term food assistance or drought aid and longer term development assistance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With great respect, we are talking about two orders which relate to the operation of the World Bank and the International Development Association and the level of contributions which are set out in the order.

Mr. Holland: I appreciate that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but my argument, simply, is that the kinds of costs which are likely to be incurred by failure now to distribute food aid effectively in sub-Saharan Africa will pre-empt the kind of resources which the World Bank wants to put towards development. It will simply be remedying a drought crisis after hundreds of thousands or millions of people have died rather than being able to build on a sure foundation. We are not an insignificant power.

Although our share of the World Bank has diminished, we are still represented on the board of the Bank and this Minister is directly responsible for Government policy on the Bank.

I would stress a further point on the relationship between the current economic crisis and the Bank's lending policy and the role of IDA. The bank is seriously addressing itself to the longer-term development issue. It is not receiving adequate support from the leading countries and from its board members on this point. It is not simply a matter of United States policy. It is, firstly whether alternative ways can be found for like-minded members of the bank's board to undertake activities which fulfil the spirit of the bank's objective without necessarily undertaking them through bank agencies.

Secondly, on such individual projects as the bank's programme for sub-Saharan Africa, where the analysis has been published in detail and where the prospectuses have been published in detail, what will the Government's response be? Thirdly, what role will the Government play in relation to the longer-term issue of global economic recovery which the Bank stresses is so crucial for its own activities? It is very notable that, because of its concern about the recession in the United States economy, the bank in its report makes the case for a European economic recovery which would have a very significant impact on the export performance of less developed countries.

This week's issue of *The Economist* asks why, with a recession now under way in the United States as a result of Government policy, Europe cannot take up the recovery and face its responsibility for a recovery programme. I was glad to see this and it is rare for me to say that of something in *The Economist*. If Europe does not do so, not only shall we have had a cut in the IDA contribution which could cripple the IDA's activities, but we shall have a deepening of the global slump.

It is possible for the Government to take action. The longer term development prospects depend upon a real recovery in world trade. For example, a real recovery of $100 billion a year spent would not only sustain Third world exports by 4 to 5 per cent. a year but would, over a 10-year period, add more than a half to the Third world's GNP. That would make it possible not only to offset the debt crisis in some respects through repayment. And the World bank stresses the imminent risks to the Third world countries from that debt crisis. It would thereby enable less developed countries to put the brunt of the debt crisis behind them within not 10 but five years.

The Government are making no contribution to such a recovery. They are reacting to the depression of world spending and trade. They claim that they are justified in reducing contributions to the bank because of the reduced circumstances of the United Kingdom's economy. I call upon the Minister to say what he is doing in the international arena to encourage not only the bank's policies but, for example, Commonwealth countries and their New Delhi summit proposals and those of the recent meeting of the Commonwealth countries for economic recovery. If we do not do so, not only the World Bank and its programmes will suffer but the Third world too.

10.41 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister rather than criticise him, as the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) did, on the way in which he led the group in the World bank to try to effect a special fund for the support of the IDA to replenish the figure of £9·5 billion. That is what the total IDA replenishment has been reduced to by the American's failure to contribute to it. My hon. Friend maintained the amount of money allocated in the ODA budget in order to continue to make that contribution.

Those countries which failed to support my right hon. Friend were Germany and Japan. We in the House should say straightforwardly that we resent that. The Third world should resent the fact that Japan in particular, with its responsibility for aid and trade relationships with the Third world in which it is very much the winner, has failed in its responsibilities to the Third world far more than has the Government, who were led by my right hon. Friend to replenish that shortfall in the IDA replenishment led by the United States.

Let me deal with the United States and the reasons why it did not support the replenishment of the IDA at its current level—£12 billion. Clearly, in view of rising overseas costs and inflation, that would have been below what had been agreed to previously. When one bears in mind that in the meantime China, an extremely large country with many poor people, has come into the IDA, the failure not only to renew at the same level of £12 billion, but to reduce it by 25 per cent. to £9·5 billion, is something that the developed world should be ashamed of.

I much admire my right hon. Friend's work and determination in trying to bring that about. The reason why the Americans failed to do that was that they resent the fact that 40 per cent. of the IDA fund goes to India. It was felt that with the addition of China, an even greater percentage would have gone to India and to China. That is because the allocation of funds under the IDA is to those countries which have a low per capita income. India and China can therefore command a large percentage of the IDA budget.

India is a powerful economy. It is a nuclear power with a major defence capacity. It has also a major industrial capacity. The Americans are right to criticise the IDA's distribution of money to India. In fact, India could devote a large amount of its funds—it has large reserves—to the support of the poorest in its own country. I believe firmly that development begins at home, and help must start at home. Developing countries must put their own houses in order and direct their money to the poorest in the communities before they can expect the international community to respond. I have some sympathy with the American view of the IDA and I understand why they chose not to replenish its funds. On the other hand, I criticise it because IDA grant funds are needed desperately, especially in Africa, as the hon. Member for Vauxhall has said and as my right hon. Friend would undoubtedly agree. Aid is necessary in Africa to prevent widespread starvation of the sort which we have seen on our television screens and which has accorded a major response from the British people.

Mr. Parry: Is it not deplorable that our assistance to the African continent is so small compared with that which is made available by some of our European partners? We are making available only half of the target which has been set by the United Nations.

Mr. Wells: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is talking about the United Nations target of 0·75 per cent. of GDP, which we have agreed to and at which we should be aiming. That is the target for total aid contributions. But we should not talk in meaningless monetary economic terms. We should be directing ourselves to sending aid to where it is most needed. I am not interested in global figures. My interest lies in directing aid to the poorest, to the starving people of Africa and elsewhere. The issue is directing money, people, materials, compassion, management and administration to those places and not 0·75 per cent. targets. The hon. Gentleman may agree that that aid should be directed to Africa and the poorest parts of the world.

My right hon. Friend has been trying to promote that policy. He has been supporting the World Bank's fund for Africa, which is designed to absorb the moneys which were available in the ODA budget and to support the IDA. Having failed to secure replenishment for the IDA, we are supporting a special fund for Africa.

What is my right hon. Friend forced to say to the World Bank and other organisations which come to him for money? What I am about to say may lead to cross-party agreement. He is forced to say that he does not have the money now. I should like him to tell me that that is not true, but I understand that the Government are saying that they cannot now lend money to Africa for a special Africa fund. There will be opposition from West Germany and Japan to the formation of a World Bank special fund for Africa, and Britain may be included in that category because the Government say that they do not have the money.

Why do we not have the money? Let us return to the debate on aid and take up the leader that appeared in *The Times* on the Saturday after the debate. It seems that many in the House did not understand what was happening; neither did the leader writer of *The Times*. The aid budget has not been compensated at all for overseas risen costs and adverse changes in the exchange rate, whereas the diplomatic budget has been compensated in part for those risen costs.

The *Times* leader said that the Foreign Secretary had given way to the aid lobby and had not cut the aid budget in favour of cutting the diplomatic budget. The reverse is true, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has had to deal with the consequences. We have learned from a strange admission to the Public Account Committee that my right hon. Friend's budget for dealing with the Ethiopian crisis by emergency relief and food aid was £50 million. Anyone budgeting in the ODA hopes that he will not have to use all that money and that he will be able to use money in other directions through the unallocated funds within the ODA's budget. That aid money has been used up almost entirely in providing drought relief in Africa. My right hon. Friend the Minister gave generously to Ethiopia to try to relieve the drought and political problems. The hon. Member for Vauxhall paid tribute to my right hon. Friend in trying to deal with those problems—perhaps not enough was done; there can never be enough done in such cases—that lie beneath the Administration of the Addis Ababa Government, whom I deplore.

I can see that you are becoming agitated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I am not dealing with IDA, but these budgets are related.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a general debate on overseas aid. The debate is concerned with the two funds and our contribution to them. Any hon. Member taking part in the debate must address himself to the orders before the House.

Mr. Wells: I fully accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to say that these two budgets are intimately related; that is why my right hon. Friend the Minister has not been able to make the contribution to IDA which he would otherwise ask the House to approve. We have reduced, as we should do in the light of our economic circumstances, the amount we give to the IDA. The figure has been reduced by 25 per cent. because of the failure of the American and British Governments to contribute at the level at which they would have contributed if the aid contribution had been renewed at the previous level. I contend that it should have been renewed at a higher level. You have given me the opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make a point on the IDA.

The House has decided to take together the issues of the IDA and the IBRD, and I shall try to be quick in dealing with the World Bank. I am concerned about the way in which the British Government control the votes of the World Bank. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Vauxhall said, the way in which the alternative director on the IBRD executive board and the IDA executive board votes is controlled not by the Overseas Development Adminstration and my right hon. Friend for Overseas Development but by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. How is the alternate director told how to vote?

Mr. Stuart Holland: When my right hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) and others were in government, that was the responsibility of the Ministry of Overseas Development. It is simply a reflection of the downgrading of that Ministry that that is no longer the case.

Mr. Wells: I am asking for information. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will be able to correct us and put us on line. As I understand it, that aspect is not under the control of the Overseas Development Administration.

The IBRD needs not only more money—in case you think that I am getting out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I point out that is a reason why I welcome the order—but greater conditionality. Conditionality is required to ensure that the money that goes through the World Bank is directed towards the development of those countries which need it.

Why has the alternate director of the World Bank executive board voted against Guyana and denied that country more funds from the IBRD to which the order contributes? A policy decision must lie behind that, which has not been revealed to the House. I ask my right hon. Friend to clarify how and why that director is authorised to vote. We should not penalise or turn our back on Guyana. We need to help Guyana's economy through the World Bank with the money which will be voted through this order.

I believe that the special adjustment loan is on offer, and I call upon my right hon. Friend to ensure that the World Bank conducts itself properly in relation to special adjustment loans to aid development of the poorer countries. That must be combined with the conditionality of the IMF so that we achieve a longer-term programme through the two institutions than is available through the IMF alone to resolve the difficult development problems faced by the poorer countries.

I shall give an example of how some of the money from the IBRD and the IDA is used badly, in the development of one country. Let us take St. Kitts. Sanctions against sugar going to the United States and the EEC have caused St. Kitts to lose $5 million, but the World Bank and the IDA have just given it $5 million for additional development projects. That shows that there is insufficient co-ordination of policy not just domestically and bilaterally but also internationally, with other countries and multilateral agencies, and through trade relationships, to support the development of the poorest countries. The IBRD and the IDA have the greatest opportunity to bring about that co-ordination. That is why I ask the House wholeheartedly to support the orders. I hope that my right hon. Friend can bring about the necessary improvements to meet the points that I have made.

Several Hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the House wants to hear the Minister's reply. He would like to begin at 11.22 or 11.23 pm. I appeal for brevity.

10.57 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I cannot altogether follow the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) in the sympathy that he expressed for the United States over the seventh IDA replenishment. The Minister, perhaps inadvertently, gave some, but not all, of the figures on this issue. It is worth summarising them briefly, because they are stark.

The sixth IDA replenishment amounted to $12 billion. The World Bank, which operates the IDA scheme throughout the world to the poorest countries, wanted $16 billion for the seventh replenishment. That would have been an increase of one third. There is to be $9 billion. That is a decrease of 25 per cent. on the sixth replenishment, but what is more important is that it is a decrease of 43 per cent. on what the World Bank considered to be essential for multilateral aid from rich countries to help poor countries over the next three years.

That is not the final figure, because the figures that I have been quoting are all in cash terms. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) said, there is inflation throughout the world and the 25 per cent. cut is probably even bigger if one takes account of expected inflation over the next three years.

The prime mover in making this cut has been the United States, as the Minister very fairly pointed out. I think that the whole House accepts that. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford suggested that there were reasons for this. No doubt there were—there are reasons for bad policies, just as there are reasons for good policies. In other words, there are good reasons and bad reasons. In making that cut, the United States has forced all the other rich countries to follow suit because of the way in which the IDA contributions are calculated. Once a major donor has taken the lead, the process cannot be stopped but

[Mr. Eric Deakins]

spreads like the ripples in a pond when a stone is thrown in, and the poor countries of the world will suffer substantially as a result.

The United States took that action for bad reasons. I know a great about political opinion in the United States in relation to the Third world. There is a great deal of myopia and sheer ignorance, not merely among the American people, but among their legislators, about the facts of life in the poor countries which the IDA replenishment is designed to aid. If ever there was a case of spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar, it is the penny-pinching attitude of the United States in this regard.

In terms of the United States defence budget, let alone its total budget, the cut in contribution from $1 billion to $750 million, rather than an increase to $1,250 million, is penny pinching indeed. For the world's richest country to adopt such an attitude to the major issue of the next few years, which will affect the future of all of us — not even improving life in the poor countries, but just stopping things getting worse—will inevitably make it far more difficult for the World Bank and other international institutions to stop the rot getting worse.

The United States, aided and abetted — as the Minister again quite fairly said, although he did not use those words—by the Federal Republic of Germany and by Japan, has taken a very bad decision indeed. It is probably one of the most significant decisions that it has taken in relation to the Third world since the second world war, and possibly in its history. Those three countries, with the rest of us who are carried along willy-nilly due to the system of proportionality in contributions, will live to regret that decision.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall explained in such clear detail, the situation in the Third world is getting worse. Let those who doubt that read the World Bank's annual reports, including the latest report. The problems are not just poverty, unemployment, disease and malnutrition, but heavy debt burdens, population increases and, above all, the fact that in real terms commodity prices are at their lowest for about 30 years so that Third world countries cannot earn the money to pay for the extra cost of their imports or even to finance their debt burdens properly.

I do not suggest that the whole system is about to collapse like a house of cards, because I believe that the rich countries have sufficient nous and self-interest to recognise that they must allow debt rescheduling rather than let the world banking system collapse. But that does not improve life in the poor countries. It merely staves off disaster for all of us, and that is what the IDA replenishment would have done if we had had the $16 billion to which I believe the British Government would have been willing to contribute. Certainly there would have been pressure from the House for them to do so.

We have to accept the order, because it is better than nothing, but symbolically it is a disaster for the Third world. Those countries need more multilateral assistance, but they will get less as a result of the ignorant and myopic policies of the politicians and leadership of the United States. My only regret is that the United Kingdom, as a close friend and ally of that great country, did not have sufficient influence to change opinion on Capitol Hill and in the White House and ensure that the United States, as the world's richest country, undertook its true responsibilities to the poor countries of the world.

I am ashamed of the action of the United States. We must accept the order, because by doing so we shall preserve something at least for the poor countries. However, I am afraid that the position will deteriorate. When, in three years' time — under a Government of whatever colour—we debate the eighth replenishment of IDA, I am afraid that the global situation will be much worse, and that will be partly because of what the United States, Germany and Japan have done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) for the brevity of his speech.

11.06 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): This is the first time that I have taken part in a foreign affairs debate. I do so because two weeks ago, as a member of an all-party delegation that included six other hon. Members, I visited the United Nations. I should like to thank all those, especially in the Foreign Office, who so excellently put to use some very scarce funds. Whether anyone apart from the participants benefited from the exercise, I leave the House to judge, but I hope that it will be possible to continue to send such delegations.

We had 24 meetings at the United Nations in three and a half days. One might have thought that in that time we would have run the gamut of the United Nations agencies. We saw politics, and we saw the aid agencies. We had lunch with Brad Morse, the director of the United Nations Development Programme, which was an experience that I would recommend to anyone. But we did not see the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and we did not see the transfer and banking of funds. We did not meet anyone from IBRD or from the IDA. That was a serious omission, because without trade and without industrial development — without the hard-headed commercialism especially noticeable in the IBRD—we must be talking in a very limited way. For if trade and commercial enterprises are successful and mutually beneficial, as I believe that they are, much aid becomes less necessary. The political input that the Western world would like to see into the Third world will follow both more subtly and more effectively in that way than if it is simply fuelled through the political and soft aid agencies.

I have had some contact with IBRD in the recent past. I believe that is is easily the most hard-headed and commercially minded of all the agencies operating in that field. My husband's company has been involved in much of the supervision of its activities in parts of the Third world.

The rules of the IBRD could be commended to one or two other organisations, including, perhaps, some of our own companies. I quote from the guide to the United Nations:

"Under its charter, the Bank must lend only for productive purposes—

in other words, not direct to Governments—

"and pay due regard to the prospects of repayment. . . loans must be for specific projects . . . The bank must assure itself that the necessary funds are unavailable from other sources on reasonable terms. The use of loans cannot be restricted to

purchases in any particular member country or countries, and the bank's decisions to lend must be based only on economic considerations."

Most of the money comes from private investors—from the bank's own borrowing — and the disbursement is done entirely against invoices, most of which are for contracts based on international competitive bidding. After that, an extensive audit is required.

That is not a bad collection of commercial rules on which this and other Governments could allocate funds to the developing countries.

In 1974-75, my husband was involved in supervising some IBRD projects in Turkey. I went with him. This week, I checked on what has happened to some of the projects in the decade since then. The experience was salutary. The IBRD projects have continued to be profitable, despite all the political vicissitudes of that sad country. I found it hard to believe, but one particular project was in fact set up to break a government monopoly in one industry, and it has had a dramatic effect on that part of the economy.

The IBRD has encouraged and made possible an input in kind—not just cash—from other donor countries, so that, for example, the link between West Germany and Turkey has been emphasised. We should recognise and value such links. We would be far more worried if such links were forged between Turkey and East Germany or some other Eastern bloc country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) says that funds should go to the countries where they are most needed, but there are occasions when funds should go where they are most ably used. If we concentrate on a country that is rising and that has potential for development, and if we can transform it from a poor to a moderately well-off country, we will have helped the world economy more rapidly and more effectively than by simply pouring money into the countries with the greatest difficulties.

There has recently been much criticism of attitudes to aid of various types. Some of the most telling appeared in a leader article in *The Times* of 27 November, which came out while we were sitting at the United Nations. It sent a shiver of fear through representatives of all of the countries sitting there, so much so that several agency leaders came up to us waving a copy saying, "You do not all believe this, do you?" The article's comments were based on a debate in the House on Overseas aid on 22 November. Two comments were especially apposite. First:

"MPs showed an obsession with volume."

It went on to say that aid should be

"subjected to more critical cost benefit analysis for donor and recipient together."

I do not think that I could be described as an aid freak because, perhaps more than any other hon. Member present, I am aware that the funds which we are voting are competing with my pet activities such as pensions and the National Health Service. We should try and we should admit that we are obsessed with inputs at the expense of outputs. If I might say so with the greatest respect, the speech of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) was a classic example of an obsession with inputs without any consideration of the results. That, of course, is a British failing. We do it all the time. We do it with the National Health Service and with the Department of Health and Social Security, and we have just done it with the Common Market. I suspect that much of the funds that we have just voted for the EEC might have been better devoted to filling the grain silos of the rest of the world rather than those of Europe.

I suspect that much of the grumbling about inputs that we get from newspapers such as *The Times* is an excuse for not examining the results. Those who have doubts cannot be smug. We must ask three questions about where the money is going to and what we get out of it. First, what do we as donors get out of it?

Mr. Parry *rose*——

Mrs. Currie: Secondly, what do the recipients get out of it; and, thirdly, what is the result for both of us? We must ask what we donors get. It is a selfish and cruel question, but in this world the best things are often done for the wrong reasons and we should remind ourselves and our constituents that, through the IBRD and IDA, about 80 per cent. of what we give comes back to us in direct procurement. One or two agencies provide even more. The United Nations development programme, for example, brought back twice as much to the United Kingdom in terms of dollars in 1983—we gave $28 million and got $63 million back. We are on to a good thing in some of these programmes and we should not let our constituents forget it. I commend to my right hon. Friend the practice of the Ministry of Defence which, when there is any argument about what we should do about that programme, circulates to all hon. Members a list of companies in our constituencies which benefit from the programme so that we can be assured how employment prospects in our constituencies are affected.

We must ask what developing countries get. For IBRD it is easier to say what they do not get. They do not get weapons from IBRD. They do not get political infiltration. We are not talking about CIA or KGB funding of tin-pot dictators. They do not get unrepayable debts. They do not get grandiose white elephants and triumphal arches. They do not get schemes which break down for lack of infrastructure, parts or skills. The Third world is littered with past mistakes and especially the neglect of agriculture. It is significant that all those things that I have listed are the result of bilateral aid programmes, especially of Government-to-Government direct bilateral aid. We in the United Kingdom give about two-thirds of our total aid through bilateral aid and about one-third in multilateral aid of this type. I cannot tell whether that proportion is right but I know that if we go on—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Lady must relate what she is saying to the orders.

Mrs. Currie: I am referring directly to the orders, or at least I am trying to. I know, however, that if we head entirely away from programmes such as we are dealing with, we are probably going in the wrong direction.

We must ask what we get together. IBRD and IDF have shown the success of programmes which have a hard-headed and commercial element, for many of the nations that were once the recipients of IDA are now donors to IBRD. They work. Sentimentalitly alone is not enough. Long after the starving have disappeared from the television screens and long after the urgency of the immediate aid programmes has faded, the money that we vote tonight will contribute far more to a prosperous world from which we shall all benefit.

11.14 pm

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Time is short and I want to make only one simple point. The Liberal party entirely agrees with the criticisms of the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) of the United States for its failure to respond to the World Bank's request for replenishment to IDA. I wish to put that firmly on the record.

Did the Government make representations to the Reagan Administration about this, and if so, what response did they receive? Did they receive a response in the terms referred to by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells)?

11.15 pm

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on what he has done and on his personal commitment to this matter. I welcome these orders because they are directly relevant to what is happening to the poorest countries—something on which a number of hon. Members have rightly concentrated.

Of course we must increase the viability of developing countries as partners with industrialised nations in a mutually rewarding expansion of international trade. Every developing country, in addition to needing financial resources, also needs human resources. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) mentioned Mr. Bradford Morse, the administrator of the UNDP. I was in New York two weeks ago and had more than one meeting with Bradford Morse. I endorse what my hon. Friend said. It is quite an experience, which unfortunately too few people have. I am indebted to him for reminding me that development is all about human beings. That is an axiom, but it is often forgotten when one gets bogged down in figures and percentages.

Mr. Morse reminded me that for far too long we have suffered from a Marshall plan mentality on aid. After the second world war in Europe all that was needed was a transfer of capital, but development in the Third world is still too concerned with investment and the transfer of capital, without concentrating on developing human resources.

In Europe that was not necessary, because the human resources were already fully developed after the second world war. We must do far more to improve skills, human resources and capacity. Only 10 per cent. of improvement in development comes from capital—the rest is in the development of human resources. The latter has been neglected, and in the last five years the World Bank has tried to fill that gap. That is why I am pleased about the orders.

I do not entirely follow the doom and gloom that is sometimes spread by Labour Members, although I share many of their criticisms and much of their concern. However, it is right to put on record that in the 30 years between 1950 and 1980 there has been a greater improvement in the less-developed countries than in any other 30-year period for any nation at any time, including Japan. Literacy in the poorest countries increased from 22 to 48 per cent. Life expectancy rose from 41 to 57 years. Child mortality decreased from 28 per 1,000 to 12 per 1,000. There has been a dramatic and worthwhile benefit over that 30-year period.

These orders are directly related to what we can do for the poorest countries. I am concerned about the fact that for the poorest 50 countries our percentage of gross bilateral aid was 63 per cent. in 1983, the lowest since 1979, with the exception of 1982. Our total overseas aid expenditure in 1983 was only 0·35 per cent. of GNP, the lowest for the last 20 years, except for 1980.

I appreciate that technical factors—for example, the timing of our contributions to IDA—have been largely responsible for those lower percentages, but that percentage of GNP is exactly half that suggested by the Brandt Commission. Indeed, it is necessary to remind the Government that in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office memorandum to the Brandt Commission in July 1980 there was a commitment to work towards the 0·7 per cent. of GNP for official aid, although without a target date. The percentage in 1979 was 0·52 per cent.

The poorest countries need international institutions because they are unattractive donees for bilateral aid as they have little to offer in return. I urge my right hon. Friend, when considering the orders, especially that relating to the IDA, to ensure in future that there is no flight of capital from Third-world countries, and to review the terms for loans because many of them are no longer applicable to the problems of Third-world countries. Finally, there is a need to fix interest rates for the future. Third world debtor countries cannot plan their next year's budget when they do not know what interest rates will be.

I commend the orders to the House.

11.20 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I was told tonight by Mr. George Galloway, who is to give evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee tomorrow and who has just returned from Ethiopia, that he has evidence from aerial photographs that about 500,000 people are making their way towards the southern Sudan. The position in sub-Saharan Africa, as the Minister knows, is beyond description.

In those circumstances, should this oil-rich country make this cut? About every eight hours a tanker leaves my constituency at Hound Point for Japan, Korea or heaven knows where, loaded with North sea oil. We are rich in oil. Even in our own national interests, should we not do something more to help the Third world?

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) has been waiting patiently to speak, as I did, so I shall end on a point which will not surprise the House. *The Sunday Times* estimates—it is an underestimate—that £3 million a day is spent on those islands in the south Atlantic, yet the Government propose this international penny-pinching. That is not the way that the United Kingdom should conduct its affairs in 1984.

11.22 pm

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): When the Minister replies, I hope that he will deal with how aid is distributed. He may have seen the admirable article in this week's *New Statesman* by James Firebrace about large donors, such as the United States, Canada, and European countries. There is no examination of where their aid goes, but aid given by voluntary organisations is monitored.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) rightly said that 85 per cent. of people in Eritrea can be reached only by the Eritrean Relief Association. I hope that the Minister will say that the Government

recognise the ERA and will give it full support to ensure that vital supplies are given to the people there, who need them desperately.

11.23 pm

Mr. Raison: I shall deal with the last point immediately, although it is perhaps a little outside the scope of the debate. We believe that the best way to get help to the rebel-held areas of Ethiopia is by working discreetly through voluntary agencies. I believe that to be a better way than to recognise all sorts of bodies and to hype the matter up politically.

There was great unanimity in the debate, in that we all respect the World Bank and what it does. No hon. Member seriously dissented from that, and I echo that shared respect. I was glad to hear from a newcomer to our debates, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). It is always nice to have fresh blood in these debates. Her stress on outputs as opposed to inputs is right. It occasionally worries me that we spend all our time during the Lomé negotiations talking about how large the next one will be, and little time talking about how large in terms of effect the existing one has been, or, indeed, why it has not been possible to spend much of the money that was allocated to Lomé 2. We should talk about the consequences of our aid programmes, rather than only about their size.

The debate was wide-ranging and not especially disciplined, but nevertheless it was valuable. All that I can do in the time available is pick out a few points, and one in particular. We all share the regret that the next IDA replenishment will be as low as $9 billion. I should tell the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) that Britain and the EC made clear to the United States their views on the size of the replenishment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) and others mentioned the World Bank's proposal for a special facility for Africa. The matter has been mentioned directly in relation to the orders and to the possibility of an IDA supplementary fund. The proposal was discussed by the World Bank's executive board earlier today. The facility will take the form of a voluntary fund with a target of $1 billion to be committed over three years. The fund would be outside the IDA and the normal burden-sharing arrangements among donors would not apply. The precise purposes for which it would be used will be agreed by donors at a meeting in January or February. The United Kingdom would expect to attend that meeting. Until then, we shall continue to discuss with the bank how best we can play our part not only in relation to the facility, but in the wider context of the bank's joint programme action for sub-Saharan Africa, of which the special facility will be only a part.

The bank's purpose—this is in line with what we have heard in the debate—is to support reform and adjustment undertaken in African countries that have structural problems. That is precisely the underlying aim of our bilateral aid programme in Africa. During the past year alone, we have committed programme or sector aid worth nearly £33 million to eight countries in pursuit of that policy, and we shall need to bear in mind the strength of our bilateral programme when considering how to respond to the bank's latest initiative. We must ask ourselves whether a United Kingdom contribution to the bank's proposed special facility would be likely to yield greater value to African countries than would our programmes, and whether, in consequence, it represents a higher priority claim on our resources. Hon. Members must understand that, in the final analysis, there are limits to what we can do.

In the wider global context, there is a general decrease in official development assistance available to developing countries. Therefore, it is more important than ever that aid flows are used to maximum effect. We know that aid alone is not sufficient to bring about change; the right climate and policies must also be there. We must ensure that we have an effective policy dialogue such as we have been seeking in the Lomé negotiations.

As the House probably agrees, the World Bank and IDA staff are taking a positive lead in those directions, especially in the creation of more consultative groups in which policy dialogue with recipient countries can take place, and donors can exchange information. The bank intends to strengthen its staff in that area. We can take encouragement from that. I say firmly that my Department will work closely with the bank and IDA staff wherever and whenever we can. That is the real thrust of the joint programme of action for sub-Saharan Africa.

I cannot say now exactly what will happen in the discussions on the special facility, but I can say categorically that we believe that nothing is more important in tackling the problems of the world, especially Africa, than that we should work together as closely as possible with the World Bank and the other multi-lateral and bilateral donors. That must by the keystone of our approach to Africa in the difficult period that lies ahead. The House recognises those difficulties, and it recognises that, in the short term, we have the desperate problem of dealing with the immediate famine, which I have seen so vividly, and which everyone has seen on television. That is the immediate problem, but beyond that is the crucial problem of finding out how best we can begin to get the long-term development that Africa has so far not seen, in spite of the great resources that have been poured into it.

When the House passes these orders, as I believe it will, it will be making a significant and important contribution to this enormously challenging and worthwhile task.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft International Development Association (Seventh Replenishment) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION

Resolved,

That the draft International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1984 Selective Capital Increase) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 7th November, be approved. *—[Mr. Raison.]*

LAW REFORM (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be committed to a Scottish Standing Committee *—[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

LAW REFORM (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State—

(i) in paying remuneration or allowances to persons appointed as a temporary measure to act as judges of the Court of Session and High Court of Justiciary;

(ii) in assisting persons to conduct research into any matter connected with the law;

(b) any expenses incurred by the Lord Advocate in assisting persons to conduct such research; and

(c) any increase attributable to the said Act in the sums which, under any other Act, are payable out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

PETITION

Human Embryos

11.31 pm

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I beg leave to present a petition from the ministers and members of the church congregations in the Banff and Buchan constituency. The petition contains 449 signatures and was initiated by Rev. David J. Randall of Doune Manse, Macduff, and the other ministers in the constituency.

The petitioners believe that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real living individual human being, and oppose all practices which discriminate against the embryo, or violate his, or her, human dignity and right to life.

The petition continues as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos; the discarding of human embryos; their use as sources of transplant tissue; or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the embryo concerned).

The petition initiated by Rev. David Randall, and the others to whom I referred, concludes:

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray for the guidance of Almighty God upon all your deliberations etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Teachers (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

11.32 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): This is——

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has done the House and the people of Scotland a great service by securing this debate this evening. However, the Secretary of State for Scotland has made a major announcement, which will have enormous consequences for teachers in Scottish education, but he is not here on the Front Bench tonight. Is that not an outrageous affront to the House of Commons?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Where is he? Where is the Secretary of State?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat when I am on my feet.

Mr. Canavan: The Secretary of State is not in his seat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he is taking time from the Adjournment debate by continuing the point of order. The presence or otherwise of the Secretary of State is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Where is the Secretary of State if he is not in his seat?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already told the House that this is not a matter for me.

Mr. Maxton: I take the point that my hon. Friends the Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) are making, because the issue of teachers' pay and salaries, and their demand for an independent inquiry to examine their pay and conditions, is an important one for Scotland.

When I first applied for this debate two weeks ago, the major teaching union in Scotland, the Education Institute of Scotland had been demanding such an inquiry for four months. When I was eventually granted the debate last week, it was against the background of the teachers in Scotland being on strike for one day. That strike achieved a turn-out of 31,000 out of 41,000 members of the EIS. In areas which are traditionally moderate such as Dumfries and Ayrshire, the strike was 90 per cent. effective among EIS members. Tomorrow, yet again the teachers of Scotland will be on strike.

In the meantime we have had a written answer from the Secretary of State to a question carefully planted by the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). Planted questions are not unknown. In that reply the Secretary of State made important announcements about the inquiry into teachers' pay.

The first point that must be made is that the Secretary of State is not present to hear the debate. Secondly, he should not have made such an important statement in a written answer. He should have made a statement on the Floor of the House this afternoon so that we could question him about it. It is an insult—a continuing insult—because time after time the Secretary of State makes statements by way of written answers.

I understand that on television in Scotland tonight the Secretary of State said that a written answer was the usual way to deal with such matters. His colleagues in the Cabinet do not believe that. They believe that the correct way is to make a statement on the Floor of the House. How much better it would be if we had an assembly in Scotland where such matters could be properly debated and decided.

If the statement is so important, why did it have to be made today and what effect does the Secretary of State think that it will have? If I were being slightly less immodest than usual, I should say that it was to forestall my Adjournment debate. I do not believe that to be so. I think that the Secretary of State must have thought that if he issued the statement today it would appease the teachers in Scotland and that the industrial action promised for tomorrow would be called off. I have spoken to teachers' leaders in Scotland tonight and I am afraid that I must disillusion the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State was given a roasting tonight on Scottish BBC television. He was taken apart by that most moderate of women, Mrs. Mary Marquiss, and made to look foolish. That says something about his case.

Far from appeasing the teachers, he has made matters considerably worse. It is likely that what he has said will cause considerable confusion in Scotland tomorrow and that the industrial dispute will go on even longer than first intended. It is possible that the teachers will ballot for an extension of industrial action and that they will be joined by other trade unions in the teaching sector.

The Secretary of State has treated the legitimate demand for an inquiry with contempt. He is not prepared to admit that teachers' pay has been seriously eroded. He said in the letter which formed part of the written reply: "it is of course no part of the Government's policy that salary increases should be indexed either to the rate of inflation or to some measurement of pay increases in the economy generally . . . However, pay awards to teachers over the last 10 years or so have in fact been very closely comparable with those made to other groups of local authority employees in Scotland." I do not know about whom the Secretary of State is talking.

Mr. Canavan: What about the police?

Mr. Maxton: Indeed, what about the police? Their salaries have gone up considerably more than teachers' salaries.

The Minister has treated that argument with complete contempt. He has said to the teachers, "We do not believe that your salaries should be increased. We believe that the erosion of your salaries against the cost of living and other comparable professions is right." From what he said on television about pay, it would appear that one reason why he is refusing to set up an independent inquiry is that it would give a blank cheque to the Educational Institute for Scotland. Conservative Members might agree—do that they think that it would so so? Let us consider what that means. They are saying that an independent inquiry—one set up not by the EIS but by the Secretary of State—would be so convinced by the teachers' case that it would give them everything they want.

The Minister said that the workload of pressures on teachers has not increased. Anyone who knows anything about the teaching profession knows that that is not the case. There has been enormous curricula development in

[Mr. Maxton]

relation to those two great men of Scottish education, Dr. Munn and Mr. Dunning. The Secretary of State says that, essentially, the curricula development will be over in a short time. Anyone who studies the matter knows that examinations will have to be set up and the work by teachers will continue for a long time yet. Many children face prospects of no employment when they leave school. They are not interested in education because they feel that they will be on the dole queue anyway. That places an additional burden on teachers.

The Secretary of State makes an offer of a possible award of additional money. Let us be clear that that is hedged about by so many clauses, sub-clauses and sub-contracts that it is difficult to say that it is any more than a con-trick. In return for that fraction of a promise, the teachers will be asked to give up hard-fought and hard-won conditions of service for essentially nothing. They are not being offered anything in return.

The Minister has solved nothing by his statement. The teachers are angry, depressed and frustrated. That will lead in the short-term to industrial action. No teacher wants that —the teaching profession is not renowned for industrial action. The Minister must ask why the Government have forced teachers into industrial action that they do not want. Even more important are the long-term effects on the morale of Scottish education of such a statement.

I ask the Minister to change his mind and set up an independent inquiry to decide the rightful position of Scottish teachers.

11.44 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) on his good fortune in having an Adjournment debate tonight on this important matter. I am grateful to him for leaving me a few minutes before the Minister replies.

It is significant that the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have had ample opportunities to address the House on this matter, but they have declined to do so. Had it not been for the fact that my hon. Friend was fortunate in obtaining the Adjournment debate tonight, there is a strong possibility that we should not have heard from the Government today.

I said earlier today that the Secretary of State's letter on this issue was an insult to the teachers and to the House and therefore it would have been a complete waste of time had he come to the House to make a statement today. I have come to the conclusion that the Government have now set themselves on a road which turns every grievance in this country into an industrial dispute.

The Scottish teachers have a justifiable grievance. The Munn and Dunning reports have been produced. The whole context of a teacher's work load has changed quite dramatically. The Secretary of State does not even acknowledge that in his letter to Bob Beattie, published today. Teachers' salaries have fallen substantially, in a way which no other profession in this country has experienced. The Secretary of State acknowledges that fact but goes on to say that that is part of the Government's policy in any case.

The right hon. Gentleman adds a final insult to injury by saying that he is prepared to try to find a way around all this by setting up some kind of inquiry, but that he will dictate the terms. He wants an investigation into nine or 10 points which would dramatically alter teachers' contracts of employment by taking up hard earned home time in order to right a grievance. The teachers have a justifiable grievance. The Secretary of State and his hon. Friends want to alter the teachers' contracts in order to right what undoubtedly is a justifiable grievance.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart is right and there is prolonged trouble in Scottish schools, it will be because the Secretary of State does not understand Scottish education. Never having attended a Scottish school, he does not understand that we aim for the highest standards. Nor does he understand the dedication of Scottish teachers. Therefore, he plays on something which he simply does not understand.

If there is trouble in our Scottish schools, the responsibility for it—let it be said before the trouble begins; it is not a case of being wise after the event—will lie at the door of the Secretary of State. I hope that the parents of children in Scotland will understand clearly that the teachers are the victims of this Government's dogma and of a policy which is so unjust and so reprehensible that it is bound to lead to trouble. Even at this late hour I plead with the Minister to try to persuade his right hon. Friend to use common sense, to withdraw the letter which he sent today to Bob Beattie and to accept the teachers' request, not a demand, for an independent review so that the teachers can get on with the job which they so want to do—teaching our children.

11.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): On such a serious subject, it is a pity that the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) did not resist the temptation to make some cheap and totally unjustified personal remarks about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) will not be surprised to learn that I did not agree with much, if any, of what he said. But this is a serious subject and I am glad of the opportunity tonight to set out the position, following my right hon. Friend's statement, and in particular to put on record the Government's decision today on the postponement of the implementation of the standard grade, following the receipt today of a letter from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

The complaints of hon. Members opposite about the absence of an oral statement were totally bogus *[Interuption.]* I have checked what the last Labour Government did on teachers' pay under similar conditions. Not only was there not an oral statement, but I have not found a written statement, although one may exist.

I assure those hon. Gentlemen who have suggested that in some way the timing of today's decision was related to industrial action that it was completely unrelated to any disruptive action. Of course we deplore the disruptive action that has been taken. I hope that disruptive action will not continue once the teachers have had the opportunity to consider precisely what my right hon. Friend said. Disruptive action will damage pupils, Scottish education and teachers' reputations. I can say unequivocally that disruptive action from the teachers' point of view will achieve nothing.

No responsible Government could possibly have signed a blank cheque in the way that the teachers wanted. But my right hon. Friend has said clearly in his statement that

he fully appreciates the strong feelings of many teachers. He has pointed out that there is another possible and proper way to handle the matter.

Mr. Canavan: Give the teachers the same money as the police.

Mr. Stewart: If I have time, I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's point about the police.

It is the statutory responsibility of the Scottish joint negotiationg committee to determine the salaries and conditions of service of school teachers in Scotland. We are prepared to consider on their merits, and in the framework of the Government's existing public expenditure plans for Scotland, any proposals relating to pay and conditions of service which might result from a detailed examination undertaken by the SJNC for school education.

Mr. Maxton: If the Minister is prepared to do that, why does he not accept the report that has already been drawn up by the working party of the joint negotiating committee which has representatives of the Secretary of State on the management side?

Mr. Stewart: I am about to deal with that report, which I have read, unlike, I suspect, many hon. Gentlemen.

My right hon. Friend has, however, pointed out that a review of conditions of service would have to deal specifically with areas where existing arrangements appear not to be in keeping with the present-day requirements, including the definition and prescription of teachers' responsibilities in the planning of personal teaching methods and programmes; the teaching, discipline and assessment of pupils; participation in schemes of personal professional development; participation in pastoral, tutorial and guidance arrangements; lunchtime and playtime supervision of pupils and consultations with parents, including attendance at parents' meetings, and control by employers of time within conditioned hours when teachers are not in class contact.

I cannot accept that it is other than realistic and constructive to want to examine teachers' conditions of service as well as their salaries. In much of the discussion of the teachers' request for an independent review of their salaries alone, great play was made of their status as professionals. But the argument that we have been hearing is that teachers should be paid on what they conceive to be professional scales but that their conditions of service, which in a number of respects are favourable, should not come under scrutiny. Teachers currently work a 32½-hour week. I shall rephrase that. Teachers currently have a 32½-hour working week.

Mr. Ewing: That is a cheap point.

Mr. Stewart: No, it is not a cheap point. It is surely unusual, by the standards of any profession, that teachers should have several hours in the week—the difference between their class contact time and their working hours —in which it is up to them to decide where they put in the hours that they are expected to spend on non-class contact duties.

I understand that there has been something of a hysterical reaction about the conditions of service point from the Educational Institute of Scotland this evening.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): A what reaction—historical or hysterical?

Mr. Stewart: I understood that there has been a hysterical reaction to this point. There is a good deal of confusion about such matters as playground and lunchtime supervision, discussions with parents and attendances at parents' meetings. There is much doubt in the minds of many teachers whether these matters are part of their professional duties. It is in no one's interests—parent, teacher or pupil — to leave the issue unresolved. A review is a sensible response to what has been said.

I shall respond to the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Cathcart about the teachers' case for substantial salary increases.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden) *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I usually give way to those who wish to intervene. However, I should like to get on with my speech. If I have time later, when I have put my case on the record, I will give way to him.

Mr. Canavan: Did anyone teach the Minister to make a speech?

Mr. Stewart: I had excellent teachers.

Mr. Canavan: It does not sound like it.

Mr. Stewart: We have been told by the hon. Member for Cathcart that the teachers have an unanswerable case for salary increases. That is based on the proposition that if something is said often enough and loudly enough it automatically becomes true.

Mr. Canavan: Give teachers the same money as the police.

Mr. Stewart: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman's point about the police. Teachers have been treated very much like other comparable groups of employees. Teachers say that comparable groups have received much larger pay increases than themselves, but if they are compared with other public service groups, especially others employed by local authorities such as manual workers, social workers, administrative, professional and technical grades, and with civil servants, it emerges that they have been treated in much the same way. When one compares teachers with civil servants in the comparable salary bands, it emerges that teachers have had larger salary increases over the past 10 years than those groups.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) referred to the police. The police provide security and they are significantly different from other groups because they have no right to strike. I need hardly say, in more general terms, that it is not the Government's policy to index pay increases either to the rate of inflation or to earnings of other groups.

Mr. Canavan *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: That would not be consistent with our policy of fighting inflation——

Mr. Canavan: It is on the police——

Mr. Stewart: —or of keeping down expenditure——

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Canavan: It is unfair of the Minister to compare teachers with the police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) to resume his seat. The Minister has not given way.

Mr. Canavan: Then he will give way now. The police cannot be compared with teachers. Teachers educate children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Canavan: The police are employed by this Government to beat miners and others over the head on picket lines.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not being fair to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), who was fortunate enough to secure the Adjournment debate. The debate is personal to him and we want to hear the Minister's reply. Mr. Allan Stewart.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: No, I have given way to the hon. Member for Cathcart, who initiated the debate. I am not giving way to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West. The local authority sector must be a part—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Falkirk, West is not doing any good by making constant interjections. Hon. Members on both sides of the House want to hear what I am saying in response to the arguments of the hon. Member for Cathcart.

Hon. Members will know that my right hon. Friend sought the advice of the Scottish Examination Board and COSLA on whether phases II and III of the standard grade reforms in the implementation programme should be postponed. The SEB advised that for its interest there was as yet no reason for postponement. I have today received the advice of the convention that phases II and III should be postponed, and my right hon. Friend has accepted that advice. I agree with the convention that the policy of non-co-operation in new curricular developments, which the EIS has adopted, makes it necessary to postpone the new courses due to begin in August 1985 and August 1986.

I share the extreme reluctance with which the convention said it decided that postponement was now inevitable. The refusal of teachers to co-operate in new developments is a complete betrayal of the expectations of parents and pupils. I regret particularly the loss to those pupils who have not hitherto had the opportunity to show what they can do in national examinations and to gain a certificate showing their achievements. The policy now adopted by the EIS contrasts strangely with its view, less than two years ago, that implementation should be speeded up—a view that the Government then accepted.

Mr. Dewar *rose—*

Mr. Stewart: By its action—or rather policy of inaction the EIS has now prolonged for the schools the period of overlap during which both old and new courses are taught, a period which, not so long ago, the EIS was anxious to reduce to a minimum.

Mr. Dewar *rose—*

Mr. Stewart: May I finish this point?

I must reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made crystal clear: there can be no going back on phase I of standard grade, the new courses in English, mathematics, science and social and vocational skills which pupils started in August this year. We cannot betray the trust of those pupils by saying to some of them that, after all, they will not have the opportunity to gain the Scottish certificate of education in 1986 and saying to others that, after a term spent on the new courses, they must revert—

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that you were going to bring the proceedings to an end. The Under-Secretary of State has made an important statement. There has been a difficulty in getting such statements from the Library the following day. May we have the statement placed in the Library? Will you approach Mr. Speaker on this subject? A statement made around midnight has not been available to hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Under-Secretary of State has heard the hon. Member's comments.

Mr. Dewar *rose—*

Mr. Stewart: I cannot give way; I have only one minute to go. I shall be happy to ensure tomorrow that hon. Members have an early copy of what I am saying, because this matter is important.

Phase I of standard grade must go ahead as planned, and we shall, of course, monitor the position. We are consulting the local authorities and the examination board. I hope that we can minimise any further disruption to pupils now embarked on these new courses, to pupils studying for ordinary grade and higher grade examinations and to the conduct of the examinations next year.

The Opposition have talked about the additional work load for teachers. I must say to the—

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nicaragua

1. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom foreign policy of the current situation in Nicaragua.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Renton): We wish to see the restoration of peace and stability in central America. As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 9 November, the situation in Nicaragua calls for the greatest possible restraint on all sides. We wholeheartedly support the Contadora process as the best hope for bringing peace and stability to the region.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Why do the British Government, rather like the United States Government, appear to accept that the elections in El Salvador are more legitimate than those in Nicaragua? Do the British Government accept the integrity and sovereignty of Nicaragua? What representations have we made regarding the serious tension that exists between the United States and Nicaragua?

Mr. Renton: There was agreement on all sides that the elections in El Salvador were fair. It cannot be said that the same agreement applied in respect of the elections in Nicaragua. Although a number of people felt that the elections were reasonably conducted on election day, it was clear that, in advance of that, there was political discrimination in the form of harrassment at Opposition meetings, unequal time on radio and television and censorship of some material relating to the election campaign. Because of such considerations, four parties withdrew from the election. Against that background, we decided not to send observers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Is it not true that the strategic security of this country depends to a significant degree on NATO's capacity to provide reinforcements for Europe passing through the Panama canal, the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the efforts by the United States to foster genuine democracy and to prevent the extension of Marxist subversion and influence in that area are in our interests?

Mr. Renton: Security not only in Nicaragua but in the whole of central America depends strongly on a regional settlement. That is the spirit behind the whole Contadora process. The United States in the United Nations General Assembly has given its specific support to that process, just as we have.

Mr. Anderson: Is there not a role for us, particularly before Congress meets, in seeking to restrain the increasingly bellicose noises from the United States in respect of Nicaragua?

The Minister mentioned Contadora. Does he not share the anxieties of the Mexican Government and others that the United States, acting directly and through its allies, is seeking to move wrecking amendments to the Contadora treaty and thereby abort the process?

Mr. Renton: Honduras and others have suggested amendments to the Contadora Act, which are now under consideration. The position of the United States in this matter is reflected in the fact that the United States has constantly stressed that it wishes to achieve political reform by peaceful means. There is a continuing dialogue between the United States special representative, Mr. Shlaudeman, and the Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Tinoco. That shows that the American Government have a direct link with the Sandinista Government. The continuation of those discussions is most important.

Uganda

2. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made in the current year to the Ugandan Government on human rights.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): We attach great importance to this. My right hon. and learned Friend met the Ugandan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in New York on 28 September and discussed a number of issues in our bilateral relations, including human rights. The situation has also been raised with the Ugandans on a number of other occasions.

Mr. Fisher: I appreciate the Minister's concern, but how does that concern square with the fact that the Government are giving support for the training of the Ugandan police and army? What assurances can the Minister give that that training will be solely for the benefit of increased discipline in the army and will not result in human rights being endangered further?

Mr. Rifkind: It squares very well. As the hon. Gentleman correctly said, the purpose of the military training that we are giving the Ugandan army is to ensure that there is a proper level of discipline in the armed services. At least part of the problem of human rights in Uganda has been caused by a lack of discipline and a lack of control. That is one element in regard to which we can make a positive contribution.

Sir John Farr: Are representations being made about the pitiful circumstances of the many tens of thousands of Ugandan Asians who fled that country and arrived in

Britain penniless, many of whom are now in Leicester? What actions have the Government taken to get some justice for them?

Mr. Rifkind: Earlier this year the Ugandan Government introduced a scheme to examine compensation claims and to try to respond to the proper anxieties to which my hon. Friend has referred. I understand that some of the cases have been completed and that property has been returned to Ugandan Asians from whom it was expropriated. We hope for rapid progress in this matter. There has been progress, but it has not been sufficiently rapid.

Space Weapons

3. **Mr. Robert Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the proposed Soviet-American negotiations on weapons in space.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): We are pleased that the Soviet Union has agreed to discuss outer space arms control with the United States. We are strongly committed to arms restraint policies in this area. Together with our other allies, we shall continue to support United States efforts to achieve progress in this field, but the need for Western patience and perseverence is as great as ever.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. Bearing it in mind that the two super powers are at the start of a race to develop weapons in space at gigantic cost, will my hon. Friend undertake to do all that he can to improve the understanding between the United States and the Soviet Union on the desirability of reaching an agreement to ban the stationing of all weapons in space? Will he say what the Government's policy is towards the United States's strategic defence initiative?

Mr. Luce: I agree with my hon. Friend about the urgent need for measures, which are agreed between East and West, and principally between the United States and the Soviet Union, for arms restraint in outer space. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister talked about the dangers of a new and terrible theatre of war in that regard. I am sure that the United States goes into these preliminary discussions in the new year with the clear objective of trying to reach an understanding with the Soviet Union. Indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend has just had discussions with the United States Secretary of State about these and other issues and will shortly do so with Mr. Gorbachov in London next week.

Mr. Norman Atkinson: Will the Minister reconsider that answer, as it must contradict the Government's main purpose for maintaining nuclear weapons? The House has often heard the Government explain that their justification for having nuclear weapons is their deterrent value. If weapons in space are successfully developed with a view to finding a satisfactory defence against nuclear weapons, will that not minimise the deterrent value of nuclear weapons?

Mr. Luce: The Soviet Union and the United States are undertaking some research on strategic defence and ballistic missile defence, but the United States has made it plain during this year that it is willing and anxious to talk to the Soviet Union about research on both sides, with a view to reaching some form of understanding. That is a sensible way in which to proceed and I hope that that is what they will do.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my hon. Friend agree that American space weapons are designed primarily for the defence of the United States, not for Europe, and, therefore, that their deployment would uncouple Europe from the American strategic deterrent? Does he further agree that on those grounds alone West European Governments should resist the development and the deployment of space weapons by either side?

Mr. Luce: As I have already made plain, the Government believe that we must get urgent progress, if possible, in arms restraint in outer space. I reinforce that view strongly. Nevertheless, I believe that it is the view of the United States that the Alliance as a whole should remain completely united in these matters. We are in the closest possible consultation with them on the important issues of outer space.

Mr. Healey: Is not the question of unity the question of the policy upon which that unity exists? Does the Minister agree that the American strategic defence initiative, if it were successful, which most American experts think is most unlikely, would undermine the whole basis of nuclear stability as it has existed since the second world war? If he does not accept that, does he agree that if the Americans give their knowledge to the Russians it would make a farce of the Government's policy of maintaining a national nuclear deterrent? For those reasons, will the Minister strongly urge the United States' Government to accept the Soviet proposal to ban weapons in outer space?

Mr. Luce: I agree that the implications of research and prospects in outer space are extremely far-reaching and serious. That is why it is important that we should support strongly the statement of the United States' Government that they are willing to discuss both their research and Russian research in outer space with a view to reaching some understanding about restraints.

High Technology

4. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during his recent visit to Israel, he was able to further the prospect of joint ventures in high technology between Israel and Britain and closer co-operation between Israel and the European Community.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend's recent visit to Israel focused on the prospects for peace in the middle east. He also reviewed our bilateral relationship with Israel, as well as the effects on Israel's relationship with the European Community of Community enlargement. There was a discussion on progress in commercial relations, but joint ventures in high technology were not specifically discussed.

Dr. Clark: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of Israel's capability in various areas of high technology. Will he therefore suggest to his right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade that he should visit Israel for bilateral talks, as he has done with other countries in that area?

Mr. Luce: First, I take note of my hon. Friend's suggestion. He might like to know that officials at the

Department of Trade and Industry are due to have discussions with officials in Israel shortly, as part of the United Kingdom-Israel joint committee on trade relations, with a view to finding ways to increase our trade with Israel. Trade in both directions is already increasing quite strongly.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Does the Minister accept that before there is a further increase in trade, or a continuation of trade, between Britain and Israel, we should first at least demand that Israel withdraws from Lebanon, stops building settlements on the west bank and gives basic human rights to the Palestinians on the west bank in Gaza?

Mr. Luce: On the first question, commercial trade has continued with Israel. We believe that it is right to have ordinary, straightforward commercial trade. We want to see an agreement as soon as possible between the Israeli Government and the Lebanese Government for the withdrawal of forces there. In that connection, the European Community imposed an arms embargo on Israel in 1982 as a result of the invasion of the Lebanon.

Africa

6. **Mr. Ian Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Africa.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I shall be visiting Zimbabwe, Zambia and Kenya between 5 and 12 January.

Mr. Lloyd: The World Bank, in its challenging and perceptive series of reports on sub-Saharan Africa, has pointed out that the key issues are the better use of investments and the adequate existence of management capacity in Governments. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, despite the well-meaning but misguided observations of certain bishops and others, the one thing we must do is to continue support in that area, especially where investment in South Africa is concerned, since, despite its many faults, it remains the country which most fulfils the World Bank's conditions and is the only country which is well placed to ensure that there is not a massive disaster south of the equator? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with the observations of President Reagan yesterday that we shall continue to give unswerving support provided that South Africa continues to address the imperatives of constructive change?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of continued investment throughout Africa, and that that investment should be well managed, and in many places better managed than it is. I also agree with him about the importance of continuing freedom to invest in South Africa where that investment can contribute to the economic and political stability of that country, which has a wider significance. I would rather not agree selectively with parts of President Reagan's observations on South Africa, but I have noted them with interest.

Dr. Owen: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that this is perhaps the best opportunity that there has been for six years to obtain a Namibian peace settlement along the lines of the United Nations resolution? The hardening of Republican Congressmen's attitudes and President Reagan's change of position are now coupled with the Angolan President's offer to withdraw Cuban troops from the Namibian border and to send some Cuban troops home. Will the Foreign Secretary take the initiative, with the other four of the original five countries, to push a United Nations settlement in Namibia?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the changes to which he referred, especially the change in the position of the Angolan Government, give greater encouragement to the chances of a settlement of the Namibian problem. As he will know, we have been pursuing this matter through the existing negotiation arrangements for a long time. We shall continue to do that, and I shall consider whether the original Contact Group can do something more in this context. We must give every encouragement to that process.

Mr. Hayes: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend and the House will join me in expressing sympathy with and offering condolences to those British people who lost relatives in last week's Gambian ferry disaster. Will he assure the House that he will do his best to give information to those families, who at present do not know what is happening? One of my constituents does not know whether his brother is alive or dead. Will my right hon. and learned Friend go so far as to say that he will assist with the funeral arrangements at the earliest possible opportunity so that my constituents—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] Mr. Speaker, Opposition Members do not seem to appreciate the seriousness of the matter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going into detail on a rather broad question.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker, but may I finally ask my right hon. and learned Friend to do everything in his power to ensure that the right information is provided to my constituents on this extremely serious matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The House will join my hon. Friend in expressing sympathy with the Gambian Government and people at the sinking of the ship Chilele Jawara on 7 December when it was carrying 73 Gambians and 25 Britons. We especially extend our sympathy to the families of the three Britons who are missing, feared drowned. Only one body has been recovered, and the search continues for the other two. I fully understand my hon. Friend's anxiety on behalf of his constituents, and I assure him that our consular department is in contact with the next of kin and is, through the high commission, keeping them informed of developments. It will continue to do so.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that today there is a lobby of Parliament, jointly organised by the Namibia support committee and the anti-apartheid movement, demanding Government action on independence for Namibia? Will he take to the rally that is being held immediately after Foreign and Commonwealth Questions a message that the Government will now act and speak on behalf of the Namibian people, instead of behaving like a surrogate of South African intransigence, as has hitherto been the case?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has offered a characteristically misguided insight into the scene. The Government have been exercising the most strenuous

endeavours to help to bring about a settlement of the Namibian question. We have been taking an active part, not only in discussions with the South African Government, but with the Angolan Government, the Front Line states and our other partners in the Contact Group. We regard the settlement of this dispute in accordance with resolution 435 as a matter of importance, and we shall continue to press for this.

Mr. Lawrence: While he is in Africa, will my right hon. and learned Friend visit Bophuthatswana, from which I have just returned, which is an independent, free enterprise, democratic, multi-racial and harmonious state, lacking only the recognition of Britain and other countries?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am familiar with my hon. and learned Friend's views, which he propounds with such tenacity, on Bophuthatswana. I fear that I shall not have an opportunity to visit it in the near future. It will have to bask for the moment in the glory of his own recent visit.

Mr. Anderson: The Foreign Secretary knows that we applauded the courage shown by his Minister of State in his attitude to Solidarity when he visited Poland. Will he show a portion of that same courage in denouncing the legal tyranny in South Africa, which charges with treason men who involve themselves in democratic activities? Will he also learn from the President of the United States and the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the tune has changed and that it is now respectable to denounce apartheid?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not fully familiar with the fact that, on many occasions, we have expressed our abhorrence of the system of apartheid. We have expressed our views strongly about many manifestations of that, and most recently in the pronouncement that we agreed with our partners in the European Community on 11 September. There was also the speech by the presidency in the General Assembly only three weeks ago. There is no doubt about our position.

China

7. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which ways he expects the signing of an accord with China over the future of Hong Kong will affect Anglo-Chinese relations in the long term.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We are confident that the successful conclusions of the Hong Kong negotiations provides a firm basis not only for the future prosperity and stability of Hong Kong, but for even closer co-operation between the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China in the years ahead.

Dr. Mawhinney: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept the appreciation of the House for the substantial contribution that he has made to improving Anglo-Chinese relations? Now that the accord on Hong Kong has been signed and an agreement has been reached, will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that he will continue to afford the highest priority to building on that good relationship politically, diplomatically, in trade and in travel?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I assure him that, just as we have been working hard for a number of years to improve our relationship with the People's Republic of China we shall continue to do with particular reference to trading, touristic and other opportunities, so that our companies can make a major contribution, as we would wish them to do, to Chinese modernisation.

Mr. Beggs: Following the signing of the agreement, will all possible assistance be given to British companies tendering for contracts in China? Will companies such as GEC, which has factory space in my constituency in Larne, benefit in the long term from the good relationship being developed between the two countries?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We shall certainly continue to give all the support that we possibly and sensibly can to the efforts of British companies. We shall shortly be re-opening a consulate in Shanghai, which will be helping in that important part of the Chinese economy. I hope that the company to which the hon. Gentleman has referred will be among those to benefit.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, following the agreement on Hong Kong, any consideration of Anglo-Chinese relations should include priority being given to fostering confidence in Hong Kong and in the relationship between the people of Hong Kong and China? Has he any plans to facilitate that?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I very much agree that after the conclusion of the agreement on Hong Kong it is essential that we do not lose sight of the continuing importance of good relations between Hong Kong and China. Indeed, such relations are likely to develop during the work that will have to take place over the next 14 years. That work will be undertaken in a more auspicious climate if, at the same time, we are striving to improve our general relations with the People's Republic.

Mr. Adley: Will my right hon. and learned Friend please take this opportunity to have a thoroughgoing review of the COCOM agreement in so far as it relates to relations between this country and the People's Republic? Does he agree that in the past 30 years there has been such a fundamental change in China's relations with the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union, as well as with the Western world, that the present situation is nonsensical, indefensible and thoroughly harmful to the development of good trade relations between us?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I hesitate to agree with such wide-ranging epithets, even though they come from my hon. Friend, but I agree that it is important to ensure that the COCOM agreement operates sensibly and in a manner consistent with its overall objectives.

Mr. George Robertson: Now that the Foreign Secretary is on the point of going to Peking to sign the Hong Kong agreement, which will do much to cement British-Chinese relations, will he tell us how he intends to report on the joint liaison group over the next 12 years? Has he had any time to reflect on the suggestion made last week about the possibility of an annual report to Parliament, with, perhaps, a debate on it?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have certainly been reflecting upon that point, but I am not yet in a position to emit the results of those reflections.

Disarmament

8. **Mr. Malone** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's response to the United States-Soviet talks on disarmament, planned to take place in Geneva in January 1985.

Mr. Luce: We have consistently supported the United States in its willingness to negotiate, without preconditions, balanced and verifiable agreements on limiting nuclear weapons. We therefore welcomed the announcement that Mr. Shultz and Mr. Gromyko are to meet in January. We firmly hope that this will lead to agreement on how to carry forward the process of negotiating arms control agreements covering both nuclear and outer space questions.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the recent Soviet offer secured by the Leader of the Opposition not to target nuclear weapons on this country and to reduce the number of medium-range nuclear weapons is anything but helpful? Does it not simply amount to a unilateral renunciation of our nuclear weapons? Does not the other matter, which was conceded off-the-cuff by the Leader of the Opposition when in the Soviet Union, that we can simply replace all our missiles with cardboard ones, say all that needs to be said about the Opposition's policy on this issue?

Mr. Luce: In so far as it is possible to understand the offer made to the Leader of the Opposition by the Soviet Union, it would seem that in return for us renouncing our independent strategic deterrent and getting rid of all nuclear weapons in this country the Russians would make proportionate reductions in their country—which, given the size of their strategic force, would represent a tiny, minimal reduction—and would point their weapons in a different direction. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks that that would enhance the security of this country, he had better think again.

Mr. Johnston: Are the Government prepared to involve the British independent nuclear deterrent in such disarmament negotiations?

Mr. Luce: The first thing, obviously, as the hon. Gentleman knows is that there is to be a preparatory meeting between Mr. Shultz and Mr. Gromyko in early January with a view, we understand, to discussing the parameters within which they will review the whole question of nuclear reductions and arms activities in outer space. That is the purpose of that meeting. Therefore, we have to hope that it will lead to a discussion between the Soviet Union and the United States which will, in due course, lead to a reduction in nuclear weapons.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has frequently made it absolutely clear, as far as Britain's independent strategic force is concerned, that if there is clear evidence that both of those countries agree to substantial reductions in nuclear weapons, and there is no increase in the defence capability of the Soviet Union, we shall consider the situation with regard to the British deterrent force.

Sir Peter Blaker: Will my hon. Friend be even more specific about the relationship between our nuclear deterrent force and the size of the Soviet strategic arsenal? Is it not true that our nuclear force represents less than 3 per cent. of the strategic arsenal of the Soviet Union? Therefore, is not the proposal discussed between the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and Mr. Chernenko that we should throw away the whole of our nuclear arsenal in return for a reduction to 97 per cent. in the Soviet Union arsenal both ridiculous and positively dangerous?

Mr. Luce: My right hon. Friend, who has had responsibility for these matters, is absolutely right. The British deterrent force constitutes only 3 per cent. of the total nuclear force of the Soviet Union. It must be seen in perspective. In the forseeable future there is a need to maintain our security in Britain by the retention of an independent nuclear deterrent. As I have said, if there is real progress and substantial reductions, we can review the position again.

Mr. Healey: Either the Minister was badly briefed or he did not read his brief. Is it not true that the United States Government and the Soviet Union Government will discuss in January not only the abolition of weapons in space but a substantial reduction in offensive missiles, whether based in Europe or elsewhere? Does that not put the British nuclear force, like the French nuclear force, in the middle of the argument?

Does the Minister agree that as the Conservative Government in the early 1970s agreed that British weapons should be counted in SALT I, for the Prime Minister now to oppose the counting of British weapons in the forthcoming negotiations will present a severe obstacle to their conclusion? Does the hon. Gentleman not feel a little embarrassed because President Reagan and the Opposition are talking to the Russians about arms control while the Government absolutely refuse to engage in discussions?

Mr. Luce: As is often the case, the right hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense. The position is clear. If Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Shultz, as a result of their preparatory meeting, get together to discuss all nuclear weapons reductions as well as those in outer space—which is absolutely right—that will involve discussions about the Soviet and the United States missile systems. The right hon. Gentleman is not showing a sense of perspective. If there is substantial progress on nuclear weapons, which we all hope there will be, and there is an agreement for substantial reductions, that will be the right moment for us to review the position on Britain's deterrent force.

Brazil

9. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to foster and cement good relationships between the United Kingdom and Brazil; whether he will seek to visit Brazil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have close and friendly relations with Brazil. These links were further strengthened by the visit of my noble Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in July and by recent parliamentary visits in both directions.

Mr. Walker: Is the Minister aware that the Brazilian economy continues to grow despite the economic problems in the world, and that British exporters can only benefit from good political relationships with that country? Is he further aware that the Brazilian Government

annually purchase from British defence suppliers £80 million of goods and have never demanded an offset agreement? Is he aware also that the arrangement between Short Brothers of Belfast and Embraer provides Brazil with little in money terms? Does the Minister recognise that a contract for the new basic RAF trainer would greatly assist in cementing good relations with both countries?

Mr. Renton: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's close interest in the Shorts—Embraer bid to supply the RAF with a new trainer. It is one of four bids currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. It will be given close attention and, like all the other bids, every other relevant consideration, including political factors, will be taken into account.

South Africa

10. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current condition of relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of South Africa.

Mr. Rifkind: Despite recent difficulties, we continue to attach importance to the maintenance of diplomatic relations with South Africa. We welcome the lifting of the detention orders on the three men in our Durban consulate, and I can confirm to the House that the three men have now left the consulate. This removes a difficult problem and will improve our ability to make representations to the South African Government on matters of concern.

Mr. Proctor: I welcome the good news from Durban that my hon. Friend has just given the House. Will he take this opportunity to welcome the recent release of political detainees in South Africa?

Mr. Rifkind: We are always delighted when the imposition of detention without trial is lifted. Naturally, both sides of the House will be concerned that charges have now been levelled against the men, but they will at least be able to answer those charges in court. The South African courts have a healthy reputation for independence.

Mr. Anderson: Have the men been charged with treason following their leaving the consulate? Now that these three brave men are no longer in the consulate, will the hon. Gentleman adopt a rather more robust view about the "Coventry Four" in relation to South Africa?

Mr. Rifkind: I am not aware that any charges have been levelled against the three men. My latest information is that the three men in the consulate were having a meeting with their families in the building in which the consulate was situated. We have already indicated our great concern at the South African Government's refusal to return the "Coventry Four".

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Budgetary Discipline

78. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the effectiveness of the proposed new principles for European Economic Community budgetary discipline.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The principles agreed at Fontainebleau represented an important new step in the control of Community expenditure. Following the adoption at Dublin of a text incorporating these principles, the Community now has at its disposal the means of implementing effective budget discipline.

Mr. Freeman: I draw my right hon. and learned Friend's attention to article 5 of the agreement and ask him about two provisions. It is extraordinary, by normal business standards, that the overspending will be corrected within a two-year period and that let-out clauses will enable overspending not to be corrected in certain circumstances. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that overspending in the Community will be promptly corrected and that there will be no fudge?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The point made by my hon. Friend in his last sentence is plainly important. The arrangements for correction over a period are designed to take account of the circumstances in which the correction might need to be made. It is of the highest importance that this budgetary discipline arrangement should be applied with full vigour and that its purpose and intention are met.

Mr. Deakins: Is control of public expenditure a matter of vital national interest for this country? If it is, why have we agreed to majority voting to deal with it in future?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Control of Community expenditure has been and remains of the greatest importance to this country. It is regarded as a matter of the highest importance by a number of other member states. For that reason, we have been able to achieve agreement on this text to secure effective implementation of budgetary discipline. The reason why the budgetary discipline text provides for the Council to set the reference framework by qualified majority is that we want the new budgetary discipline arrangements to be incorporated, as I think the House would want, in the Community's budgetary procedure. All decisions on budgetary procedure are taken by qualified majority. The essential point is the stipulation that, in future, agricultural spending should grow at a rate less than the growth in the own resources base, and the Commission has bound itself to draw up its price-fixing proposals in the light of that guideline.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: As it seems likely that the European Parliament is about to reject the Community's budget, what advice will my right hon. and learned Friend give to the Council of Ministers? Will he take note of the fact that the last time the European Parliament rejected the Community's budget the Commission observed little discipline by way of sticking to the principle of one twelfth per month of the previous year's budget?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend has come at the end of his question to the point that arises at the beginning of his question. If the Parliament rejects altogether the 1985 draft budget, the Community will have to operate under the provisional twelfths regime within the 1 per cent. ceiling. It is important that that is done properly.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Secretary was once Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the annual round of public expenditure reviews, would the right hon. and learned Gentleman ever have dreamt of accepting an undertaking from a Government Department that it would not spend more unless exceptional circumstances arose, as under article 2, or barring aberrant developments, as under article 5? Would it not have been abundantly plain to him as Chancellor that such a Department was fashioning the boltholes down which it hoped to escape? Therefore, why

should the right hon. and learned Gentleman invite the House to pretend that that is not precisely what the Community is also doing?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Gentleman studies the budgetary arrangements in this country he will see that a number of Departments have rather more flexible arrangements over the control of expenditure than the ones about which he is now complaining. As Chancellor I was not necessarily happy with all of them. The arrangements that have been made, which were debated in the House yesterday, represent a substantial achievement as a means of securing effective budgetary discipline.

Community Institutions (British Staff)

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the ratio of Britons to other nationals of member states employed by European Economic Community institutions.

Mr. Rifkind: The overall ratio is about one to 10 for all staff and one to 6 in the highest grades. I am arranging for more detailed figures to be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my hon. Friend aware that Great Britain's agreed staffing quota of 18·4 per cent. of the staff of the EEC institutions is only just over half filled by British nationals? What steps does my hon. Friend intend to take to ensure that more of the 1,000 or so highly paid jobs involved go to British nationals, as they should, rather than to French and Belgian nationals as at present?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend properly draws attention to what has been a problem. We have been exercising ourselves energetically in recent years to rectify the position. The position is now reasonably healthy in the higher grades, but there is still a problem to be resolved with some of the lower grades within the Community, particularly in agriculture, development of the budget, the secretariat, and the Council secretariat. We shall continue to make representations on those matters.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Has my hon. Friend noted that the French Government have appointed as their two Commissioners their former Foreign Minister and former Finance Minister? If we wish to stake a claim to important posts within the Community, would it not be a good idea to appoint persons of that calibre rather than the two—I had better not say it—rather less than first-class political personalities whom we have chosen?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend's remarks are unworthy. One of the two British Commissioners to the Community is a respected former Cabinet Minister, and the other was an important member of the previous Government. My hon. Friend does no service to the United Kingdom by suggesting that their qualifications are other than excellent for the jobs that they will occupy.

Following are the figures:

*British and other nationals in EEC institutions**

	A Grade			*Others*		
	Total number of officials	*United Kingdom officials*	*(Per cent.)*	*Total staff numbers*	*United Kingdom staff members*	*(Per cent.)*
Commission	2,527	360	(14·25)	7,155	549	(7·67)
European Parliament (Secretariat)	373	60	(16·09)	2,288	195	(8·52)
European Investment Bank	239	41	(17·15)	353	36	(10·20)
Council Secretariat	178	25	(14·05)	1,535	104	(6·78)
Court of Auditors	70	7	(10·00)	187	19	(10·16)
Economic and Social Committee	45	8	(17·78)	370	31	(8·38)
European Foundation	9	3	(33·33)	27	1	(3·70)

* The European Court of Justice has not issued the relevant statistics.

Budgetary Discipline

80. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Council of Agriculture Ministers will be asked to approve the statement on budgetary disciplines before it is finally approved by European Economic Community Foreign Ministers.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No, Sir. The text on budgetary discipline was formally adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in Dublin on 4 December.

Mr. Deakins: Is the agreement by the Foreign Affairs Ministers legally binding on the Council of Agriculture Ministers? If it is not, why should it pay any attention to the agreement?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As the hon. Gentleman will recollect, there is only one Council of Ministers. It is sometimes attended by Finance Ministers, sometimes by Foreign Ministers and sometimes by Agriculture Ministers. The text represents a firm undertaking by the Council, which has committed itself to observe the provisions. It is an undertaking which is as valid and effective in relation to Agriculture Minister as to any others.

Mr. Winnick: How does the Foreign Secretary compare his words about better financial discipline, and the rest, with the thousands of tonnes of beef, butter and milk powder that are being held in stores within the United Kingdom? Is the Foreign Secretary aware that I have a list of thousands of tonnes of such food? Will he use his influence to ensure that such food is sold at reduced prices in Britain and used for people in distressed areas? There are 2,000 tonnes of milk powder being held in one intervention store in the west midlands.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman correctly identifies one of the features of the common agricultural policy which must be reformed. It is being reformed as a result of the measures agreed by the Agriculture Council on 31 March this year. In regard to milk and butter production, total Community milk production is down by

3·4 per cent. this year, and butter production is down by 9·5 per cent. The reduction of present stocks and the problem of the creation of additional stocks are central objectives of the reform of the CAP, upon which the Community is now embarked

Mr. Marlow: While my right hon. and learned Friend is rightly concerned to keep public expenditure strictly under control at home, can he explain to the House and the country why the Government have put their name to this ramshackle vessel, which will founder at the first squall?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Because they take a totally different view from the somewhat eccentric one to which my hon. Friend has for so long been committed.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Foreign Secretary aware of the misgivings that many milk producers have that other EC countries may not be abiding totally by the quota agreement? Will he give the House an assurance that, if that is the case, we shall not screw our farmers down and suffer disproportionately as a result?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am aware of the anxiety that is rightly felt by the farming community in Britain in that respect. In four other countries already the production is currently less than the total quota which has been allocated to them. One country, Italy, does not yet appear to have taken steps to implement the super levy, and the Commission has instituted infraction proceedings against Italy. We attach importance to the discipline being enforced effectively across the board.

Mr. Budgen: If there is such widespeard and strong determination to enforce budgetary control, why has the payment of the super levy been postponed by all the nation states on so many occasions?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I suspect that, because of the way in which the market arrangements are going, the requirement for payment of the super levy has not yet arisen. The postponement to, I think, 14 December is being applied uniformly.

Mr. Robin Cook: Has the Foreign Secretary observed that the Strasbourg Assembly proposed the insertion, on the revenue side of next year's budget, of an expected revenue of 120,000 ecu from payments of the super levy, and that the Commission has since deleted that entry on the ground that it does not expect to receive payments? Does not that speak volumes for the confidence of the Commission in its own system for controlling agricultural expenditure?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the system operates so as effectively to reduce the output on a substantial scale, that will, of course, have an effect on the likelihood of the super levy being paid on the scale on which it would otherwise be paid. I think that that must be the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

European Union

81. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about progress made towards achieving the objectives set out in the solemn declaration on European union made by the Heads of Government at the Stuttgart summit.

Mr. Rifkind: This work is being pursued in the two ad hoc committees set up at Fontainebleau last June. The Dublin European Council received interim reports from both committees and asked them to continue their work, and each submit a report in March for full discussion at the European Council in June next year.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that his answer indicates a disappointing lack of progress so far? What steps do the Government intend to take to ensure that progress is made rather more quickly and effectively in the future?

Mr. Rifkind: The solemn declaration to which my hon. Friend's question refers calls for a review to be made not later than 1988. Based on the progress achieved by that date, a decision would be taken as to whether there should be a treaty on European union. Given that we are expecting a full discussion by European Heads of Government in June 1985, I cannot accept the implied criticism of my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that, irrespective of any proposal that may emanate from the Heads of Government working parties, both the Heads of Government meeting and, therefore, the meetings of their working parties are extra-treaty? If the results of the working parties are placed before the Council of Ministers, as the Minister has just mentioned, will that not be a new genesis of legislation in the Community? Hitherto, proposals for legislation have come only from the Commission. Therefore, will not the whole of the working parties' proposals, irrespective of their mertis, be extra-treaty and ultra vires?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not think that there is any reason why the European Council cannot discuss or commission work on any issues that it thinks are relevant. If it wished to implement any proposals that were recommended to it, and if the implementation of the proposals required treaty amendment, the hon. Gentleman can be assured that that would be done.

Mr. Forth: Will my right hon. Friend agree with me that in an enlarged Community, moving towards majority rule under agreements of this sort, the emphasis of policy-making and agricultural expeniture will shift inexorably to the south, and that that will cause a major reorientation of direction of Community policies and of expenditure, to our own detriment?

Mr. Rifkind: With regard to any decisions that may be taken by a majority, the Community has already reached agreement with the applicant countries as to what a new qualified majority will require. It will require a sum that is significantly different, as a consequence of enlargement, to take into account the larger Community that we shall then have.

Fontainebleau Agreement

82. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the Fontainebleau agreement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: A text implementing the Fontainebleau agreement on budget discipline was formally adopted at the Dublin European Council. The United Kingdom's 1983 refunds have been released and the bulk of the money has been paid. The Council has also reaffirmed its commitment that the United Kingdom's abatement for 1984 should be made on the revenue side of the budget in 1985, as agreed at Fontainebleau.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Secretary of State aware of the great concern in the House and beyond at the statement by the Economic Secretary to the Treasury in the debate last night, when he appeared to link the 1984 refund with the proposed increase in the Community's own resources and, even more worrying, with advancing that increase into 1985? Particularly because that increase in own resources has not been agreed by Parliament, can the Secretary of State give us a clear assurance that the United Kingdom refund and the abatement to implement that refund do not depend in any way on the agreement to increase the Community's own resources?

Sir Geofrey Howe: All those matters have been considered together over many months, and the 1985 draft budget as sent to the European Parliament was accompanied by a Council declaration stating that funds would be provided to meet the Community's inescapable financial obligations and the United Kingdom's 1984 abatement. Nine member states agreed that additional financing in 1985 should be made available to own resources, and it is our hope that the other country—Germany—will soon agree.

Mr. Dykes: Now that we are gradually getting used to working constructively with foreigners in the Community, would not my right hon. and learned Friend repeat the assertion that the commitment to majority rule that we encapsulated in our submission to the Fontainebleau conference is one of the best ways in which we and the other member states can begin to take the Community forward in some of the vital areas in the creation of a unified Community?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend that if the Community is to make the progress that we want towards effective unity of the market as a better opportunity for job creation in this country and throughout Europe it is important that the existing provisions for majority voting already in the treaty, to which we belong, should be put into action.

Mr. Hill: Is my right hon. and learned Friend saddened, as I am, by the fact that when we talk of Europe, we talk only of the EEC? Are there not other institutions in Europe, such as the Council of Europe and the Western European Union? Was not the French initiative at the Fontainebleau conference to reactivate the WEU one of the most important decisions made this year by any Head of State?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend that there are many European institutions beyond the European Community, and I know of his association with the WEU Assembly. As a matter of fact, these questions are related to EEC matters. However, I also agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of WEU. I think that he will know of the declaration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and myself at the Rome ministerial meeting of WEU that we regard the revitalisation and effective operation of WEU as a very important matter.

Dr. Owen: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that when considering the treaties and the possibility of an umbrella treaty it would not be inappropriate to look at the Community in terms of a two-stream Europe, at least on political co-operation, and that the seven countries which are signatories to the WEU treaty would be a natural grouping within the European Community to discuss that all-important element in political unity—security?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman raises wide-ranging questions. I would not readily subscribe to the idea of a two-stream Community, but I would subscribe to the idea that it is important for European countries to undertake effective discussion and consideration of security matters. I agree that the WEU, which comprises seven of the member states, is an appropriate place for that to take place. However, I would not want to regard that as exclusive or extinctive of political co-operation in the wider Community.

Common Market

83. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps have been taken to secure the practical establishment of a common market within the European Community.

Mr. Rifkind: In September an important package of standards for industrial products was agreed. In addition, there has been progress on a British initiative for standards for the interconnection of computer and communications equipment, and in similar work on telecommunications. The directive on frontier facilities will enter into force on 1 January.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that the process of wealth creation in this country and throughout the EEC is far more likely to be assisted by the establishment of a free market in goods and services than by any form of expenditure under the EEC budget? Will my hon. Friend give an undertaking to give the highest priority at meetings with his EC colleagues to sweeping away the remaining obstacles to such a free market?

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom considers this to be the greatest priority at present. I am pleased to say that in one of the ad hoc institutions to which I referred earlier the United Kingdom put forward recommendations for the early implementation of an equal internal market. This has been unanimously endorsed by the committee as a whole.

Mr. James Lamond: Before the Minister gets carried away too far by the free internal market, will he tell us what steps are being taken to try to limit the damage that will be done to the British textile industry when Spain and Portugal join the Common Market?

Mr. Rifkind: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are treating the industrial interests of the United Kingdom and of the existing members of the Community as an important priority. This covers a wide range of issues—not only textiles, but motor vehicles and a whole series of other matters which are important to the British economy.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Do the points of order directly relate to Question Time?

Sir John Farr: Mine is a point of order relating to questions.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. I shall take it.

Sir John Farr: My point of order relates to the format of Question Time today. Seventy-seven Foreign and

Commonwealth questions were tabled, of which only 10 were reached, whereas six EEC questions were tabled, and in 20 minutes all six were reached. Mr. Speaker, I have drawn your attention to this anomaly on previous occasions, but it has been even more aggravated and exaggerated today. Once again may I ask you to pass on to the usual sources that the division of Foreign and Commonwealth and EEC Question Time is not equitable at the moment?

Mr. Winnick: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not farcical that, excluding EEC questions today and, in the main, brief supplementary questions, the fact is that we have dealt with only 10 questions? I do not believe that any further questions were linked with earlier questions. Is it not necessary to protect the House so that when there is the opportunity to ask questions on foreign affairs we have more than 40 minutes in which to do so? It is only by raising points of order that we can try to ensure that the time which should be ours is given and duly allocated. It is farcical that only 10 questions, or perhaps nine, were reached on foreign affairs, and that no more will be taken until the next round.

Mr. Norman Atkinson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not fictitious to ask what would happen to EC questions if foreign affairs questions took up all the time? Should not EEC questions take their chance along with all other foreign affairs questions that are addressed to the Foreign Office? If it is looked upon in that way and if you yourself, were to support the protests that have been made about only 35 minutes being spent on foreign affairs questions, I am told that the Procedure Committee would pay much more attention.

Mr. Hill: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that it should be called, not EEC Question Time, but the European Institutions Question Time. There are frequently questions on other European institutions which override EEC matters.

Mr. Speaker: I share the worry about the shortness of time available for foreign affairs questions. It is a matter not for me, but for the usual channels, whether the Order Paper is broken up as it is today with, effectively, 35 minutes allotted for foreign affairs questions and 20 minutes for EC questions. That should be taken up through the usual channels.

I should tell the hon. Members who said that we had got through only 10 questions today that although Ministers do not always link questions, I seek to give preference to hon. Members who have subsequent questions on the Order Paper. I see from the indications that I have put on my Order Paper today that no fewer than 10 hon. Members who had tabled subsequent questions were called during the questions that were answered.

Entry Certificates

3.34 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for raising a point of order that I have raised over the last three days—the proposal of the Foreign Office to introduce a charge for entry certificates I felt that it might be helpful to raise this point of order since Foreign Office Ministers are in the Chamber. As I have explained over the last three days, the advice I have received has been contradictory and has varied over the last three days.

I am now advised that the Foreign Office proposes to secure a Privy Council order on Tuesday to implement charges for entry certificates, which is a matter of considerable anxiety to Commonwealth citizens and their families. I understand that the order is not subject to any parliamentary proceedings, but will be available for scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments which, conveniently, meets next on Tuesday.

The proposal is widely thought to be unlawful, because a right conferred by statute would be diminished if a charge were introduced for entry clearance certificates. It is also widely held that an appeal in the courts against payment of a charge would be successful. Therefore, I am desperately trying to avoid the Foreign Office and Parliament being embarrassed.

Could you, Mr. Speaker, make representations to ensure that whatever procedure the Foreign Office pursues in this matter will be subject to parliamentary proceedings and will enable my colleagues who are very worried about the matter to have an opportunity to debate the issue before implementation of the proposal, which I understand is scheduled for 1 January?

I should also be grateful if we could be given advice by the Leader of the House or the Foreign Secretary about what procedures will be pursued and an assurance that whatever procedure is used will give us all an opportunity to debate the matter before a charge is introduced.

Mr. Speaker: I undertook to look into the matter and I am still doing so. In relation to what the hon. Gentleman has just said, I presume that the statutory instrument will be scrutinised by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. The Leader of the House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. Patently, it is not a matter for me, but I fully accept that it is an important subject on which hon. Members hold strong views.

Rate Support Grant (Wales)

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the Welsh rate support grant settlement for 1985-86.

I am today announcing to the Welsh consultative council on local government finance the details of the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement. Copies of the text of my statement to the consultative council, together with a number of key statistical tables, have been placed in the Library of the House. The rate support grant report has been laid before the House today and will be debated in the usual way. A copy of the report has also been placed in the Library. I will be announcing my decisions on the related capital expenditure issues in the near future.

The main features of the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement confirm the intentions that I announced in July. The total of relevant expenditure provision accepted for grants is £1,514·1 million. This comprises £1,309 million for current expenditure and £205·1 million for non-current items. Current expenditure provision—after allowing for the abolition of national insurance surcharge from next April and the greater role of the Manpower Services Commission in funding certain areas of further education — is £46 million or 3·6 per cent. more than the expenditure underlying local authority budgets in 1984-85, while the total of relevant expenditure is about 5 per cent. more than the comparable budgeted total for the present year.

Aggregate Exchequer grant will be £1,014·2 million comprising £149 million for specific grants, £26·5 million for transport supplementary grant, £2 million for national parks supplementary grant and £836·7 million for the rate support grants. Domestic rate relief is unchanged at 18·5p in the pound which costs £25·5 million, leaving £811·2 million as block grant. After deducting £600,000 for payments to specified bodies, the amount available for distribution to local authorities is £810·6 million.

The aggregate Exchequer grant of £1,014·2 million is £18·2 million or 1·8 per cent. more than the aggregate Exchequer grant provision in the main rate support grant settlement for the current year. Far more important for rating purposes, however, it is almost £50 million or 5 per cent. higher than the amount that authorities have included in their budgets for the present year, after allowing for the expenditure changes to which I have already referred. It represents 67 per cent. of relevant expenditure.

I believe that the settlement is very fair, and the consultative council has acknowledged that it represents an improvement on last year. That this is so owes much to the restraint which has been exercised by a majority of Welsh local authorities. Unfortunately, however, a small minority of authorities persist in spending in excess of their targets. I confirm, therefore, that I am setting targets for 1985-86 and grant penalties for exceeding those targets. I have retained the same basic system for determining next year's expenditure targets as that used in the present year but increased the weighting given to the grant related expenditure component.

The targets may require local authorities to make difficult choices in determining their spending priorities, but I believe that the targets are achievable by all authorities. Every authority's target gives a cash increase

[Mr. Nicholas Edwards]

in its current expenditure. The minimum increase is 2 per cent. and the maximum 4 per cent., after making allowance for the national insurance surcharge and further education changes. In addition, for authorities spending at or below target in 1984-85 I have added 0·5 per cent. to their current expenditure total. Thus the maximum current expenditure increase for such authorities is 4·5 per cent. in line with the projected rate of inflation for the economy as a whole. In aggregate, the targets that I am announcing today are £7·6 million higher than the provisional sum notified to authorities in the summer. The increase largely reflects the use of fixed interest rates and a slightly lower assumption for council house rents.

The grant withholding penalty for local authorities spending in excess of targets has been strengthened. The amount of grant withheld for excess expenditure up to 1 per cent. above target is 100 per cent. of that excess, but above that level the rate of holdback increases to a maximum rate of 150 per cent. for authorities spending 2 per cent. or more above target. This compares with a maximum of 90 per cent. in the current year, reached at 5 per cent. spending above target. I am retaining the arrangements under which any authority spending at or below target is exempted from both grant holdback and the close-ending adjustment. The incentive for local authorities with low rateable resources to achieve their targets has, in the past, been considerably reduced because I placed a limit on grant holdback for such authorities. This year, therefore, I am reducing that limitation by 50 per cent.

Block grant will be distributed in accordance with the formulae agreed by the Welsh local authority associations. I have decided to retain the existing block grant mechanisms which determine the distribution of block grant and the same safety net for limiting grant losses associated with changes in GRE—a maximum 4p loss at county level and 1p at district level.

One innovation that I am introducing this year is a forward indication of targets for 1986-87 and 1987-88. This will assist local authorities in their planning. I must emphasise, however, that these are indeed indications and that circumstances in which the Government have to review them cannot be ruled out. Whether those indicative targets will need to be transformed into formal guidance figures depends to a very large extent on authorities' performance next year. I have told the consultative council that if budget returns show that authorities, individually and collectively, are on course to spend in line with the Government's plans for 1985-86 I am prepared to examine with the associations whether an alternative means of containing expenditure and encouraging moderate rate increases is possible for future years.

As I said earlier, the settlement provides for an increase in both grant and relevant expenditure of about 5 per cent. more than authorities have included in their budgets for the present year, after allowing for certain expenditure changes. That is why, in a period of expenditure restraint, I regard the settlement as very fair. It is now up to the local authorities in Wales to respond sensibly and with restraint, and I believe they will. Given this and continued vigilance against spending excesses and manpower increases, it should be within their power to maintain satisfactory levels of service in key areas while keeping rate increases on average to levels comparable with inflation.

I commend my proposals for the 1985-86 Welsh rate support grant settlement to the House.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The right hon. Gentleman still operates a harsh system. Does he understand that the minuscule easing of the target figures and the prospect of forward indications of targets are welcome, although they are but small crumbs from his table? Has not block grant in real terms been cut—according to the calculation of the Association of District Councils by about £30 million?

Whatever future tinkering the right hon. Gentleman may propose, is not the penalty regime very much more severe than 1984-85? Beyond a 2 per cent. overspend, the rate of grant lost levels out at one and a half times the amount of excess spending. Is that not extremely harsh? in fact, will not the amount of grant to be taken away from Wales altogether and returned to the Treasury inevitably exceed the total overspending by Welsh local authorities, even though the overall excess over target is very small? Could not this be seen as a Welsh ratepayers' contribution to the Treasury?

On rate increases, is it not realistic to suggest that some authorities will not succeed in getting within their targets and that the average rate figures will go up more like 8 or 9 per cent. because of the severity of the penalty regime and the overall cut in aggregate Exchequer grant?

Is not the right hon. Gentleman being very coy indeed about expressing clearly a view on the effect of this statement on the standard and depth of local government services? Is he not aware that he is placing local authorities under intolerable pressures? Does he know that a typical Welsh district might have to make real savings of up to £250,000 to achieve a district rate increase in line with inflation? What will the right hon. Gentleman do to reduce the volatility in the Welsh rate support system as it affects the Welsh districts? I am informed that there will be differences in targets set of up to 30 per cent.—arguably from a 19 per cent. increase to a 10 per cent. decrease. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that there are also differences in grant-related expenditure of up to 19 per cent.

If authorities in aggregate manage to get down to the overall targets, will that not be a serious cost to the services provided to our beleagured communities? I have in mind the quality of maintenance on roads and buildings, the quality of administration, the closure of libraries, the increase in the price of school meals, the decline in the number of policemen and teachers and the decline in Welsh housing and industrial development.

Penalties have again been increased, the ratepayers' contribution has again increased while central Government's contribution has decreased, and aggregate Exchequer grant has again been cut. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that he has put Welsh local authorities at very great disadvantage with his tightening of the financial screws? Under the right hon. Gentleman we have lost our democratic local government freedoms. We have lost 100,000 manufacturing jobs. One Welshman in five is out of work. The settlement will become known as a guarantee of social distress.

Mr. Edwards: Last year we heard from the hon. Gentleman the usual forecast of rate increases. He said that they would be well over 10 per cent. In fact, the average increase was about 8 per cent. Once again, this year, the

hon. Gentleman has pitched the average a good deal higher than the inflation rate that I forecast. Once again, we shall wait and see the result.

The hon. Gentleman says that this is a harsh system. However, there are increases in relevant expenditure and in grant of 5 per cent. more than budgeted expenditure in the current year, which is more than the inflation rate. No one can say that that represents a harsh regime.

The hon. Gentleman referred to block grant cuts. It is true that since 1981-82 aggregate grant has grown by only 19 per cent. while there has been inflation of 22 per cent. Over that period, in cost terms, there was a fall of 3 per cent. which had to be borne by the local authorities. Over such a period, however, no one could describe that as a savage round of cuts.

The hon. Gentleman says that penalties are severe if targets are not met. However, all the evidence that I have suggests that the majority of authorities—certainly the majority of the counties—will meet their targets or come very close to meeting them. I have been able to tell Mid Glamorgan, for example, that, its final target being £1 million higher than the figure suggested in the summer, it is now within an almost minuscule percentage point of its target. Mid Glamorgan, too, should be able to meet its target.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the volatility of targets for districts. That volatility arises almost completely because of the rate fund contribution to housing revenue account. Districts decide either not to put up rents by as much as other districts, or to increase maintenance by much more than the average amount.

We all agree that targets are not an ideal system. I have made it clear to the local authorities and to the House that if we continue the progress made so far towards meeting the Government's objectives, I hope that we may move away altogether from the target system. We are on the road to achieving that result.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman painted the usual picture of the severity of effects on services. He cited some examples. I have before me figures for the expenditure of Welsh local authorities on education over the past seven or eight years. In terms adjusted for price and wage increases, we are spending more than, or almost exactly the same amount as, we spent seven or eight years ago. At the same time, there has been a fall of nearly 12 per cent. in the number of pupils. There has been no savage cut in that area, and it is a gross exaggeration to pretend that there has been.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall do my utmost to call all those hon. Members who wish to put a question. I ask hon. Members to make their questions succinct and brief. This matter will be the subject of an order later, and it will be debatable. This will be not a day for long speeches.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is general admiration for the way in which he manages to walk a very slack tightrope? The tightrope is slack because it lacks the necessary tension which would arise if local authorities were compelled to raise the money that they spend.

In that position, however, my right hon. Friend is vulnerable to cross-breezes. Is he aware that while there is still a determination that all waste should be cut out, there is also increasing anxiety lest essential services should start to suffer from a further increase in economies?

Mr. Edwards: I do not think that, when we are offering local authorities the ability to increase expenditure by slightly more than the rate of inflation without imposing severe rate burdens on them, there is any need for the type of suffering that my hon. Friend suggests might occur.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Does not the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that one of the heaviest burdens that most local authorities in Wales have to bear, some more severely than others, is that imposed by heavy, mass and persistent unemployment? Should there not be, under this settlement, some form of arrangement by which the scale of unemployment is taken into account? Might not the settlement take into account, for example, expenditure that must be made to maintain skillcentres which the Government and others are not willing to assist us to maintain? Should not the right hon. Gentleman have have come to the House to say, among other things that in the rate support grant he will try to do something to rescue us from the cuts that he is imposing in other spheres, such as massive cuts in regional aid for Wales?

Mr. Edwards: Some of the matters to which the right hon. Gentleman refers are taken into account in the GRE assessment. I note that the target of the right hon. Gentleman's Blaenau Gwent authority is well above the estimated inflation rate. In terms of the targets per head which have been set for English and Welsh counties, all of the eight Welsh counties are in the top 11 for England and Wales. That suggests that they are getting treatment which compares favourably with comparable authorities which face comparable difficulties elsewhere.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the Secretary of State intend to produce a simple guide to his statement and the documents that accompany it so that the people of Wales can understand the Government's meanness? Does he agree that a consequence of his statement, even in a well-managed and law-abiding county such as Powys, will be a decline in education provision, which has already led to the closure of a remedial education unit in Newtown, the closure of a special unit for teaching travellers' children in Welshpool and the closure of one-third of the school meals service in Powys? That is leading day by day to a decline in education standards about which head teachers are not being consulted properly because it is happening so suddenly?

Mr. Edwards: The simple way in which to put it, so that people can understand it, is to say that the grant provision is 5 per cent. higher than the amount which authorities have included in their budgets for the present year, which is above the anticipated rate of inflation, that Powys has a budget-to-target increase of 4·68 per cent., which is above the rate of inflation, that since 1981-82, Powy's spending has grown more than the general rate of inflation, and that I understand that that authority has resolved to meet its target. How it does that is for it to decide.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): Is my right hon. Friend aware that three elements of his statement will be especially welcomed? The first is that we can see an end to targets, which none of us like. The second is the 5 per

[Mr. Keith Best]

cent. bonus to local authorities — it can fairly be described as such. The third is the courageous attitude that he has now taken towards forward-planning, thus giving local authorities an opportunity of greater stability when planning. That is especially important in regard to stability of interest rates in supplementary reports. He is also giving indicative targets for the next three years—something that no previous Government have had the courage to do.

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that it is helpful to let local authorities plan. If they continue to co-operate as they have in the past, we could abolish targets. That would benefit everyone. Since 1979-80, Welsh local authorities' current expenditure has increased by 2 per cent. more than the increase in costs. Our aim is that, by 1987-88, current expenditure should be no higher in cost terms than in 1979-80. I do not believe that anyone can say that that is a severe regime. Against that background, it is absurd and a distortion of the truth to talk of slashing cuts in services.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I appreciate your request, Mr. Speaker, for hon. Members to be brief, but as we have received a document of 85 pages and a statement of 15 pages about rate support grants in Wales, I have many questions to ask. The Secretary of State continually comes to the House with statements and prophesies further doom and gloom for Wales. Last week there was a £60 million cut from our regional aid, and today his statement is about a further reduction in grant in real terms to local authorities. Will he state how many local authorities will receive less grant aid in real terms next year than they received this year?

Page 5, paragraph 8, of the statement gives a figure of £46 million, which is 3·6 per cent. higher than that included in local authorities' budgets for 1984-85. The Secretary of State claims that that is within the 4·5 per cent. increase in costs projected for the economy as a whole. Will adjustments be made to allow for a further inflationary increase? Will he state the total reduction in grant aid to local authorities since he was appointed to office in 1979? Is the Government's message the same as before——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is to be a debate on this subject. The hon. Member is making now the speech that he might well make on that occasion, if he were to catch my eye. In fairness to the House, there is another statement to follow this statement and a long day and night Committee sitting. He should confine himself to one question.

Mr. Powell: I promise that I shall not delay the House tonight because I shall not wish to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, but this issue is so important to the ratepayers of Ogwr that I wish to ask the last part of my question. Does the Secretary of State expect ratepayers yet again to pay more for fewer services? How many jobs will be lost as a result of his statement? What services will suffer? Will they include the care for the elderly, our schools, the fire brigade and social services?

Mr. Edwards: I have given the hon. Gentleman the overall figures and I circulated to every Welsh Member the detailed schedule, which sets out the position for each local authority in Wales. It would be unreasonable to detain the House by giving the detailed answers that the hon. Gentleman requires. Ogwr has a target increase which is above the anticipated rate of inflation. For the reasons I have given, I see no reason to anticipate the slashing cuts in services, about which the hon. Gentleman loves to talk.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this extremely fair settlement will not harm the educational prospects of pupils in Clwyd? Does he agree that the maintenance of a high standard of education depends on the county council at last getting its priorities right and concentrating on its statutory obligations?

Mr. Edwards: I see no reason why there should be a great sacrifice by the education service in Clwyd. It is remarkable that the resources available and being spent on education in Clwyd, adjusted for cost and price increases, are substantially more than they where when we first had a separate Welsh rate support grant settlement. Indeed, it is about £10 million a year more than when the Labour Government made its slashing cuts in expenditure in 1977-78. There are more than 11 per cent. fewer pupils in the schools, and the pupil-teacher ratio in Clwyd is at its best ever.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Secretary of State confirm that there has been no broad change in the definition of grant-related expenditure, and that it is broadly an assessment of the cost to a local authority of providing a standard of service comparable to other local authorities? If that is the case, why has Gwynedd this year once again a GRE of £97·2 million, but a target of only £94·4 million, which is £2·5 million less than the Government recognise as necessary to maintain the services?

Mr. Edwards: As the hon. Gentleman has had explained to him often before, targets are related not only to GRE but to previous expenditure patterns and to the pattern of expenditure that the local authority actually thought was right for the people in its area. He can hardly complain now and demand that the local authority should achieve the exact theoretical pattern of expenditure that creates GRE.

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment promised to send a "child's guide" to the rate support grant system to a number of hon. Members. Will he please send one to me? I am sure that I am not alone in being confused this afternoon. Will the Secretary of State say what effect his announcement will have on the city of Cardiff and the county of south Glamorgan?

Mr. Edwards: I sympathise with my hon. Friend about the complexity of these issues. South Glamorgan has a target increase above its budget of 5·19 per cent., which is well above the rate of inflation. I do not anticipate that it will have any difficulty in meeting its target. Since 1981-82 its current expenditure has grown a good deal more than the general increase in inflation and it has been a relatively low spender. I would think therefore, that it would have no difficulty in maintaining services and a low rate increase in the current year.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State will recall that we used to have a high domestic rate relief, partly because of our high water rates. He

halved that domestic rate relief. As we are now likely to have higher water rates, will he increase the domestic rate relief?

Mr. Edwards: No, I shall not. I halved the domestic rate relief because I believed that it was currently a priority to give the maximum assistance to industry and to job creation. The change has been of great benefit to industry, and will help in our common objective of reducing unemployment. I am surprised, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman should suggest that we should go back on that move.

Mr. Tom Hooson (Brecon and Radnor): My right hon. Friend has done well in limiting himself to grant withholding as a method of discipline with the various local authorities. I note that among the counties the safety net needs to be applied only to Powys. Has not the time come to reopen the GRE need indicator, not only in relation to rural sparsity but at the opposite end of the scale, that is, where there is a high density of population?

Mr. Edwards: We have had this debate over a long period. We keep looking at the GREs of the local authority association. I would have thought that my hon. Friend would be glad that the limiter was used in that case and that we took account of the special problems of his county.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): The right hon. Gentleman said twice when he introduced his statement that he believed that it was a fair statement. Does he recall saying the same thing last year? Why is west Glamorgan county having to reconsider having nurses in comprehensive schools, cutting the meals service and doing away with music and swimming tuition? What does his statement offer west Glamorgan? How will it affect the decisions that the county may have to make?

Mr. Edwards: I pay tribute to west Glamorgan, which has made a considerable effort to get within target. It started as a very high spender, relative to the GREs, which my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Hooson) urged should be the basis on which we should proceed. We have allowed west Glamorgan a considerable period to adjust its expenditure from those high levels. It could meet its target, probably for the first time, on the basis of plans which it is now considering. I hope that it will do so, and that all Welsh counties will be able to meet their targets.

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in an ideal world it would be marvellous to have an unlimited amount of money to spend? But in reality where is the money to come from? We could print or borrow more money, which would cause higher inflation, higher interest rates and perhaps higher unemployment.

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that it must be a priority to keep down interest rates and domestic and industrial rates. The rate burden on industry has a considerable effect on jobs. I do not apologise for introducing a settlement that will help to keep down the general level of rates, as it has in recent years, to at or below the inflation rate.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): So that Mid-Glamorgan authority nearly reaches its target, will the Secretary of State estimate how many fewer teachers, home-help hours and school books there will be in the county?

Mr. Edwards: Adjusted for price and wage increases, personal and social service expenditure by Welsh local authorities has increased under this Government, and expenditure on education has been maintained, although Wales has nearly 12 per cent. fewer pupils. The reduction in teachers in no way matches the reduction in pupils. It is absurd for the hon. Gentleman to argue that there should not be some adjustment at a time of falling school rolls.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his statement will be welcomed in Cardiff, although some of my constituents might prefer the loonier councils in Wales to be swept away by an extension of the reform of local government that we shall debate later today? Does he accept that his statement will concentrate the minds of our local councillors and will force them to return to what they should do rather than to waste taxpayers' and ratepayers' money on items such as CND weeks and reality-free zones?

Mr. Edwards: Local authorities should consider carefully their expenditure priorities at a time when it is clearly important that they should hold down the rate burden.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The Secretary of State talks about industrial rates and the need to keep them down to attract industrialists to the valleys and communities of south Wales. Does he accept that a major criterion used by industrialists in coming to Wales is that there is a reasonable social infrastructure for them to move into, and that the continual cut in resources for Wales is a disincentive to industry to invest there?

Mr. Edwards: It is not a continual cut in resources for Wales. There is an increase above the expected rate of inflation in relevant expenditure and in aggregate grant. The target for the Rhondda is well above the expected rate of inflation. As the hon. Gentleman was informed in the Welsh Grand Committee only today, we are launching a major new road scheme for the improvement of his constituency.

Mr. Peter Hubbard-Miles (Bridgend): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Mid-Glamorgan county council decided recently to take £3 million from capital reserves rather than to make the necessary economies in this year's budget, which will result in a shortfall next year of £6 million? That decision was taken against the advice of the treasurer and the leader of the Labour group, who put his proposals to the Labour group but who was defeated by 31 votes to 19, although he remains the leader.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the dangers inherent in putting off difficult decisions. Mid-Glamorgan's spending has increased by 4·1 per cent. more than inflation since 1981-82, and there is a danger that if it does not make the necessary changes it will store up difficulties for itself.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): If the Secretary of State believes, as he said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), that the infrastructure is adequate, does he expect to attract more Japanese companies to Cynon Valley? If he does, will he assure us that those companies will not require workers to retire at the age of 35?

Mr. Edwards: I am not sure that the hon. Lady's latter point arises from this statement. I welcome Japanese

[Mr. Edwards]

investment, but the policy statement issued by that company was not one of the finest examples of Japanese management techniques.

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): In the light of what the Secretary of State called his generous statement, may we look forward to headmasters in his constituency and mine — they are adjacent — giving up the idea of demanding £5 from hard-pressed parents to pay for inadequate school resources?

Mr. Edwards: It is about time that Dyfed authority got down to the job of considering the details of its budgeting and what has been happening with its financial arrangements, because it is hard to see why it is confronted with such difficulties. Its target increase is above the inflation rate, yet it is on course to exceed that target by £1 million. Instead of encouraging schoolmasters to campaign, the authority should have a thorough and proper re-examination of its finances.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the message that will go to Wales following the statement is that there will be a further reduction in resources to Welsh local authorities, and that the penalties for the authorities which cannot comply with the Government's guidelines will be even harsher? Does he further understand that, as the total money available to local authorities decreases, an increasing percentage of cuts will be made in the provision of statutory services? That means that less money will be available for discretionary measures, which either improve the quality of life or are employment-related schemes. Does the Secretary of State agree that the statement will lead to a diminution in the quality of life, especially in the valleys of south Wales, and to an increase in unemployment?

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that strange messages will go out from hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who are more anxious to make political points than they are concerned with reality. The 80 per cent. block grant has hardly altered since we first made a separate Welsh rate support grant settlement, and the suggestion that hunks of discretion will be removed from Welsh local government is not true.

Mr. John Watson (Skipton and Ripon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I do not represent a Welsh constituency, but that I represent the rest of Britain, which must foot the bill?

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order. An hon. Member who represents an English constituency has the right to participate in Welsh debates. We shall all be interested to learn how the hon. Gentleman can relate Skipton and Ripon to this statement.

Mr. Watson: Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what proportion of local authority spending in Wales will be covered by the rate support grant that he announced this afternoon, and how that proportion will relate to most constituencies in the rest of the United Kingdom, including Skipton and Ripon?

Mr. Edwards: The rate support grant proportion of 67 per cent. is based on completely different rateable values in Wales than in England. The real difference, which accounts for the settlement today being somewhat easier than the settlement in England, is that the Welsh local authorities have made a considerable effort to achieve the expenditure targets set by the Government. They have come close to doing so, while the minority of high-spending authorities in England have failed to do so, have enormously overspent on the Government's targets, and are still paying the price for that overspending.

Agriculture Council

4.19 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels on 10 and 11 December, where, with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I represented the United Kingdom. Much of the meeting was taken up with further discussion of the new structures package. No agreement was possible on the basis of a compromise from the presidency. I emphasised the need for consistency between the costs of the structures measures and a decision, which has still to be taken, on the finance available for guidance expenditure over the next few years.

On the milk supplementary levy, the Commissioner said the that Commission was determined to ensure that the system was applied according to the rules in all member states, and that they would withhold funds for financing the dairy sector where the rules were not being observed. With most other Ministers, I emphasised the importance of proper and uniform application of the rules in all member states. Nine member states, with Denmark abstaining, adopted a statement noting that there are still technical and administrative difficulties concerning the application of the system in certain member states, and inviting the Commission to allow postponement of the first payment until the end of the marketing year. The Commission is expected to consider this matter at its meeting today.

During the discussion, I emphasised again the urgent need for the Commission to come forward with proposals to allow more flexibility between the dairy and direct sales quotas.

I raised again the issue of the price of natural gas for Dutch horticulturists, on which the Commission has instituted legal proceedings under the treaty. I urged the Commission, pending the outcome, to require suspension of the aid. The Commissioner said that the Dutch had already been asked to suspend the aid complained of. The question of recovery would be considered when the case was decided.

I also pressed the Commission on the French beef aid. The Commissioner confirmed that the French Government had notified this aid in accordance with the treaty, following the refusal of the Council at its last meeting to endorse the payments. The Commissioner confirmed that meanwhile no payments should be made.

In discussion on changes in detailed provisions on sparking wine, I refused to withdraw my opposition until I had received assurances that illegal procedures applied to United Kingdom whisky imports into Italy would be discontinued. I am happy to report that, after consulting Rome, the Italian Minister gave fully satisfactory assurances both that import procedures applied in future would allow imports at the lower rate of duty and that the excess duty charged would be refunded as quickly as possible.

In the veterinary sector, the Council reached agreement in principle on a proposal on charging for red meat and poultrymeat inspection. We have explained the need for the Community to reach early agreement on the harmonisation of inspection standards under the poultry meat hygiene directive. This made it possible to adopt the other outstanding issues in the veterinary package otherwise agreed at the June Council. These include satisfactory trading arrangements to protect the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland and Denmark against foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for making that statement, but he will not be surprised to hear that it has raised more questions than it has answered. For example, concerning the last paragraph of his statement, will he confirm that the previous agreement makes it possible for an import charge to be made to cover the costs of inspection of New Zealand lamb? If so, what is likely to be the extent of that charge? The poultry industry in Britain will be fairly unhappy at a decision that again harmonises charges in advance of the harmonisation of standards, which means that our more rigorous standards will feed through into higher costs in the shops.

There are a few shorter points to be made. For example, France seems to be still adamant about beef aids. I hope that the Minister will be equally tough if any question is raised about continuing our variable beef premium.

The wine lake was discussed at the Council of Ministers. What does the agreement amount to? Does it mean a genuine agreement to effect a genuine cut in wine production or is it, as one fears, a potential cosmetic fiddle which will put money into the pockets of people who remain in the industry?

What will be the effect of the Finance Ministers' demand to be consulted before any structures agreement arrived at by the Agriculture Ministers is agreed? Will that happen and has it been agreed that it will happen? Will the Minister confirm that, as the structures agreement affects only 4 per cent. of the agricultural budget, it will be a minuscule control on the profligate agriculture budget of the EEC?

Did the Minister—I suppose from his statement that he did not—and his fellow Agriculture Ministers discuss the increasingly important question of mounting cereal surpluses, which will be greatly augmented by this year's monster harvest? Did they consider the likely effect of the United States 1985 Farm Bill, which is likely to add some £900 million to the cost of EEC cereal export subsidies? If Ministers have not yet discussed that, I recommend that they do so, so that they can avoid the sort of haste, panic and muddle that has characterised the dairy quotas scheme.

The main part of the statement relates to the decision to ask the Commission to postpone the super-levy until March. The Minister rightly said that the Commission is meeting today. Has he heard what results have been arrived at? Is it likely that the Commission will agree to a request for postponement, and if not, what will happen? What will happen to the Northern Ireland dairy industry as a result of the withholding of the first £60 million by the Commission, for example? The Minister will know that the dairy industry in the United Kingdom is in complete confusion. Does he accept that, at the very least, this further decision will prolong its anxiety?

This decision — coupled with the failure of two countries even to try to implement the scheme, and the fact that on the latest figures, five countries are over their quotas of production—will lead many people to doubt whether the milk quota scheme will ever be properly implemented. On top of that, there is a threat by the

[Mr. Brynmor John]

Commission that it will direct imports of fresh milk into this country. Is it any wonder that the dairy industry is confused and has lost faith in the Government, who launched into the scheme without anticipating any of the problems, however simple? Are we not in danger of being the only ones in the Common Market who are in step?

Can the Minister confirm that our inability even to fulfil our quota will not penalise us in the future, and will he use the present gap to try to obtain a more sensible scheme? The Select Committee has already criticised the over-hasty British scheme. Our dairy farmers, who have already made the sacrifice, will properly demand a fair deal and fair implementation throughout the Community. Will the right hon. Gentleman stake his reputation on getting that?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman has asked a great many questions, which I shall try to answer. His first question was on the veterinary measures that I announced. The package provides for a charge on imports of meat from third countries to cover the costs of the limited inspection that is carried out. There has been provision for such a charge since 1972, although it has not been levied. The charge will not be implemented immediately. Charges have to be fixed by January 1986, so there will be further discussions on the implementing arrangements next year. New Zealand has known about this all along. It has not made representations to my Department. Domestic slaughterhouses are already subject to meat inspection charges.

The hon. Gentleman asked about beef, and in particular about the beef variable premium scheme. As he knows, this is something for which we fought, and, with great difficulty, we succeeded in keeping it within the package agreed at the last price review. There is no doubt that it will be one of the closely argued issues at the next price review. I see no reason to change the present arrangements, but the hon. Gentleman and the House will understand that the scheme has no friends in any other country in the Community. We did not enter into a detailed discussion of the wine situation following the agreements that were recently reached in Dublin.

The hon. Gentleman then asked me a question about the financial implications of the structures proposals. As I understand it, the arrangement is that the matter will be discussed at ECOFIN — the Council of Ministers (Economic and Finance)—when it meets to consider what the financial ceilings should be in relation to the structures directives.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the cereal surpluses are a crucial factor in the CAP. However, that subject was not on the agenda this time. Nevertheless, the cereal position was the subject of a good deal of discussion between Ministers in the margins of the Council. The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the United States Farm Bill, and I am hoping to meet Secretary Block within the hour to discuss that. He will also discuss that point with the Commission in Brussels before the end of the week.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the Commission's decisions on milk. It is considering the requests for a general delay at its meeting today. First reports are that it has decided to make no changes to the regulations, but there has not yet been any formal response to the Council's request. Thus, I cannot anticipate what the situation will be until we receive a formal response from the Commission to the request from the Council.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. Friend said that he had drawn the Commission's attention to the need for flexibility as between direct sales and dairy sales quotas. Is he making any progress on that, and when are we likely to hear that such flexibility has been achieved?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend will have heard me say before that this issue involves the clearest case of unsatisfactory rules within the present milk levy arrangements. I think that I have raised this matter at every meeting of the Agriculture Council since June, but regrettably so far to no effect. One difficulty in recent weeks is that we have had a lame duck Commission, as the Commissioner and many members will not continue in office after the end of the year. However, I assure my hon. Friend that I shall continue vigorously to press that important point.

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): Can the Minister confirm that there is only the remotest and faintest possibility this year of any levy being raised on the dairy farmers of England, Scotland and Wales? Can he also confirm that if it is to be raised, it will probably be raised by so little that there will be no logic in discouraging any dairy farmer in Britain from producing milk between now and next April? Were liquid milk imports discussed? If so, what is the present position?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the most recent figures, which show that when the period between April and October 1984 is compared with the same period for 1983, it is clear that the United Kingdom's milk production fell by 8·7 per cent. As he will know, that fall was largely assisted by the drought. I think that farmers have had sufficient information from various sources to show that it would be possible to produce more milk in the remainder of the year than in the first part of it and still not have a levy commitment at the end of it.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about imports of liquid milk, but that subject was not discussed in the Council of Ministers. However, he may have read in the press that our present arrangements have recently been questioned by the Commission. We are considering the situation and will decide, in due course, what response to make.

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): Yes, but will the Minister put down a real marker next time he discusses milk imports in the Community? If they were imposed in addition to the problem of quotas, it would mean a very serious blow for British dairy farmers. Will he make it quite clear that we are not prepared to allow such milk to be imported until the health problem, including that of foot and mouth disease, has been cleared up, together with the whole problem of nationally subsidised production and the freedom of our producers to export their products to the Community? At present, that is not the case with sheep.

Mr. Jopling: I endorse much of what my hon. Friend has said and am grateful to him for saying it. He is right to home in on the public health problems, which are central to milk importation.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Is the Minister telling us that the central issue at present—the cereals

surplus—was discussed only on the margins, when we are witnessing the biggest emergency and famine that the world has faced for many years? What is the present estimate of the cereal surplus and how much will it cost? Will he repudiate the statement of the Tory chairman of the Tory group of Members of the European Parliament that they should sell that surplus, rather than giving it, in order to help solve the problems of Ethiopia?

Mr. Jopling: I had better not get into the business of repudiating, or not, any Member of the European Parliament. I have enough on my plate dealing with the comments of hon. Members. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is not aware of a question that I answered earlier about the last Council, where we discussed in depth the problems of world famine and the cereal situation. But on this occasion we had a particularly heavy agenda. Of course, the whole subject of cereals will come up in the course of the discussions on the price fixing for 1985, which we shall no doubt start early in the new year.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Has the Agriculture Council considered the likely effect of enlargement on the Community and on agricultural policies, in that the shift in balance and political influence in the Community will put much greater pressure on the northern countries and their products because it will put greater emphasis on Mediterranean so-called products and prices? Is my right hon. Friend concerned about that? Is the Council doing anything about it?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend will remember that responsibility for dealing with the problems of enlargement lies mainly with the Foreign Office. But of course the Council of Agriculture Ministers has given a good deal of thought to the problems of Mediterranean products within the Community. As one who, like my hon. Friend, attends the Fisheries Council, I should add that fisheries represents another important area where Spanish fishing, in particular, could have great effects on existing members of the Community.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Which states have difficulties in applying their rules over the milk supplementary levy? Is it true that some of those states now believe that the milk quota system is impractical, given the conditions that they face? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that a United Kingdom quota on milk is just a United Kingdom quota, and that no supplementary levy will be paid by the United Kingdom unless other states follow the rules and until the United Kingdom quota is exceeded?

Mr. Jopling: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will have seen statements that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have made in the past about the payment of levies. As a farmer, he will be aware that, because we have opted for formula B, these matters are based on the various milk marketing boards within the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is a fact that for the first six months of the milk year, a levy is due from Northern Ireland. However, the hon. Gentleman may like to know that milk production is down in most member states, including Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom, and that from April to September milk deliveries in the Community were down on the same period last year by 1·7 million tonnes.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that it would be misleading to talk about cereal surpluses if the cereal substitutes allowed into the Community were eliminated?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend may recall that the matter of cereal substitutes — mainly maize gluten feed and citrus pellets—has caused a great deal of discussion in the Council of Ministers. The Council did not discuss it on this occasion, but we have always resisted limitations upon those importations. I have no doubt that when I meet Secretary Block within half an hour, that will form a major part of our discussions.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Just what are we going to do about the Dutch horticulturists with their subsidised Groningen gas? Does not the Minister understand that hon. Members from central Scotland who represent glasshouse owners know that they are becoming absolutely distraught because of the unfair competition? I understand from the Minister's statement that there are to be legal proceedings. Is it fair to say that the Dutch have cocked a snook at the Commission in the legal proceedings? Knowing the Amsterdam lawyers, may I ask the Minister whether there is any likelihood of their arriving at a conclusion before the mid-1990s, by which time many of the tomato growers we represent will be out of business and down the chute? What will the Minister do about it?

Mr. Jopling: I am not going to enter into an argument with the hon. Gentleman about whether Amsterdam lawyers are any more pernicious than Scottish or any other lawyers. That would be inappropriate. It is a matter of the hon. Gentleman to judge.

I have made it quite clear that our view is that the Commission should have acted more quickly and that we expect the Commission to pursue the matter in the European Court if the Dutch do not comply. We extracted from the Commission yesterday a statement that it has already asked the Dutch Government to desist from that practice. I took particular trouble at a meeting with Mr. Braks, the Netherlands Minister, on Monday morning to express my serious displeasure at the way the issue has developed.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is it true that five countries are now eligible to pay super-levy? Will my right hon. Friend explain why the payment was postponed if it is true that there is a general, serious and widespread political desire throughout the Community to restrain agricultural expenditure?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend has not counted very well. As I understand the matter, the Commission's view is that seven countries are due to pay levy. Some have collected it, some have said they will pay and there are disputes with other countries. The crucial aspect of the operation is to ensure a uniform attitude towards the behaviour of member states as regards complying with the law and the regulations. That is much more important than any short-term arrangement. We must ensure that everyone complies with the law.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): How can supplementary milk levy be due from the United Kingdom if its milk production is not exceeding its quota?

Mr. Jopling: As the right hon. Gentleman will see from the regulations, these matters are assessed under what we call formula B, on a dairy basis. For the purposes

[Mr. Jopling]

of the United Kingdom, especially for wholesale deliveries, we have treated the five milk marketing boards as the dairies. The levy and the quota are based on that. That is why there is levy due in Northern Ireland, but not in Great Britain.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): When my right hon. Friend spoke to his colleagues about cereal surpluses, did he impress upon them his view that they should be dealt with not at the last moment by a bureaucratic quota but by a price mechanism? Cereal farmers need an element of certainty. Above all, we need to take more grain out of intervention stores by relaxing controls on restitutions and export credit.

Mr. Jopling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because, for a long time, I have said that the way to deal with the cereal surplus is through the discipline of price and not through some bureaucratic horror such as quotas or co-responsibility levies.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On milk, did the Minister make it clear, and will he now make it clear to the House, that, if any other state—Italy appears to be the culprit—does not comply with the requirements, we will reserve the right not to comply ourselves and to take whatever unilateral action is necessary to safeguard our dairy producers?

Mr. Jopling: As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman will have seen what both I and the Prime Minister have said on this matter. We must be a little careful about Italy; a special derogation in the regulations agreed last March, because of the peculiar problems of Italy and Greece, provides that their assessment for levy is made on the basis of 12 months, whereas the other eight member states are treated on a shorter-term basis.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his stance in the Agriculture Council in pressing for flexibility in milk quotas. What progress is he making towards a system of leasing of quotas?

Mr. Jopling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those kind remarks. I have said many times that I am sympathetic to the prospect of leasing quotas. The present system of attaching the quota solely to the land is a great deal too rigid. In the end, we will have to make it more flexible, as well as dealing with the adjoining matter of direct and wholesale quotas.

I am afraid that it has proved impossible to get the outgoing Commission to change the rules. I shall give my hon. Friend the same assurance that I gave my other constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellet-Bowman), that I shall press on as hard as possible with this matter when the new Commissioner is in office.

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) mentioned the disarray in the dairy industry. Does not the Minister fear that that is due to the tardiness of the distribution of secondary quotas? Will he extend the outgoers scheme to all farmers, irrespective of farm size, on a partial surrender basis?

Mr. Jopling: With a great deal of difficulty, I managed to obtain £50 million for the outgoers scheme. It looks as though that will be spoken for—I hope so. I am afraid that there are no prospects at the moment for an extension of that.

I wholly reject the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about disarray.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): How did the Council of Ministers defend the cereal support system, under which, for example, if United Kingdom agriculture receives a bonus issue of 4 million tonnes of cereal from the Almighty over and above that which is required by farmers to satisfy their appetites and their bank managers, the taxpayer will have to put his hand in his pocket and find an additional £100 million at least, at a time when the Government are trying to cut back in other areas?

Mr. Jopling: Under the rules as they stand, there is an open-ended commitment to pay. My hon. Friend should recall that there has been a dramatic drop in cereal prices this year, which has been to the benefit of the livestock industry. He should also remember that this year, for the first time, the guarantee thresholds should bite very hard on cereal prices. Our estimate is that they should lead to a reduction of 5 per cent. in cereal prices at the next price fixing.

Mr. John Watson (Skipton and Ripon): How strong an assurance can my right hon. Friend give that production by British dairy farmers next year will not need to be reduced as a result of over-production by some continental dairy farmers this year?

Mr. Jopling: I have every hope that that will not happen. In fact, that thought has never seriously crossed my mind. Certainly, we would strongly resist any such suggestion. As I said to the House the other day, people in the Community speak to me with a good deal of envy about the drought we had in the summer, which has greatly helped us to reduce our milk production level.

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham): I am grateful to the Minister for making this statement on the Agriculture Council. I ask your advice, Mr. Speaker, about Questions Nos. 1 and 175 on today's Order Paper, which call for written answers. Both those questions were asked by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) and both asked for a statement on the Fisheries Council meeting which was held on the same day as the Agriculture Council meeting. It is curious that we need to have two questions about the same Council.

Mr. Jopling: I regret to say that I have not studied the Order Paper sufficiently to note that fact. With customary foresight, my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) has tabled questions on days when he thought it was likely that there would be a report on a meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Twice?

Mr. Jopling: If my hon. Friend has tabled the question twice, that is a totally admirable belt and braces policy.

Teachers (Scotland)

4.51 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Government's refusal yesterday to have an independent pay review for teachers in Scotland."

The matter is specific, because yesterday the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that he was refusing what the Opposition believed was a thoroughly justified claim. The Minister made the announcement by written answer, which gave the House no opportunity to call the Secretary of State for Scotland to account.

This matter is important, because, as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's intransigence, we are faced with the prospect of a protracted period of disruption in our schools which could be disastrous for teachers, for parents and, above all, for pupils. If the teachers are right in thinking that their salaries have fallen behind those of comparable groups, they deserve justice. If they are wrong, the Secretary of State has nothing to fear from an independent inquiry.

The House should have an immediate opportunity to probe the reason why teachers in Scotland can obtain redress only at the price of accepting a sharp deterioration in their conditions of service. If there is no debate, and Ministers do not reconsider their position, there will be serious consequences, deepening the mood of anger and resentment in our schools, a mood which the Minister responsible for education in Scotland—the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)—described in the House last night in an insensitive and unhappy phrase as "hysterical".

The Opposition's sense of urgency is reinforced by the knowledge that there will be widespread industrial action in Scotland's schools during the next few days. Teachers expect the House to have flexibility and a sense of priority of such an order as to allow it to respond to their outrage. In that expectation, they will have widespread support from Scottish public opinion. For those reasons, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to consider this application sympathetically.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Government's refusal yesterday to have an independent pay review for teachers in Scotland."

I have listened carefully to the hon. Member's speech, but I regret to say that I do not consider the matter that he has raised as appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No point of order can arise on that subject.

Mr. Buchan: On the contrary, Sir. I completely accept your ruling, but, it has been alleged that the Minister responsible for education in Scotland described the teachers' response as "hysterical". The hon. Gentleman appeared just now to deny that. Is is possible to give the Minister the opportunity to tell us exactly what he said if he did not use the word "hysterical"?

Mr. Speaker: That is not possible now.

4.54 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the postponement of the announcement of the introduction of phases II and III of the standard grade examinations in Scottish schools as a result of industrial action by Scottish teachers."

This is an important and specific subject. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, last night the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland announced that, following consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Government have agreed to the postponement of phases II and III of the standard grade reform of the curricula in Scottish schools.

It is clear that phase I covers English, mathematics, science and social and vocational skills, and phases II and III cover all the other subjects. It is clear that the subjects in which there is to be a postponement of the reform cover a wide range. It is clear also that such an important reform of Scottish education is falling and crumbling around the Government's ears.

This matter is urgent because, although phases II and III were not scheduled to come into operation until 1985 and 1986 respectively, the important preparatory work to bring those phases into operation must be done now.

The hon. Member for Garscadden has referred to the industrial action, which is part and parcel of this matter, and which is holding up the reforms. That industrial action is related to the Government's action—or rather inaction—in dealing with the teachers' justifiable claims for an independent pay review.

I therefore submit that this is an important and urgent matter. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to grant this application and allow the House the opportunity to challenge the Government's educational policies in Scotland, which are rapidly pushing Scottish education into an ever-deepening crisis.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the postponement of the announcement of the introduction of phases II and III of the standard grade examinations in Scottish schools as a result of industrial action by Scottish teachers."

I regret to say that I must give the hon. Member the same answer I gave the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member said, but I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing order No. 10. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

4.56 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order involves statements of ministerial speeches that are placed in the Library. Mr. Deputy Speaker will recall that, last night, I asked for the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to be made available in the Library, and the Scottish Office

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Ministers courteously made such arrangements. The Library copy of the statement—I do not know whether it has the official status of the *Hansard* report—states that I asked:

"A what reaction—historical or hysterical?"

The Minister replied:

"I understood that there has been a hysterical reaction to this point."

That may not appear in the *Official Report*, but it certainly appears in the report placed in the Library. Does that Library report have official status?

Mr. Speaker: A paper in the Library does not have the status of a statement in the House. I cannot comment on any ministerial statement placed in the Library or the language in which it is couched. The report may have been uncorrected.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to delay the House, because I realise that my colleagues have important business to transact, and we are all looking forward to helping them.

It is clear that the Minister responsible for education in Scotland indicated forcefully when I made my Standing Order No. 10 application that he had not used the word "hysterical". The word appears in what I understand to be an official report. We shall check the details tomorrow. I presume that this will be a correct report. I hope that the Minister accepts that, in referring to the reaction of the principal teachers' union, he used a word which I regard as unfortunate — he said that its members were "hysterical".

Mr. Speaker: That is as may be, but it is not a matter for me.

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the matter of the Oil Industry in Scotland, being a matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Major.]*

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill

(Considered in Committee)

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

ABOLITION OF GLC AND METROPOLITAN COUNTY COUNCILS

4.59 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 8, at beginning insert

'After a Royal Commission has reported on local government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties and'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 8, at beginning insert

'After a Parliamentary tribunal of inquiry has reported on local government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties and'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 8, at beginning insert

'After a review of metropolitan counties under the provisions of the principal Act has reported on local government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties and'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 8, at beginning insert

'After a committee of inquiry has reported on local government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties and'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 8, at beginning insert

'After the Audit Commission has reported on local government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties and'.

No. 6, in page 1, line 9, after 'force', insert

'and after the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament proposals for an independent inquiry into the administrative implications of the proposed reorganisation of local government in London and the metropolitan counties'.

No. 7, in page 1, line 9, after 'force' insert

'and after a referendum held in each of the areas of the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils in which a majority of those voting have approved the proposed abolition of the council in each of the areas concerned'.

No. 19, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such day as may be appointed by an Order by the Secretary of State after the Royal Commission referred to in subsection (1) above has reported'.

No. 20, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such day as may be appointed by an Order by the Secretary of State after the review of the metropolitan counties under the provisions of the principal Act referred to in subsection (1) above has reported'.

No. 21, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such day as may be appointed by an Order by the Secretary of State after the Parliamentary tribunal of inquiry referred to in subsection (1) above has reported'.

No. 22, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such day as may be appointed by an Order by the Secretary of State after the committee of inquiry referred to in subsection (1) above has reported'.

No. 23, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such day as may be appointed by an Order by the Secretary of State after the Audit Commission referred to in subsection (1) above has reported'.

No. 24, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such a day as may be appointed by the Secretary of State after a referendum has been held in each of the areas of the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils to coincide with the local elections to be held in May 1986 in which a majority of those voting have approved the proposed abolition of the council in each of the areas concerned'.

No. 35, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such dates as the Secretary of State shall by order appoint, after he has laid before each House of Parliament reports of independent local inquiries setting out proposals and recommendations for the future administration of local government in the Greater London Council and each of the metropolitan counties, such order to be laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Straw: The departure of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) as I stood up, was not designed to reflect upon anything that I was about to say. We have started rather late and the time coincides with a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party's parliamentary committee.

The purpose of these amendments, with two exceptions, is essentially the same — to provide that there should be proper inquiry before the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties is proceeded with. The inquiries are variously to be held by a Royal Commission, a parliamentary tribunal or the Audit Commission. In addition, there are other amendments which have the similar effect of ensuring that the proposals are subject to greater scrutiny. One of the amendments proposes that if abolition is to go through there should be direct elections to all the presently indirectly elected boards and quangos to which most of the functions of the present metropolitan counties and the GLC are to be transferred.

It is notorious that the Bill's proposals were cobbled together in haste without proper consultation or consideration even within the Conservative party, let alone outside it. As we have heard, and it has not been expressly contradicted, they were against the expressed wishes of the Conservative party policy committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland wrote last week to the Prime Minister to remind her that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) had said in the House, with all the authority that he commands, that the manifesto commitment was included nine days after the 1983 election was called and against the wishes of the Conservative party policy committee. A week later, we have had no reply from the right hon. Lady.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): The reply, the terms of which I have seen, is on its way. If it is of any help to the hon. Gentleman, and so that he does not go on flogging a dead horse, the date to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) referred in his speech was the date upon which the manifesto was published. The idea that the commitment was inserted on the day of publication is fanciful. On the hon. Gentleman's second point, it is not for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to make public statements about internal party committees.

Mr. Straw: If it is not for the Prime Minister, who should comment about the internal organisation of the Conservative party? It is she who runs the Conservative party.

I note with interest that this is the third intervention that the Secretary of State has offered on this important matter. At no stage has he explicitly denied the charge of his right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, his former Prime Minister, that the commitment was included in the manifesto against the wishes of the Conservative party policy committee. I see that someone is about to give me some information on this.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I shall give the hon. Gentleman information not on the Conservative party's manifesto but on that of the Labour party. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us why the Labour party manifesto says:

"we aim to end, if we can, the present confusing division of services between two tiers of authority. Unitary district authorities, in England and Wales, could be responsible for all of the functions in this area that they could sensibly undertake."?

Mr. Straw: That is an entirely unexceptional statement which talks about ending the division of services if we can and suggests that district authorities could be responsible for them. Had we been elected as a Government there would have been the most careful consideration of the matter. We should have listened carefully, as we have in the past and as our record shows, to representations made to us.

As so many Conservative councillors have made clear, whatever else the Bill does, it does not create unitary authorities out of the present two-tier structure; it makes a two-tier structure into a four-tier structure and transfers power to the Secretary of State. The result of the haste is that this measure is ill-considered and without merit. So much so, that the Government's case rests upon shifting sands. First, they said that the proposal was all about savings, and nothing else. We all know about the £120 million.

When the Minister for Local Government reached the Department he evidently decided that the argument about savings was not as strong as we had been led to believe. For 18 months the Government had been promising us details of that £120 million, but could never come up with it. The Minister then issued a statement saying that that was not the main issue but that the proposal was all about devolution to the boroughs. That is nonsense and a deception, according to the Conservative councillor, Mr. Robert Mitchell. I am sure that our ever-flexible Friend the Minister will offer some other explanation this afternoon.

The proposal is so ill thought out that the Government have failed to convince even those people on serious newspapers who at other times have been regarded as the Government's allies and supporters. Today, the *Financial Times* said:

"there are certain criteria which must be fulfilled for these changes to be accpetable. The first is that the new arrangement has a reasonable chance of being an improvement on the old. The second is that accountability is not reduced, so that pressure for efficiency and sensitivity to local aspirations is not diminished. The third is that democracy and democratic principles are neither weakened nor violated. The Bill fails on all three counts."

I could not have said it better myself. I notice the odd guffaw at that suggestion from the *Financial Times*, which is, of course, the mouthpiece of international capitalism — as people may say — and a supporter of the Government, but how about the "old thunderer" *The Times*

[Mr. Straw]

which has been cerebrating in its support for this Administration? Two editorials attacked the proposals. One said:

"The abolition bill can be examined in vain for any expression of a general philosophy of the role of government in society, or doctrine of fiscal limits. It is a document lacking any sense of future . . . It is a document lacking coherent principles for local administration."

The second said:

"Ostensibly about devolving powers to districts and boroughs the local government bill becomes in too many places a recipe for decentralisation . . . this excess of ministerial discretion . . . they are a recipe for private government and the abuse of power."

Those views are backed by those who normally support the Conservative Administration—the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the British Roads Federation and even Alcoholics Recovery Project.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): They could do some good business in this place.

Mr. Straw: I am sure that that was an all-party reference.

The Government went through a consultation process. They denied the Library and hon. Members copies of the documents which were submitted to them by way of consultation, as well they might, because they were overwhelmingly against the proposals. Out of 780 submissions analysed by outside bodies, 750 were against, only 10 in favour and 20 could not be classified.

Why are the Government in this mess? First, because their motives for the change are fundamentally suspect. We know that the real motive for the change was not that they thought that change was needed on its merits but because they objected to the policies being democratically carried out by democratically elected Labour authorities.

The second and associated reason for the mess is that the proposals were not thought out before they were brought forward. As the Prime Minister told the nation in her Carlton club lecture last week, the Conservative party claims to be the party which respects the conventions and traditions of Britain. The Bill flies in the face of all convention and of all principles of good government.

Every previous change in local government has been preceded by a serious and independent inquiry in which the people concerned have been able to put forward their views before and not after the Government have made up their mind and set their proposals in concrete.

The establishment of the county councils—including the London county council, in 1888—was preceded by years of public debate and consultation. Recently the Secretary of State referred to the fact that Lord Salisbury had opposed the London county council in 1898, but I remind the right hon. Gentleman that it was Lord Salisbury who sponsored the establishment of the London county council in 1888. Later he may have repented for the same reason as the Secretary of State is now proposing the removal of an elected authority for London. Lord Salisbury repented later because the elections in London did not go the way that he had wished, but it was he who proposed the measure, and his hon. Friends helped to push it through this House. Whatever their subsequent comments about the policies of the LCC, at least previous Consevative administrations, even when the LCC elections went the wrong way, were willing to allow an elected authority for London to continue.

The London Government Act 1962 was preceded by the most serious consideration, not only by the Herbert Commission but within the wider confines of the London community. I remind Conservative Members that someone who was at that stage a leading light in the Conservative party, and is now the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), was a director of the London Municipal Society, which held an inquiry into the running of Greater London and produced serious and well worked out proposals—with which the Labour party did not agree — for London to be split into seven large boroughs. The Government did not say that they would act on those proposals. They looked at them and at other proposals and set up a Royal Commission, so that the matter could be considered with great seriousness, with people having a chance to put forward their views.

With regard to the government of the country outside Greater London, the Labour Government between 1964 and 1970 could have implemented proposals which suited their political book. It is a testament to the Labour Administration — as it is to the Conservative Administration under Macmillan—that they did not do so. They recognised that they were dealing not simply with party advantage but with a central part of the running of our democracy. So, again, there was a full inquiry, under Lord Redcliffe-Maud, before any proposals were made.

With regard to three of the six metropolitan areas, Lord Redcliffe-Maud recommended that there should be two-tier government. In paragraph 3 of Chapter I the report said:

"In the special circumstances of three metropolitan areas around Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, responsibility for services should be divided in each case between a metropolitan authority . . . and a number of metropolitan district authorities".

To the extent that Conservative Members are now recommending unitary authorities—that is what they say but it is not what they are doing—the case for unitary authorities is overwhelmingly the strongest in the shire areas, where there are free-standing towns without surrounding conurbations. I look forward to the Secretary of State at last recognising that that is where the logic of his arguments will lead. What will he say to the proposals of the last Labour Government for organic change in the shire areas, which were carefully worked out, the subject of the widest consultation, and supported by Conservative as well as Labour Administrations? Does he believe that what is sauce for the goose in the Labour conurbation areas is also sauce for the gander in the Conservative shire areas?

The Secretary of State for Transport and his right hon. Friends have called for an inquiry into the GLC's lorry ban. The Secretary of State—I understand his reasons—said:

"If people are adversely and discriminately affected by matters such as a new road . . . the Government have no hesitation in allowing a public inquiry."

He added that it was a question

"of individuals being adversely affected compared with others."

—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1984; Vol 2, c. 138.]

5.15 pm

If people are to be adversely affected by a lorry ban, how much more will people be affected by the abolition of the GLC? If there is a case for an inquiry into a lorry ban, there is an overwhelming case for an inquiry into the Bill's proposals, which would have a far greater impact on people in the areas concerned.

We have heard a great deal about the Conservatives' manifesto commitment and we have all read it. The Conservative party claims to be the principal upholder of the parliamentary system, so it should never be seen to override the will of Parliament and the need for important proposals, such as those in the Bill, to be scrutinised on their merits. When I talk of the will of Parliament I do not mean the use of a parliamentary majority to effect elective dictatorship of the offensive kind that Lord Hailsham once exposed and which the present Government have been practising.

I suggest to the Secretary of State that the manifesto commitment in no way precludes the reference of that commitment to a Royal Commission. If the Government were to set up such an inquiry, it would still be open to them, within the lifetime of this Parliament, to bring forward proposals, if they wished to do so, in exactly the same form as the pesent proposals. Such proposals would have a great deal more legitimacy behind them, having been the subject of independent scrutiny.

The Secretary of State should have listened more closely to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who said:

"At any time it is possible to carry out a review of the 1972 Local Government Act, and for my money the longer the settling-in period the more factual evidence we shall possess upon which to make informed judgments."

The right hon. Gentleman said that in 1979. Only five years have passed since the first elections following a reform of local government—the first serious attempt at that task since Queen Victoria sat on the throne. The right hon. Gentleman went on to say:

"We are agreed that we do not seek another major reorganisation of local government because we are certain that change in this field is likely to be expensive and divisive."

The Secretary of State's Conservative predecessor was right when he said that in 1979, and he is right now.

Mr. Reg Prentice (Daventry): I voted for the Bill on Second Reading, I expect to vote for it on Third Reading, and possibly once or twice in between, but very selectively, because it is a Bill that I dislike in many respects. I particularly dislike the way in which it was born.

I voted for the Bill on Second Reading for one reason only. Given the fact that the Bill was before the House and that we had to make a broad decision on whether we believed in the continuation of the GLC and the metropolitan counties, my own view on balance was against them. I think that those authorities are too large to be local authorities and too small to be regional authorities; therefore, I want to see some change. But I dislike the way that the change was brought about.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the analysis of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends that a major change in the structure of local government in Britain should take place only very occasionally, and then only after the most careful study and consultation. I suggest that about twice in a century is sufficient. Such a change should be preceded probably by a Royal Commission or by some other deep study of that kind. I think that we are due for a Royal Commission or some such study into the structure and financing of local government.

We have had several studies in the past, but they have tended to be either of structure or of the method of financing local services. All were unsatisfactory for that reason. We should now have a major study of both together. It would have been compatible with the election pledge to set up a Royal Commission now, for it to report during this Parliament and then for the Government to make up their mind on their proposals towards the end of this Parliament, to be implemented in the following Parliament.

At the very least, if we do not go down the road of a Royal Commission, I suggest that there should have been a much longer period of consultation before the Government ever made that firm commitment in the election manifesto. It is rather absurd to put such a pledge into a manifesto, at a late stage, without consulting the local government world in general, and without even consulting Conservative councillors up and down the country or even Conservative councillors on the GLC and the metropolitan counties. Many of them have resented that, and they are right to resent it.

It seems to me that the pledge went into the manifesto basically because in the last Parliament the Government had failed to find an alternative to the rating system. Having failed to do so, and having disappointed the expectations of people up and down the country who looked for a change, there seemed to be a move in the leadership of the Conservative party, saying that Conservatives had to do something about the rates and wondering what could be put into the manifesto. One outcome was the unfortunate Rates Bill and the second is the Local Government Bill. That is not the way in which such major decisions should be made. I might vote for the amendment, or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, by his eloquence, might persuade me to abstain. One way or the other, I cannot vote with the Government.

I do not seriously expect the Government to accept the amendment. I expect them to go ahead with the Bill. Given the broad choice facing us, I am in favour of a change away from the large authorities, but I suggest to my right hon. Friend and the Government that unfortunately in the past few years they have produced an atmosphere in their relationship with local government, including Conservative-controlled local authorities, that is very unhappy and has caused a great deal of resentment. Several of their friends feel that they take local government too much for granted and do not sufficiently respect its traditions and successes. If I am told that that is unfair, I can only say that that is what is often said to me by county and district councillors in my constituency, and by other people whom I meet elsewhere. I hope that the Government can, in various ways, begin to put that right. It is in that spirit that I speak briefly in favour of the amendment.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Prentice), because I agreed strongly with two of the points that he made. First, he argued that the existing GLC and the metropolitan counties are too large to be genuine local government and, in some respects, have the wrong boundaries and powers to be effective regional government. That is absolutely right. That is why there is a case for re-examining our metropolitan government in London and the metropolitan counties. Secondly, I agree that we make a great mistake in looking at the structure of local government and its financing in isolation. It means that we get the wrong structure and the wrong financing system, when we should look at the two together.

[Mr. John Cartwright]

The Government are most vulnerable on this Bill because it is not the result of any independent analysis. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) rightly said that before the London government reorganisation we had the Herbert commission report and before the reorganisation in the metropolitan areas outside London we had Redcliffe-Maud. It is fair to say that the Government of the day did not stick to the recommendations of either report—they produced different formulations—but the two reports provided a basis of independent assessment against which one could judge the Government's proposals. That is not what we have in this Bill.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with that statement. We should compare what was finally enacted in the Local Government Act 1972 with the Redcliffe-Maud report which, after all, recommended 61 unitary authorities across the country, and we ended up with the present pattern of shire counties and districts. When one makes that comparison, how can the hon. Gentleman say that one decision flowed in any way from the inquiry that preceded it? It is as different as chalk from cheese.

Mr. Cartwright: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not want to misrepresent what I said. I was not arguing that the one flowed from the other. I said that the independent assessment provided a background and evidence against which to judge what the Government were doing. Many of us who thought that Redcliffe-Maud was right were able as a result to oppose the local government reorganisation proposed in 1972 by the then Secretary of State for the Environment. I was saying that the independent analysis was there, and provided some independent judgment. There is nothing of that sort available against which to judge what the Government are now proposing.

We are talking about a very important area—the government of the capital and of the most important urban areas of this country. To make a change on the basis of a sudden commitment produced at the beginning of a general election campaign, if not in the heat of the campaign, is not the right way to go about it. The effect is that the commitment that was given has had to be made good in a hurry. I am reminded of the experience of the noble Lord Shinwell, who has from time to time commented on the problems that he faced when he took over the Ministry of Fuel and Power. He was given the job of nationalising the coal mines and discovered that there were no plans to nationalise them. The same sort of problem seems to have befallen the Secretary of State. No doubt when he walked into the Department of the Environment after the general election in June 1983 and said, "Let me see the proposals for the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties," the civil servants had to say that no detailed proposals had been worked out.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Rubbish.

Mr. Cartwright: I should be interested to see what evidence the right hon. Gentleman has that there were any detailed—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] The Secretary of State has not signified that he wishes to intervene at the moment. If he has any evidence that detailed proposals had been worked out either in Conservative Central Office or in the Department of the Environment, I am sure that the Committee would be interested to hear it.

What we have to go on is the White Paper entitled "Streamlining the Cities". That document appears to have been cobbled together at such speed that the joins show. If one wanted evidence of that, I suggest that it came rapidly in that snowstorm of hastily duplicated consultation documents which came whistling out of Marsham street as civil servants discovered that many practical problems had not even been addressed in "Streamlining the Cities".

Two domestic problems in my constituency have still not been sorted out. One is the problem of Thamesmead new town. The Government have still not reached a conclusion on the final arrangements for Thamesmead, which is a new town of the 21st century being developed by the GLC. It falls within two London boroughs, neither of which is anxious to take it over or has the resources to take it over. The Government are saying that the best solution that they can find is to set up a trust to take over responsibility for the development of Thamesmead. At this point, they have no firm proposal for such a trust. We look forward with great interest to seeing how that idea works out.

5.30 pm

If the proposal for the abolition of the Greater London council had been worked out in such detail, the Secretary of State would have some difficulty in persuading me that at this stage we should be discussing what on earth to do about the problem of a major housing development like Thamesmead.

My second example is that of the Woolwich free ferry. It is now run by the Greater London council. Before that, it was operated by the London county council. After the abolition of the GLC, who is going to run the Woolwich free ferry? Neither the London borough of Newham nor the London borough of Greenwich has the resources or the capability to run it. When the matter was raised in the House and outside, there was a clear statement from the Government that the ferry would continue as a free ferry, but who is going to run it we do not yet know. When I took up this point with the Minister of State, Department of Transport, I received a very civil letter from her in which she said that it was a very good question and that if I had any solution to the problem would I kindly let her have it. This shows that on what is no doubt a minor matter for the Government but an important matter for Londoners, this proposal has not been thought through.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Does the hon. Gentleman say that the same kind of consideration as for the ferry occurs in relation to the upkeep of the Blackwall and Rotherhithe tunnels?

Mr. Cartwright: No. They are run on a different basis. They are not the direct responsibility of the ferry which has been operated on a free basis for generations by the GLC and the LCC. The argument I am putting to the Committee is that this is another example of legislation on the hoof, something which has not been thought through and which has been produced under pressure.

If we are considering that kind of approach to the government of major urban centres in this country, I do not believe that that is the way to go about it. I agree with the right hon. Member for Daventry. He argues that if we are

going to change the government of these important parts of the country, we ought to produce the kind of change which will last for a very long time. I do not believe that the proposals which are now being put before the Committee can possibly last. They are being imposed for political reasons. They have not been thought through. They are confusing to the electorate. They will be costly to administer. They involve a major switch of power and influence from local government to central Government.

The case which can be made against the Government on this batch of amendments is that they clearly do not want the best available system of government for London and the metropolitan counties. They wish to impose their system without any independent assessment of what they are doing. I hope that, even at this late stage, they will grasp the opportunity provided by these amendments. I have little faith that they will, but, nevertheless, we shall support this group of amendments.

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): I should like briefly to support the proposal for an inquiry before this legislation proceeds. My right hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Prentice) explained how he voted for Second Reading, although he had considerable reservations about the Bill. I did not vote for Second Reading, although I had and still have sympathy with some of the objectives of the Bill. I did not vote for Second Reading because I believe that the legislation is feckless and ill-considered. Therefore, it could only be very seriously improved if there were an inquiry. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said, local government matters are peculiarly unsuitable for rushed and ill-digested legislation. This Bill comes under that heading. I have every sympathy, therefore, for my right hon. and hon. Friends who are caught up with this legislation.

Let me give one example—waste disposal. Funnily enough, the GLC runs waste disposal very well, to the considerable advantage not only of London but of the surrounding counties. To break up that waste disposal activity would be irresponsible and would involve considerable disadvantages for Greater London and the home counties. That is just one example of the problems caused by a Bill being brought forward before the Government have thought through the matter. It will have very damaging consequences.

There has been no consultation about the Bill and there has been no attempt to obtain wide support for the Bill's proposals. As Conservatives, we ought to be aiming for that. Not even to try to hold consultations over local government matters is surely a considerable mistake and will result in grave problems.

When moving the Second Reading my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that he did not believe that anybody would wish to live with a structure that would inevitably lead to the sort of conflict that we have seen. That may well be true, but surely my right hon. Friend does not believe that these proposals will not lead to just as much conflict in the future. Indeed, they will probably lead to a great deal more conflict.

My right hon. Friend takes 123 powers in the Bill. Not all of them are new powers; nevertheless, 123 different powers are mentioned. I suggest that that will lead to a great deal of conflict, and probably even more conflict than last year's measure—ratecapping—is likely to lead to before very long. Therefore, an inquiry would be a great benefit.

Mr. Bernard Brook-Partridge, the GLC Conservative member, recently wrote an article in which he described this legislation as

"the last-minute, unconsidered, un-thought-out, 'populist', ignorant, insulting and constitutionally illiterate proposals relating to the GLC and the Metropolitan Counties",

and said that they

"should be dropped immediately in favour of either a short, sharp, properly constituted public inquiry or an immediate acceptance of the fact that London-wide services should be discharged by a refined, 'slimmed-down' GLC or by a new London Assembly, democratically elected and publicly accountable".

Those are strong words. I would not go quite so far myself. Nevertheless, they contain a certain amount of truth.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I support all the amendments which stand in the names of my hon. Friends. In my view, these amendments expose very well the basic weaknesses of this squalid Bill. It is sometimes seen as a badge of honour for a Secretary of State to pursue a Bill which he knows is not acceptable to the country. It would be much more of a badge of honour and would require much more courage if the Secretary of State were to go back to his Cabinet colleagues, even at this late stage, and say that this hastily cobbled Bill is not worth wasting a large amount of time during this parliamentary session.

There is no denying that this Government have not been prepared to hold proper, meaningful consultations or a proper form of inquiry before deciding to ride roughshod over one third of the population of the country, including that part of the country which I have the privilege to represent. I refer to the area of the Tyne and Wear county council. In my opinion and in the opinion of the vast majority of my constituents, it has done an exceptionally good job, measured by any standards, during the 10 years since the creation of the metropolitan counties by the previous Tory Government.

My concern is that all the traditions of previous Administrations — of not being prepared to undertake major local government reform in advance of an independent inquiry or a Royal Commission—have been flung to the winds by this Government. The Local Government Act 1972 was preceded, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, by the Redcliffe-Maud Commission. In fairness to the Tory Government at that time I should say that they were implementing the recommendation to set up two-tier authorities in the metropolitan areas or major conurbations — hence the creation of the metropolitan county councils.

I am equally concerned that the review procedures that Parliament established by the 1972 Act, which required a review of local government to be undertaken within 10 to 15 years, have been completely ignored. Parliament decided that a major review should be undertaken within 10 to 15 years. We are in the 11th year, yet the Government have introduced a Bill which rides roughshod over one third of the population and over the will of Parliament.

At the Tory party conference, the Secretary of State announced a major review of local government finance. That was not done out of a genuine desire to consider what should replace the rates, a subject on which the Prime

[Mr. Robert C. Brown]

Minister waxed so eloquent two elections ago when she committed the Tory Party to the abolition of the rates. We are still waiting. The Secretary of State was so embarrassed when he thought of the hoo-ha that would occur at the Tory party conference if he did not give some sort of undertaking that he promised to set up an inquiry into local government finance.

I give the right hon. Gentleman credit for promising at least to do something, but, having agreed to examine the financial structure of local government, the right hon. Gentleman should have gone on to look at local government as a whole.

I did not support the establishment of the metropolitan county councils. I make no apology for that, because I still believe that we should have major regional authorities, with all-purpose authorities under them. However, the best method of local government can be determined only by the sort of major inquiry proposed in the amendments.

The Bill is bound to have major knock-on effects. It will have implications for the whole of local government and not just for the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. The PA Management Consultants report has already pointed out that many shire areas have larger populations but fewer powers than the metropolitan districts. That is why there must be full consultation on the structure and financing of local government as a whole before any changes are made in the conurbations.

The Government have rejected consultation. Not only have they not commissioned an inquiry into their proposals, but they have paid little or no regard to the response to the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities". On their own analysis of responses, published in the summer, fewer than 10 per cent. of those consulted supported abolition. The Secretary of State has consistently refused to publish the responses to help us have a considered debate on the issues involved in the Bill.

We have not been told the views of 90 per cent. of those who responded to the White Paper, but I could quote ad nauseam hundreds of comments that condemn the Bill line by line, just as we shall be doing in the months ahead.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I had not intended to speak in the debate. I avoided speaking on Second Reading because I thought that if I showed any enthusiasm for the Bill I might be put on the Standing Committee. I came in to listen to the debate in the hope that I would hear some words of wisdom. I have been sadly disappointed.

I had the advantage in the years up to 1972 of serving on a county borough council—still, in my view, the best method of effecting local government in its proper sense. I also have the advantage of being on record as having opposed the establishment of the metropolitan county councils in general and the Merseyside county council in particular.

5.45 pm

In my political peregrinations around the country, trying to get elected to the House, I was at a by-election in Liverpool in 1971 when the few people who were then inclined to support the Conservative cause said that they had no wish to see the establishment of a Merseyside county council. They did not understand what it was, and nothing much has changed in the succeeding 14 years. Many people in that part of the world still think that the county council is something to do with the Liverpool city council.

In 1974, when I moved my political activities to Newton-le-Willows, which for some reason is now in the Merseyside county council area, though it has nothing to do with Merseyside, people asked what on earth they were doing in Merseyside and what Merseyside had to do with Newton-le-Willows.

I remember that the people involved in local politics at that time, either on the county borough council or on urban district councils, had to make judgments about their political futures. Without exception, they stood for election to the district councils within the metropolitan county council areas and not for the county councils. They could not see what the counties would do politically or how they would occupy their time. I took the same decision. Unfortunately, I was defeated by a Liberal, although I got back later.

No one of any political consequence chose to stand for election to the county councils. The young hirsute gentlemen who sit on those councils now perhaps do not have such long memories.

In 1979, I was asked why, as the metropolitan county councils had still not worked, we had not got rid of them. The same question was being asked during the 1983 general election.

It has been suggested that the people represented by the metropolitan county councils have some affection for them. That is not true. The Merseyside county council has gone to enormous expense to buy space in newspapers so that people can send me clippings saying that they wish to keep the county council. Some people have done that, but it is surprising to see how many altered the clipping to say that they agree with the abolition of the Merseyside county council.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): How many slips of paper has the hon. Gentleman received from people who support the abolition of the county council and how many people have told him that they disagree with abolition? I have not had a single call for abolition.

Mr. Porter: As the lady said, "You would, wouldn't you?" To be absolutely fair, about 60 per cent. were in favour of abolition and about 40 per cent. were against it. As it is a printed form to be sent to the person's Member of Parliament expressing disagreement with abolition, I am surprised that so many people have gone to the length of altering it and then sending it to me.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir Ian Gilmour) seemed to be suggesting that, as the GLC had run waste disposal services rather well, that was somehow a powerful argument for not abolishing it. Waste disposal no doubt took place before the GLC was set up. I do not argue about the situation in the GLC area, but on Merseyside, whatever I put in my dustbin was adequately disposed of before the county council came into being. I do not believe that it is beyond the wit of man to devise an equally efficient system under the new arrangements, so that seems a rather infantile objection to a major proposal.

Sir Ian Gilmour: I was simply saying that well-thought-out legislation would have dealt with the problem in the Bill, so I do not think that my hon. Friend's objection carries much weight.

Mr. Porter: I have no doubt that during the Committee stage, in which I intend to take little part after today and tomorrow, such matters will be dealt with, but I should not have thought that they constituted fundamental objections to the measure. I hope that those who take part in the Committee stage — [HON. MEMBERS: "This is the Committee stage"] I mean the Standing Committee upstairs. I hope that members of that Committee will address themselves postively to these matters rather than keeping people like me up all night for the next six months.

The Chairman: I share the hon. Gentleman's hope, but I also hope that he will address himself to the amendments before the Committee and not seek to make the speech that he might have made if he had caught Mr. Speaker's eye on Second Reading.

Mr. Porter: I am obliged to you for that reminder, Mr. Chairman. It might help if I had read the amendments. I shall call myself to order, conclude my remarks very shortly and leave it to the self-appointed experts to carry on.

Merseyside county council in particular and the metropolitan counties in general have achieved popularity, although some false affection has been generated by money, activity and noise from those running them. I am in fact advocating the abolition of my own father, who in the latter part of his local government career has subsided on to the benches of Merseyside county council. It is with the greatest pleasure that I abolish his office. I am sad that he should have spent the past few years in an activity of no real consequence when he would have been better occupied dealing with local government matters in the proper manner that the Bill will achieve.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The Government have put forward proposals for the reform of the metropolitan counties without proper consideration and almost without putting them to the public in the areas concerned. They have a very long way to go if they are to justify the wholesale massacre of local government structure. They have yet to show the logic of undermining local government in this way, as they have not yet provided the detailed analysis that both Opposition and Conservative Members have called for. In dealing with the most fundamental restructuring of local government this decade we need far more evidence to underpin the proposals before us.

One of the amendments calls for a series of referendums in the GLC and metropolitan areas. We set great store by that in Greater Manchester, where only 10 per cent. of the population strongly favour the Government's proposals. The proposals thus have almost no credible support in the area. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the people most affected by the proposals should have the opportunity to express their view. I also have considerable sympathy with the view that the proposals should be subject to detailed examination by a Royal Commission or similar body. Whatever the merits or demerits of the Bill, it is clear that the structure of local government after abolition will have to be reformed very quickly by a future Government, preferably a Labour Government, because the present proposals offer no credible structure for local government in the metropolitan areas.

The uncertainties caused by the Bill have not been adequately dealt with. The proposals for the police forces are a good example. Greater Manchester now has an integrated police force covering the whole metropolitan county, with a central headquarters and a centralised communications system. I understand that the Home Office itself, unofficially, strongly opposes the idea of breaking up that integrated force. If the Bill is passed there will be strong demands from the districts within Greater Manchester for the restoration of some democratic control over the police force because we wish a police force to be accountable. That is not the right way to achieve accountability. Having created an integrated force out of the former separate forces in the area, the correct way to proceed is to guarantee that democratic structure through a countywide body such as the present county council. The Government's proposal is unsatisfactory and unlikely to gain the support of Home Office Ministers. With such uncertainty built into the Bill, it is inevitable that the public in the metropolitan areas will look askance at the Government's proposals.

Despite the various assertions made by the Secretary of State, there has been no adequate discussion of the cost of the proposals. An annual figure of £100 million has been magicked out of the air by the Government, but there has been no in-depth examination or justification and there is not a shred of evidence to support the Government's assumptions. Credible examinations have been carried out by Coopers and Lybrand and others who have attempted to grapple with the complexities of the problem. We all admit that it is a complex matter and none of us would wish to pin our faith to the last pound on the figures in the Coopers and Lybrand report. Nevertheless, it has been the only attempt to analyse the situation and to tell the public the likely costs and benefits of abolition and people will naturally assume, in the absence of any other evidence, that the figures in that report are more reliable than those plucked out of the air by the Secretary of State. The public cannot possibly be satisfied while that uncertainty remains.

All those uncertainties point to the need for a Royal Commission to carry out a study based on something more substantial than the political prejudices of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, who dislike the county councils because of their political composition, which is merely temporary. The Government dislike the authorities because they are all Labour-controlled. It is unlikely that a Royal Commission would approach the matter purely on the basis of party political spite. It is important that we get away from such spite and set up a body on which we can rely to examine the arguments in a more dispassionate and constructive way than has been achieved so far.

One amendment refers specifically to the Audit Commission. I have had cause to write to the commission in relation to the Price Waterhouse report on the abolition proposals. I am not totally enamoured of the Audit Commission, but that is a much more reputable body to look into these matters——

Mr. Harry Cowans (Tyne Bridge): It was set up by the Government.

Mr. Lloyd: As my hon. Friend says, it was set up by this Government to control local government spending.

[Mr. Lloyd]

The Audit Commission ought to be given the opportunity to look into the costing of these proposals and the efficiency of the existing set-up. Not even Parliament has discussed improving the county councils and the GLC, and that should be put to the judgment of a Royal Commission or the Audit Commission. It is not good enough simply to bow to the prejudices of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. It is more important to establish a local government structure that will last and which, without the present uncertainties, will be safe for a considerable number of years ahead and not simply until the next Parliament.

6 pm

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): Are not Royal Commissions, committees of inquiry and parliamentary inquiries just another form of parliamentary procrastination? Will they produce any shred of evidence which my right hon. Friend does not already possess? I think not. The Committee would be well advised to reject this group of amendments.

In 1975, to its eternal credit, the Labour party took the trouble to set up the Layfield committee of inquiry into the financing of local government. That document remains a major work on the financial aspects of local government. However, to its discredit, the Labour party did not have the courage between 1975 and 1979 to implement any of that committee's recommendations. To our credit, my right hon. Friend and his predecessors have since 1979 tried to grapple with the problem of financing local government. We have not yet been entirely successful, but at least we have taken steps which, it is hoped, will ultimately lead in the right direction. That must surely be the protection of the ratepayer against rapacious and greedy local authorities which seek to obtain funds from the ratepayer out of earned income to provide for services which are not necessarily best provided by the local authority, and which perhaps could be better and more prudently provided by other solutions.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Heddle: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He spoke many times on Second Reading, and no doubt he will do so in Committee. I am sure that he will make his own views known in his inimitable manner.

This Committee should direct its attention specifically to protecting the ratepayer, because without the wealth which the ratepayer can provide, local authorities such as the GLC and the six metropolitan country councils would not have the money with which to provide the services which, in their infinite wisdom, they believe that the ratepayer deserves.

Both the Labour and Liberal parties are united with Conservative Members in wishing to seek a solution to unemployment, the most enormous problem which confronts us. We all want to find a solution which will create jobs. We are more likely to find that solution if we give the industrial and commercial ratepayers a greater opportunity to preserve as much of their after-tax wealth as they can. Without a doubt, there has been a flight of private sector capital from the GLC and the six metropolitan county councils because that sector has paid an inordinate amount of after-tax profits in rates. This has nothing to do with reducing the rate support grant, but it has everything to do with protecting the industrial and commercial ratepayer. My right hon. Friend's rate-capping announcement yesterday will do precisely that and will go some way towards protecting jobs in our inner cities and conurbations.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith) *rose*——

Mr. Heddle: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish my speech. When I sit down, he will no doubt have the opportunity of catching the eye of the Chair.

Some of the operational aspects of the Bill which will have to be further debated when it goes into Standing Committee — for example, waste disposal, planning functions, transfers of powers and transfer of rights and responsibilities under leases — are technical nuts and bolts to which the Committee will have to give deep consideration. However, these amendments simply suggest the fudge of a basic issue which affects all firms in the constituency of every hon. Member in or near the GLC and the six metropolitan county council areas. Relieving them of the additional burden of one expensive layer of bureaucracy, which takes democracy one step further away from them, will do nothing to create jobs. The Committee should reject this raft of amendments forthwith.

Mr. Wareing: As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, all previous major local government reorganisations have been preceded by a thorough review and investigation of the needs of those who live in the various areas. So important did a thorough investigation seem that, after 1926, a borough or urban district which sought county borough status was required to present a private Bill before Parliament so that it could be thoroughly investigated before a change was made. Between 1926 and the 1960s, only one county borough was established in that way—Doncaster.

Even relatively minor changes have been the subject of real inquiry. Between 1945 and 1949, two local government boundary commissions looked at the problems of boundaries only. In 1956, a Conservative Government published a White Paper on the structure of local government. However, that was felt to be insufficient, and that Government under Harold Macmillan passed the Local Government Act 1958 which established two local government commissions—one for England and one for Wales—which in 1963-64 reported on the establishment of a number of county boroughs in the west midlands area.

The Redcliffe-Maud commission provided a mountain of information and identified the disparity in size and resources of local authorities, the overspill problems in the conurbations and the haphazard allocation of functions between urban and rural districts and the non-county and county boroughs. It was argued that the Labour party has never been in favour of metropolitan authorities, but, following the publication of the Redcliffe-Maud report, the White Paper on the reform of local government in England was published in February 1970 by the Government of which the right hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Prentice) was a member.

A common theme of the Redcliffe-Maud report and the White Paper of February 1970 was that in the metropolitan areas of Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the west midlands the two-tier system was the correct one to deal with the disparity in resources, the haphazard allocation

of functions and the overspill problems in those conurbations. Indeed, the Labour Government's White Paper went further. It added to the three areas mentioned in the Redcliffe-Maud report the conurbations of west Yorkshire and south Hampshire, including the Isle of Wight. In February 1971, the Conservative Government published a White Paper on local government in England. Again, it increased from three to six the number of conurbations which were to have metropolitan authorities. Those, of course, were the areas which were the subject of the Local Government Act 1972.

Redcliffe-Maud and all the previous reports and White Papers had something else in common. They were all concerned about the growing amount of central control. They argued that, if nothing was done to reorganise local government, central control was bound to become greater.

The motive for the Local Government Act 1972 was to hold back the tide of central control. The proposition before the Committee now has exactly the opposite motive. The aim of the Secretary of State is not to increase local accountability, but to increase central control. As the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) so eloquently put it, there are about 120 powers in the Bill—I had not realised that the figure was so large — by which the Government seek to increase central control.

In answer to the hon. Member for Lichfield and Tamworth——

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Mid-Staffordshire.

Mr. Wareing: I am sorry. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) referred to the increasing burden on the ratepayer. However, the burden on the ratepayer must increase when the Government reduce the rate support grant from 61 per cent. of expenditure to 48 per cent. At a time when we are still suffering from inflation—even though it has become less severe—the only alternative is to cut services. That is what the Secretary of State has in mind. He is the agent of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the Tory party conference, the Secretary of State announced that there was to be a review of local government finance. However, before that review can be published, the Secretary of State presents us with a Bill to alter the structure of local government. That has never happened before.

Even on the Government's own admission, they have little support. I understand that the Government received 5,000 responses to their White Paper "Streamlining the Cities" and that less than 10 per cent. of the respondents supported the Government's proposition.

Throughout the arguments of the past year, the Government have provided no concessions whatsoever to informed opinion. There is still much that one can ask about the details. We know that under this measure a number of trusts are to be established. One will cater for the arts on Merseyside. There has been no thoroughgoing investigation of the right way of presenting the arts in conurbations such as Merseyside. I dare say that, even now, the Secretary of State could not tell me who will be responsible for the Philharmonic hall in the city of Liverpool. The philharmonic orchestra may be administered by the trust, but presumably the hall itself will become the possession of Liverpool city council—and the city council has had to close St. George's hall already in order to keep its head above water in the climate created by the Government's financial policies.

6.15 pm

Government Members have argued that the Labour party manifesto favoured unitary authorities. However, "Labour's Programme 1982" included a statement on devolution. In the consideration of devolution for Scotland and Wales, the point was made that if there is devolution in Scotland and Wales, we must also consider the democratisation of regional government in England. The Labour Government of 1964-79 published a document called "Devolution: The English Dimension". Many Labour Members would be fully in favour not of reducing the second tier but of extending democratic government to the control of electricity boards, gas boards, health authorities and water authorities. That is the question that we should be considering, instead of this squalid measure.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter)—the only Member from the Merseyside area who has been present on the Conservative Benches—said that most people on Merseyside are not in favour of the county council. What has he been reading? He has certainly not read Liverpool polytechnics' survey of opinion on Merseyside, according to which, 70·3 per cent. of those questioned were in favour of retaining the Merseyside county council. Some people were in favour of increasing its powers. Over 80 per cent. of those questioned were opposed to increased central Government control. No less that 86·8 per cent. were in favour of Merseyside county council's cheap fares policy.

That survey was a test of opinion. What test of opinion have the Government carried out? How can this measure be presented to the Committee as a matter of major importance to the country? What people in the conurbations are concerned about is how services can be provided adequately to protect them in their homes and their streets. They are concerned about how to find jobs. For such areas, the question that we should be considering is unemployment, and not this nonsensical measure which is before us, merely—as I said on Second Reading—at the whim of the Prime Minister.

On the authority of someone who was very close to the Conservative party working party on this issue, I can say that, originally, the manifesto was to state that there would be a review of the local government system under the new Conservative Government. That would have been entirely in accord with the amendments. Nine days after the general election was called, that commitment was crossed out by the Prime Minister. I challenge the Secretary of State to say whether that is true or false. I understand that that is what happened.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Wareing: I will indeed give way in a moment. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) has confirmed what I say, in a sense.

Mr. Jenkin: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can have been in his place an hour and a half ago, when I replied to the same allegation when it was made by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Nine days after the election was called, the manifesto was published. Thousands and thousands of copies of it

[Mr. Jenkin]

were distributed around the country. The manifesto had taken some time to print. The idea that such a change could have been made at that time is absurd. I shall deal with the point again when I reply to the debate, but the hon. Gentleman must not be fooled by some of the statements that have been made on the matter.

Mr. Wareing: You will have noticed, Mr. Walker, that the Secretary of State will not confirm or deny that it was the Prime Minister who determined that, in the final manifesto, there should appear the abolition of the met councils rather than a promise to review the system of local government. Such a review would not have required legislation. The Local Government Act 1972, which was put through by a Government of which the Secretary of State was a member, presaged a review of local government in 10 to 15 years. Amendment No. 1 would put that requirement into effect. As a member of the previous Conservative Government, the right hon. Gentleman should promise such a review.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Further to the exchange between my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), my right hon. Friend must exercise care when dealing with these matters. It is widely known, as a result of the process of osmosis, that this matter was never properly discussed in Cabinet. As far as we know, it came up once at the tail-end of a general Cabinet discussion and was very much an afterthought. I must not transgress the rules and conventions on this matter but, as far as can be ascertained, it appears that two members of the Cabinet declared themselves in favour of the proposal and no one else said anything on the subject. My right hon. Friend must therefore be careful. I am sure that he is not trying to mislead the House, but he must refrain from giving the impression that the matter was given the conventional endorsement of the Cabinet, as we would expect in regard to such a controversial and sweeping measure. That is the sadness of the background to the Bill, which was referred on Second Reading.

During the Second Reading debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Sir J. Page) declared himself enthusiastically in favour of abolition of the GLC. I have not had a word with him about referring to what he said, but shall try to do so as soon as possible later this evening. After the Second Reading debate, one of my constituents told me that opinion in Harrow appeared to be evenly divided about abolition of the GLC and its replacement by a successor authority. I do not get that impression. I do not wish to make a Second Reading speech, but I must observe that I have been inundated with letters from people, including Conservatives, who have expressed gross dismay at the essence of the Bill and what it stands for. As several hon. Members have dealt with the metropolitan counties, I hope that I shall be forgiven for dwelling on the GLC.

Because he was interrupted so much, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West did not have time in his Second Reading speech to discuss the Bill or the proposal to abolish the GLC, but he referred to the disastrous effect of the GLC in regard to roads and said that, 15 years ago, he had tried to get a road in his constituency put right. The only problem is that the road was not in his constituency then and it is not in his constituency now. I hope to be able to bring that to the attention of my hon. Friend soon. However, that example shows how important it is, whether on Second Reading or in Committee, for right hon. and hon. Members to refer to the Bill.

Sadly, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) did not deploy a good argument and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) came in but briefly and made a somewhat incoherent speech. Admittedly, he had not read the Bill or the amendments, but he has now disappeared, although right hon. and hon. Members might want to refer to what he said.

I shall now return to the valid objections to the Bill and therefore to an expression of support for amendments that are designed to ask the Government, with humility but forcibly and reasonably, to think again carefully about this proposal. Amendment No 1 proposes a Royal Commission. There are tempting arguments in support of that and I and other Conservative Members might consider doing that in the absence of my right hon. Friend advancing reasonable arguments to the contrary.

Several Conservative Members have proposed a formula that would produce an intra-parliamentary inquiry, which might take less time than a Royal Commission. It gives me no pleasure to support the Opposition amendment, but there are times when right hon. and hon. Members have to get up and say what they believe is right. A Royal Commission might be the right method. I mean no disrespect to parliamentarians here and in another place, but it is the only mechanism of getting a profound and outside independent inquiry which, by solemn political and constitutional convention, is an absolute engagement. It has always been the case that there should not be legislative and constitutional upheavals of local government structures without such an inquiry.

I should like to refer to what *The Sunday Times* said on 25 November 1984—just after the Bill was published. It said that there was not a strong case for keeping the Greater Manchester council. I disagree, but shall not go into that argument now. It continued:

"People do however talk of themselves as Londoners. The capital is a recognisable geographical and social entity. It requires a London-wide authority to maintain its cultural and economic viability, and we hope that in its passage through Parliament, the Bill will be amended accordingly.

Even then, the Bill will be a monument to a missed opportunity. Local government can only be reformed once in a while. What was needed, this time, was a radical, fully thought-through reorganisation, embracing finance as well as structure, thus treating the whole malaise. Instead, in its haste to despatch Ken Livingstone and his comrades, the government has produced a bosched job."

Two months before, the *Financial Times* of 20 September 1984 said, in what is now a well-known quotation which was referred to on Second Reading, similar things about London being a collection of villages but a cohesive capital city of international importance, and therefore needing commensurate treatment in its structural organisation.

I have always been naive in assuming, in an old-fashioned way, that the Tory party in government has not historically been in the business of creating huge political upheavals, least of all on a decision based on people being in a political bad temper and when that decision would not save money. Indeed, the proposition will cost London ratepayers more. If the Bill goes through without being amended as proposed, it will create such a disastrous upheaval in London that it cannot possibly go into

Committee upstairs without the commitment of a huge amount of time to examine it properly. The Government have the opportunity to accept these amendments or later ones tonight. As *The Sunday Times* said recently:

"a lingering question hangs over the great investment of Parliamentary time and political energy about to take place. What relevance does all this re-jigging of boundaries and functions have for the real agenda of British political economy in the second half of the 1980s?"

I hope that my right hon. Friend and the Minister, who have the unenviable, indeed, hapless and miserable task of getting this awful Bill through will bear in mind that a change of mind in the face of overwhelming evidence from all parts of the House, far from being a sign of weakness, is a sign of political strength.

Mr. Heddle: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dykes: I have little time.

Mr. Heddle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Committee has listened, as it always does, with great respect to what he has said. As he prefaced his speech with a reference to my speech, perhaps he would make it quite clear how he stood on the abolition of the GLC in the general election of June 1983. From where I was in Mid-Staffordshire, I got the impression that a considerable number of voters in Greater London supported the abolition of the GLC, as is evidenced by the presence of many of my hon. Friends who perhaps owe their present position to the wealth of opinion against the GLC at that election.

Mr. Dykes: I gave way only because I referred to my hon. Friend's remarks. I am not sad that I did, because it gives me the opportunity to repeat that I was a co-author of the 1976 pamphlet, which the Minister also wrote. Pamphlets carry collective responsibility, especially when the chapters do not have attributional names attached to them. We all enthusiastically said that London needed a strategic Londonwide authority. *[Interruption.]* Whips do not normally intervene from a sedentary position, but I recognise the exception this time.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West) *rose*——

6.30 pm

Mr. Dykes: I shall not give way at the moment. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) has not been present for long. I should like to continue, because I do not wish to take up too much time.

The co-authors also said that such an authority could be called the Greater London council, or, as that was rather a corny name, something else. In January, February and March 1983, through the local press and local broadcasting in London, I made it crystal clear that I was opposed to the abolition of the GLC. That was manifest in my election campaign. I was asked two questions on the subject during the campaign and I made that clear when I answered them. Everyone, locally and throughout London, knew that that was my consistent position.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin *rose*——

Mr. Dykes: I shall not give way, although I shall on a later occasion. I am explaining my position. I have already taken rather a long time to do so, and I am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak.

It is definitely not a sign of weakness for a Government to listen to arguments and realise that second thoughts are a legitimate part of the democratic response of any great Government. Because such solemn issues about democracy and accountability are at stake, the Government would receive tremendous applause by doing so. Although it has been said before, I commend to the Committee again the utterances of a courageous Conservative at county hall, Bernard Brook-Partridge, in his article,

"Whither, not wither, local government?"

He said that this was not merely a disagreement about policy but

"a dispute about principle and constitutional legitimacy."

That is the anxiety that assails those of us who are against these proposals in detail and, therefore, in favour of this kind of amendment, and who are worried about the constitutional background to them. We know the history of the matter. On all previous occasions Conservative Governments have endorsed independent outside reports and external examinations that have concluded that London needs a Londonwide authority.

Once again we thank the wisdom of the *Financial Times*. A final paragraph of its leading article today entitled

"The reform of local councils",

states:

"London is a conundrum."

Perhaps the paper is returning to the theme enunciated in September. It continues:

"At least in the metropolitan areas the major cities such as Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, will still have a city-wide authority after abolition. The capital will not. The Government has had no answer to critics who point out the absurdity of ignoring the common interests which exist between the disparate villages and communities which make up one of the world's largest and most important capitals. The case for abolishing the Greater London Council is clearly much weaker than for the metropolitan counties and, on present evidence, ought not to proceed at all.

An opportunity for sensible reform has been missed."

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West) *rose*——

Mr. Dykes: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not giving way. I am aware that I am taking up time. I know that the Government Whip would like me to give way, but I have given way several times already.

Without burdening the Committee with too many quotations, I commend to all hon. Members who want a genuinely constructive solution to the question of the future of London the article by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). In an article in *The Guardian* of 7 December he concluded:

"There is however another option which could meet the obvious need to curb the wildly excessive discretionary spending powers of the GLC, to rationalise the strategic government of London and yet retain an elected voice for our capital city".

He was referring to a total of 4 per cent. of the GLC's total spending, and the 1·5 per cent. of the most contentious areas of its spending, with which I also violently disagree. The 4 per cent. is the same ratio as that which existed when Horace Cutler was in charge of the GLC.

The article states that the option is

"to institute a directly elected representative body for London whose functions and powers would be determined by Parliament, following a Select Committee Inquiry."

I shall not say any more about that in case I am out of order, because it will be the subject of a later amendment.

Whatever the form of the inquiry, whether it is a Royal Commission or not — there are arguments that that

[Mr. Dykes]

would be the best way—it might conclude that that would be its option because the present legislative proposal is a recipe for complete chaos, and disaster in future. That is why I support the amendment.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is a pleasure to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). If the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) wishes to speak, the House will be delighted to listen to him making a speech rather than to his comments from a sedentary position.

The hon. Gentleman made a good speech, as did the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on Monday night. It is often said that the Labour party is intolerant of opposition. My eyes have been opened to the intolerance of Conservative Members to dissident voices within their ranks. That is a matter of especial concern when those dissident voices are clearly talking good sense. I ask Conservative Members for one moment to lay aside some of the prejudices that they bring with them into the Chamber and to reflect on what their reaction would be, had a Labour Government brought forward proposals to restructure local government based on such a sketchy undertaking in a manifesto.

That is the point at issue, and the central feature of the amendment. It is intellectually insulting for the House to consider how the Bill was formulated. We have heard how the abolition of the GLC got into the Conservative party manifesto. There seems to be no argument that it was introduced at the behest of the Prime Minister and against the advice of her party policy committee. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) gave us that evidence.

I understand that Prime Ministers tend at times to say, "Put this in the manifesto, or else there will be trouble". The Labour party has experienced that. A previous Labour Prime Minister made it clear that if a proposal to abolish the House of Lords were in the manifesto, he would resign. I do not know whether the Prime Minister made that sort of threat to her colleagues, but the manifesto undertaking was clearly there because she decided that it should be.

On many occasions the Secretary of State said that discussions had taken place a year before the undertaking to abolish the GLC was written into the manifesto. However, he has not said with whom those discussions took place. Did they take place in the Cabinet or in the Department of the Environment? On whose authority did they take place? What was the outcome of the discussions? The only evidence that the House has is that the Prime Minister insisted that the abolition of the GLC should be written into the manifesto. That is the intellectual insult that has been delivered to the House and the country.

Mr. Maples: The hon. Gentleman pretends constantly that the proposal to abolish the GLC is a diabolical, secret Tory plot. How does he square that with the fact that the Labour party programme of 1982 called for the same thing? It called for a root and branch reorganisation, and stated:

"We favour the creation in England and Wales of unitary authorities."

Mr. Banks: That is not a valid point. There is nothing wrong with any Government considering the structure of local government.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that that is precisely what this series of amendments proposes should occur? Therefore, the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) will presumably support them.

Mr. Banks: If we were debating a Bill that had been the product of a Royal Commission inquiry or a public inquiry, and it was based on a measured consideration of the needs of local government in London and the rest of the country, I admit that we might still oppose it. That is a function of opposition. But the Government's case would have been much stronger, because they could have prayed in aid the fact that the Bill was based on evidence taken by Royal Commission or by a public inquiry. They cannot say that. All they can say is that the manifesto said that they would do it.

I have some sympathy with a Government who say, "It is a manifesto commitment and we shall carry it out." However, to take up the words of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, it is still for the Government to prove their case to the House. As he said, that case has not been proved. It is symptomatic of the failure to prove the case that there have been so many weak arguments from the few Conservative Members who are prepared to speak in favour of the proposals.

The Herbert commission that sat between 1957 and 1960 took millions of words in evidence. It produced a unanimous report that had great standing in local government, in the House and in the country as a whole. Hon. Members should contrast the Herbert commission's report with the back-of-the-fag-packet undertaking that brought about this proposal. How can we contrast the 66 words in a Conservative party manifesto — by all accounts written in by the Prime Minister, unaided, and against the advice of her party policy committee—with all the words of the Herbert commission, which suggested the present structure of local government in London?

Most of the Herbert commission's views were supported by the Marshall inquiry of 1978. There were two major inquiries into the structure of local government in London, both conducted under Conservative Governments. That must be contrasted with 66 words in the Conservative party manifesto.

I hope that when the Labour party is in government it will carry out its manifesto pledges, but I hope—indeed, I know—that they will have been thought out in greater depth and with more intellectual effort than has this back-of-the-fag-packet policy.

I wonder whether Ministers have re-read the report of the Marshall inquiry. I am especially interested to know whether the Minister for Local Government has done so. I will not go through all the evidence that he gave to the inquiry, because I am sure that it will be mentioned many times during the long Committee nights until March. He will have to do better than to say that it was not really his evidence. He carries much responsibility for what he wrote in 1978, with much of which the Opposition agree. Many of his proposals were similar to those contained in the 1981 Labour party manifesto. I congratulate him on his prescience in that respect, and I am only sorry that he is now trying to distance himself from the views that he held those few years ago.

6.45 pm

Hon. Members will remember that the Labour GLC also made a manifesto pledge in 1981, when this trouble

started. Had the Labour party not won the GLC elections in 1981, and had Mr. Kenneth Livingstone not been elected to the leadership of the GLC, I am convinced that we would not now be discussing the abolition of the GLC. The GLC's manifesto undertaking to introduce cheap fares in London was challenged in the courts by Bromley council—an authority that now supports the abolition of the GLC. Although the GLC prayed in aid the fact that there was a manifesto undertaking, the then Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning, said:

"A manifesto issued by a political party—in order to get votes—is not to be taken as gospel. It is not to be regarded as a bond, signed, sealed and delivered. It may contain—and often does contain—promises and proposals that are quite unworkable or impossible of obtainment. When the party gets into power, it should consider any proposal or promise afresh—on its merits—without any feeling of being obliged to honour it or being committed to it. It should then consider what is best to do in the circumstances of the case and to do it if it is practicable and fair."

When Lord Denning uttered those words in overturning the GLC's manifesto commitment to reduce fares in London, I do not remember many Conservative Members protesting that it was a manifesto undertaking that should be upheld. In the circumstances, it comes ill from the Conservative party to say that the manifesto is all, that the undertaking is the only relevant thing and that no other considerations should be entertained.

The Herbert commission, the Marshall inquiry and the Layfield inquiry have all considered the structure and financing of local government. I noted the speech of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle). I tried to intervene because I wished to ask a question about a point that he made. I hope that in future, in the interests of good debate, he will give way rather than steadfastly refuse to answer the point. I shall gladly give way to him if he wishes to answer my question now. Does he support the idea in the Layfield report of a local income tax? Many Opposition Members argue that rates are not a fair form of taxation, mainly because they have a regressive impact and they take no account of the ability to pay of those who must foot the rates bill. Few Conservative Members have supported the idea of a local income tax. The Layfield inquiry also suggested greater local authority powers; that again is something with which the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire has not come to grips.

For many years, we have had major inquiries into the structure of government in London. Fights between county hall and central Government are almost part of our historical process. But every change in local government structure in London—I have confined my remarks to London for obvious reasons—has followed intense consultation and study. The Bill is not worthy of consideration by the House. It is a fag-packet proposal written into the manifesto by the Prime Minister in a fit of great passion. The House should not discuss it tonight in a fit of great passion.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): I apologise to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for not being here to hear his speech, as I was in another Committee.

I have been a Government Whip and was an Under-Secretary with responsibility for local government affairs when various new procedures were brought in in 1972-73, with the creation of the metropolitan counties. I take full responsibility, having been a Minister, for what we did then, but in retrospect I think that the creation of those councils was a mistake. However, I am extremely attracted by the arguments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour), my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and others who have said that at the moment, the Government, both with their rate-capping Bill and this Bill, are treating the symptoms and not the cause of local government problems. Therefore, what we need and what this and other amendments are suggesting, is a proper, independent look at both the structure and finance of local government, as the two essentially go together.

The Bill is a major reform of the structure, but with no independent inquiry. When I was shadow spokesman for local government from 1975 to the end of 1977, about the same time that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East was writing his pamphlets, I spent my time going up and down the country speaking with the full backing of the shadow Cabinet. I was saying that a Conservative Government believed in local government and wanted to see more powers devolved from central to local government, and not the other way round. I shall not bore my right hon. and hon. Friends with the speeches that I made then, but I draw their attention to a speech that I made in Gloucester, which sets out our philosophy in great detail. There was a Conservative Central Office handout running to 14 pages, so important was the policy statement on this. Time after time, I underlined that the fact that we trusted local government and wanted to devolve powers to it, because it was locally accountable. A considerable number of powers will be going from the Greater London and metropolitan county councils to the Government. That is against what I believed in at that time, and still believe in today, and it is a profoundly un-Tory approach to these issues.

There is a central problem, which has led to this Bill, and which could have been tackled by an independent inquiry or a Royal Commission. It is that at the moment we have taxation without representation in local government. In my constituency of Ashford, about 30 per cent. of the local government electorate pay domestic rates. In the borough of Lambeth, where I have a flat, 22 per cent. of the local government electorate pay rates. That is a farcical situation and it is no good wittering on about Mr. Livingstone, Mr. Knight or anybody else until we can put that right, so that when people are voting for local government they realise that they are not only voting but will have directly to meet some of the costs themselves. When only one in five in some of the London boroughs, and even fewer than a third in my constituency, pay rates, clearly something is wrong. To tamper with that through this Bill or through rate capping is putting the cart before the horse.

Since the Layfield inquiry, modern computer technology and other developments have made it easier to have a system of local income tax, should that be the way to go, or a local service tax, or whatever. In the 1970s, it would have been difficult to do that, because the technology was not there to do it without creating vast numbers of civil servants and bureaucrats. If we wished to introduce such a system now, the technology would be there.

This Bill has been introduced without a proper investigation or report. Many of us believe that such a report would be not only practically sensible but constitutionally necessary. All the facts that have been given tonight show that on every major constitutional reform—the abolition of the largest authority in the

[Mr. Keith Speed]

United Kingdom is certainly a major constitutional reform —there has been a proper, wide-ranging committee of inquiry or a Royal Commission.

I shall not stray into the details of how this manifesto commitment was arrived at. I shall just say that there was a manifesto commitment about the reform of the domestic rating system, which I believe would still be possible, but that was put on one side. Therefore, we have establishd that manifesto commitments are not the Ark of the Covenant. Anyway, there is a way to get over this manifesto commitment, as Mr. Greengross, the Conservative leader in the GLC, has proved in his excellent pamphlet.

Finance is the key and heart of the problem of local government, not only in London but outside as well, but it is not being examined. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced at the party conference that another investigation would be set up, but by the time that that report is finished and there is an effective prospect of action, it will be after the next general election. By that time, the Bill will have been enacted, the GLC will have gone and there will be more central control. It will go against what many of us on the Conservative Benches, and, I am sure, even my right hon. Friend himself, who is as good a Tory as I am, believe in, which is to have local accountability and not to bring things back to Whitehall and central Government, which cannot be right.

It is breathtaking to go around the major cities in the western world and see how in each one people are either New Yorkers, Berliners, Parisiens or Londoners. Each one has a major, directly elected and accountable local authority looking after it. Once the Bill has gone through, this country will be unique in not having such a body for its major cities. What is more, that will have happened without the benefit of a rational report. That is not acceptable. I am sorry, but I believe that this is against the Conservative tradition, and I have been a member of the Conservative party for 34 years. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to look at this again, not least because of the financial and other problems and not least because, while abolishing the GLC will abolish Mr. Livingstone, it will solve no problems for Londoners or the Conservative party.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I hope that the Government will listen to the comments of experienced and caring members of their party as well as to the arguments from Opposition Benches. Hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) with experience of local government, and as a member of a Government, and other hon. Members should be listened to, if the Government are to restore any credibility to the claim that they have listened to anybody since they introduced the proposals.

Amendment No. 35 in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends is being discussed with this group of amendments and will be voted on at the end of our debate. My colleagues and I will vote in support of any of the amendments that are put to the vote because we believe that at this stage it is fundamentally important that the Government recognise that they cannot sufficiently impartially and adequately, and in the time that they have given themselves, allow for a proper reorganisation of local government in England. That is not possible, and it will not happen. Unless the Government allow some expertise, intelligence and advice to come their way, we shall be heading for an unsatisfactory and troublesome state in Britain in the years ahead.

The result of all this will be that the Government will go down in history with a reputation of having been arrogant and undemocratic. That will be to their detriment. Although they may not care to discriminate, Conservative Members who come from constituencies such as Harrow and other places on the boundaries of Greater London can speak with more authority of the feelings of their constituents on this issue than can such hon. Members as the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle). He could not have had the abolition of the GLC as the fundamental point on which he fought the last election, no matter what his colleagues were saying.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) made the most amazing and incoherent contribution. I hope that it will be reported back at his home that he came here to represent his constituents not having bothered to read either the Bill or the amendments. He said that he did not want to make himself a self-appointed expert. The trouble with the Bill is that the Government have effectively made themselves self-appointed experts. They could claim that they obtained their authority to be the experts from the election. Of course, we now have a new theory in the Conservative party's political philosophy—the doctrine of the mandate. But it must first be remembered that at the last general election the Conservative party's vote fell, and thus its authority with regard to this proposal is at least arguable. Furthermore, we all know that the election of a Government does not necessarily mean that each point of their manifesto was endorsed. It is certainly alien to the Conservative party to claim that it is committed to the doctrine of the manifesto. Many arguments have already been well presented on that point, and I hope that they will serve to debunk the idea that the doctrine of the manifesto lies easily in Conservative mouths.

7 pm

The arrogance and undemocratic nature of the proposal is borne out by the fact that the Secretary of State and his colleagues regularly reassert that the counties' powers will be returned to the boroughs. In London's case that is so fundamentally inaccurate as to show that the Government obviously have not listened to the volume of accurate evidence that has been given.

The time factor is not a persuasive argument against there being some form of public inquiry, because if the Government so wished, they could accommodate an inquiry within this Parliament's timetable that would allow proposals to be put through thereafter. But there should be a public inquiry, because, unlike the occasion when the GLC and the metropolitan counties were set up, we are now seeing for the first time in the reform of English local government a dismantling and dismembering process. That is quite different from setting up such bodies. In the Conservative party's election address there was, indeed, a proposal to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties, but there were no details as to the destinations of those powers. Although we would all accept the proposition of the hon. Member for Ashford that as much power as possible should be devolved locally, that will not be the result of this legislation. Thus the Government

cannot claim that they have put a simple proposition to devolve power to the people or that that is what they are doing in the Bill.

Mr. Maples: In the unlikely event that the alliance had won the last election, would the hon. Gentleman have proposed the establishment of a Royal Commission to consider its manifesto proposal to abolish a tier of local government?

Mr. Hughes: Quite clearly the answer is yes. Indeed, we specifically said so. We said that the order of events should be that we would establish, with consultation, regional government in England. I think that it is highly likely that, before the next election, the Labour party will also hold that view. I do not critisise it for coming to that view, but I think that that is the way that its policy is moving. Thereafter changes in powers between levels of local government within the regions would be the subject of discussion within them. If regions wanted slightly different forms, they could have them, because that is what devolution and decentralisation is all about.

It is not always appropriate to apply the same principles to all cities. As London has asserted over the years, it is certainly inappropriate that a capital should have the same local government structure as other cities. After all, it inevitably has a different nature. That is why it is always argued that the Metropolitan police must be under the direct control of the Home Secretary, as opposed to being under the control of a democratic police authority. Thus, we clearly said and would, I hope, never do other than ensure, that there would be an independent and proper inquiry before any fundamental local government change took place.

Until now, that was of course the Tory position. In 1970, the Tory manifesto—which was written after the Redcliffe-Maud commission had reported—said:

"We are convinced of the need for reform of the present structure of local government. Unfortunately, the Terms of Reference given to the Redcliffe-Maud and Wheatley Royal Commissions which examined this problem in England and in Scotland respectively were restricted. As a result, the crucial questions of devolution of power from the central government and of local government finance were not adequately dealt with in their Reports. We believe that these matters must be considered and that those concerned in local government must be fully consulted before final decisions are made."

Then, and perhaps most importantly, the manifesto said:

"We will bring foreward a sensible measure of local government reform which will involve a genuine devolution of power from the central government and will provide for the existence of a two-tier structure. There will be full consultation about the pattern of boundaries and the effect of changes upon existing resources of local government."

Even after the Royal Commission had reported, the Conservative party that gained office in 1970 — the Secretary of State was then a member of the party—said that there would be thereafter further and proper consultation. After that, the changes were brought about.

Whenever changes were made it was never even contemplated that such a substantial and radical constitutional change could be entered into without an impartial and objective inquiry. The Liberal party, together with its alliance partner, proposes a series of local inquiries. They have a specific role. Indeed, I hope that the Secretary of State will accept from me—as I am sure that he will in view of his legal background—that they have a perfectly proper constitutional role which could be used in these circumstances. The special report of the Council on Tribunals, which was published in January 1980, states:

"Powers to hold statutory inquiries have also existed for many years. Their essential purpose is two-fold: to provide Ministers with factual reports and recommendations which form a basis for policy decisions, and to ensure that citizens whose interests are affected have an opportunity of examining and probing the issues and putting their objections."

One of the most eminent constitutional lawyers of this century, Professor de Smith, had some relevant things to say in his last major book on this subject. I shall quote just two sentences, as they include examples that relate to this debate. He said:

"Local inquiries are used for three main purposes. As a means of consulting and informing local opinion, and gleaning local information as to the likely impact of a proposed administrative decision (for example, to alter constituency or local boundaries, or to amalgamate police forces)"—

among other things, this Bill involves changing the structure of police forces——

"affecting the interests of persons and bodies in that locality."

It was then said—and I accept it—that:

"This slows down the pace of decision-making but provides the decision-maker with a better fund of knowledge."

It is important that the fund of knowledge should be accurate and generally available, so that even if the Government ultimately choose to ignore it, they do so in full knowledge of what they are doing and cannot then be blamed for what they will be principally blamed for after this legislation, which is perhaps not that they carried out a reform but that they did not consult.

At the next election I imagine that politically the Government's greatest weakness—as many Conservative Members know—will be that there was no inquiry. It does not matter whether or not that inquiry was into matters such as those gone into by the report of PA Management Consultants on the metropolitan counties. The fact would be that there was no inquiry, the Government had not listened and they had no objective evidence. Those factors will lead to a weakness that they will never be able to justify later.

All commentators, and particularly *The Times* of 24 November, have said that, as a result, this Bill has an unstable impermanent air and is a breeding ground of discontent. Consequently, in five or six years' time the House will have to go through the exercise again. It will be the taxpayers and ratepayers who pay for that. The Government will not do so, because they have no money other than that which they glean from this country's citizens. If we make a mistake this time, it will be the Government's fault. Indeed, it will be an extremely costly mistake.

The advantage of our proposal is that there would be different solutions for different areas. Perhaps districts on the edge of metropolitan counties such as Merseyside—for example, Wirral or Sefton—could establish a case for running their own services rather than being encompassed by the broad brush approach of the Bill, which is a two-stage approach—in the first instance a joint board and then the opportunity to opt out at a later date. Such a proposal would allow local people, not in a politicised or polemical way—including representatives at district and county level, hon. Members and the public generally — to put before an inspector specific ideas upon which he could report, and which could provide a

[Mr. Hughes]

factual basis for discussion in the House. It would be without the quite clear prejudice that the Government have brought to the issue.

One argument must be laid to rest, because the Government continually seek to use it in support of their proposition. They say that it is not true that throughout western Europe there are authorities for capital cities. The Institute of Local Government Studies — a highly respected body—specifically studied the administration of metropolitan areas in western democracies. In its report it states:

"metropolitan structures and powers are generally the result of prolonged local study, debate and consultation, in order to set up arrangements which have as wide as possible multi-party consensus and may therefore be expected to be relatively stable. Commonly their operation is the subject of thorough review by independent commissions, as well as by parliamentary committees, and changes tend to be incremental . . . The direction of development is strongly towards . . . decentralisation."

The report ends:

"British local government is a frail and vulnerable plant compared with that in other Western European Countries, lacking their constitutional shield and their high levels of connection with central government."

It is untrue to say that in any other western European country there is not a tier of government between central Government and the lowest tier of local government. I hope that the Secretary of State will not use that argument again, because there is no evidence to support it.

There are two options tonight. We either have quick justice or we have good justice; we either have quick law or we have good law. I hope that at even this late stage the Government will accept that, because the matter is of such fundamental importance. As we go into this long, proper and considered period of Committee, it is far better to have a good law at the end of the process. We shall achieve that only with independent evidence and an independent inquiry. If we do not, there will be muddle, it will be a mistake, and we shall all pay for it and regret it.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): Like the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), I hope that the Government will listen. However, judging by their recent record on local government legislation, there is not much hope of their doing so. If they do not, although they will get their legislation through Parliament I fear that they will create a banana skin of proportions that even they have not yet discovered.

I wish to take up a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). He asked what a successor Londonwide authority would do. I am not saying that Lord Marshall was 100 per cent. right, but it is worth recording that he undertook an inquiry at the behest of the last Conservative leader of the GLC. He was given a free hand to respond to any criticism and to make any recommendations that he felt inclined to make after his inquiries—including the possibility of the abolition of the GLC. He did not reach that conclusion. Indeed, he identified 38 functions that a metropolitan authority should fulfill.

The GLC currently exercises 27 of those 38 functions. The London Boroughs Association, in its response to the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities", also identified 27 functions that should be managed by a Londonwide authority, and which could not be managed by individual local authorities. It is not good enough to say that there is not a job for a Londonwide authority.

7.15 pm

Mr. Maples: I accept that some functions remain, but it is difficult to accept that any of them is important enough to necessitate the creation of a special Londonwide authority to manage it.

Mr. Morrison: I am not saying that Lord Marshall is absolutely right. However, he recommended an increase in the number of functions, not a decrease. At least he went into the issue in some depth, as others have done —for example, Mr. Alan Greengross, who was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed). Those with experience of London government believe strongly that it is impossible for London to be administered properly without some Londonwide authority. If an inquiry was set up, I believe that it would reach the same conclusion. That is why the Government do not want an inquiry. I intend to support the amendment.

Our manifesto said that we would abolish the metropolitan counties and the GLC and return most of their functions to the boroughs and districts. In principle, I am not against the abolition of the GLC or the metropolitan councils. There is plenty of scope for evolving the GLC. However, it is absolutely certain that most of the functions under this Bill will not be returned to the boroughs and districts. Many of the functions being taken from the GLC and given either to boroughs or quangos have never been administered by the boroughs, so there is no question of returning them to the boroughs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has already referred to the leading article in today's *Financial Times*. I suppose that the nearest the *Financial Times* comes to being a Socialist newspaper is the fact that it is printed on pink paper. It is generally thought to be a Conservative paper, albeit one that believes in good administration and good sense. The article stated:

"But there are certain criteria which must be fulfilled for changes to be acceptable."

The article went on:

"The first is that the new arrangements stand a reasonable chance of being an improvement on the old. The second is that accountability is not reduced, so that pressure for efficiency and sensitivity to local aspirations is not diminished. The third is that democracy and democratic principles are neither weakened nor violated.

The Bill fails on all three counts."

Later the article stated:

"The three key areas requiring amendment are the Government's reserve powers, joint boards and London. The Bill is littered with reserve powers to give a degree of centralised control over local issues which makes efficient service provision less, rather than more, likely."

As I have always understood it, the Conservative party's principle and, perhaps, part of its philosophy, is that there should be the maximum possible distribution of power; yet in this Bill the Secretary of State tends to take unto himself these reserve powers. Day after day, week after week, month after month, leading politicians and great statesmen—even Lord Stockton, in his maiden speech in the other place—have criticised the degree of centralisation in the state. The Government's response is to make the state more centralised. That is an extraordinarily contradictory attitude. It is true that, under

this Bill, some powers would go to the boroughs, but many more would go to the quangos or, indirectly, to Whitehall. Worst of all, there are rows of reserve powers.

The GLC has rightly been criticised for wasting an enormous amount of money on advertisements. The natural inclination of some of us who support the Conservative party is to believe that the advertisements do not tell the true story. Last week, not for the first time, a number of national papers contained an advertisement headed:

"Who Patrick Jenkin plans to put in the place of London's democratically elected councillors."

Beneath the heading, there were nine photographs of my right hon. Friend who is described as the head of education, planning, traffic control, fire service, housing improvements, arts, waste disposal, grants to voluntary groups and flooding and land drainage. I said to myself, "Rubbish, that simply cannot be true." Unfortunately, on looking into the matter one discovers that, because of the reserve powers, there is a degree of truth in that advertisement. Again the point is made that the Government intend centralising power.

I do not want to go through the justification for each of the nine claims, except with regard to education. If enacted, the Bill would give the Secretary of State the power to review the functions of the Inner London education authority and to transfer education to any of the inner London boroughs either before or after 1991. The Secretary of State for Education and Science will have the power to control for the first three years staffing levels and budgets. Apart from the fact that no other education authority is subject to such controls or to the permanent threat of break-up into smaller units, the provisions that leave my right hon. Friend with these powers are guaranteed to ensure that ILEA will live in a state of total uncertainty until 1991, or possibly later. I doubt that that will lead to good administration. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will be able to assure me that it will lead to good administration, but it is difficult to believe that that will happen.

I am utterly convinced that, if there is not a proper inquiry into the future of London and the metropolitan boroughs before this legislation is passed, we shall end up with a measure which will provide, at best, poor administration and, at worst, complete chaos.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I support the amendments. I suppose that it is a character defect on my part that I expect others, when I discuss issues dispassionately, rationally and intellectually, both inside and outside the Chamber, to respond in the same fashion. I am always confounded in my expectations, and I am afraid that that happened once again as a result of the Second Reading. My doubts about these amendments have been resolved. This morning, as I came to the House, I had grave doubts about the desirability of setting up a Royal Commission. I am now absolutely convinced of its desirability.

On Second Reading, I raised two issues — first, damage to the arts in Hackney and, secondly, the visual arts and the continuing control of the Hayward gallery by the Arts Council, which would result if this legislation were passed. I then wrote to the chairman of the Arts Council, Sir William Rees-Mogg, and suggested that I and a couple of my advisers should see him to discuss some of the issues. Hackney and the visual arts and the control of Hayward gallery were the only issues I suggested we should discuss.

Imagine my astonishment when, this morning, I received a letter from Sir William Rees-Mogg which stated:

"Dear Mr. Sedgemore

I do not see any point in having a discussion with you until you have made a further study of the Arts' Council's work. If you believe that our support for the Regional Arts Associations or such institutions as the Notting Hill Carnival, the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool or the Whitechapel Gallery represent the notion of an 'exclusive Mandarin art', or that they are 'restrictive, elitist, oligarchic and discriminatory', then it seems to me you insult the institutions that we do support. If you are not aware of our support for these institutions, then you should reconsider your position in the light of the work that we actually do."

Leaving aside the complete irrelevance of that letter to the concern I expressed about the Arts Council's marginalising, rejecting and defining as bad the work of women artists at the Hayward gallery, the chairman of that unelected quango is saying that he is not prepared to talk to the elected representatives of this country about major items of legislation before we reach the relevant clauses in Committee. That is one of the most powerful arguments one could adduce for setting up some type of inquiry or some type of Royal Commission to discuss some of these issues.

I shall bring out some of the constitutional issues involved in supporting these amendments if I read briefly what I am thinking of saying in reply to Sir William Rees-Mogg. My handwritten draft states:

"Dear Sir William Rees-Mogg,

Thank you for your letter of 10 Dec, which I was disturbed to read. You are a public servant and the staff under your control at the Arts Council are paid in part out of the taxes of the people of Hackney. For good or ill I am one of their elected representatives. As such my constituents want me to discuss with you or your officers two issues, namely,

(1) what the Arts Council will be able to do for Hackney when the GLC is abolished and, with it, its policy for the arts and the funds which accompany it, and

(2) what the Arts Council intends for the future of the South Bank if it takes over the complex under the Bill, and what plans it has to change its damaging policies over the Hayward Gallery, particularly in relation to the Gallery's treatment of women artists.

At our discussions, which I am sure that you will agree on mature reflection should take place, my constituents will expect me both to listen and to make suggestions. I have never heard of a public figure in your position refusing to see a Member of Parliament. If Ministers, chairpersons of nationalised industries, leaders of professional association, quango chiefs, and editors of great national newspapers can do so, I am not sure why you are refusing. As the Committee stage of the Local Government Bill proceeds, Conservative Ministers will be asking you for your briefings to deal with various amendments to the Bill which I shall put down in clauses which deal with the arts. In that context, your refusal to talk to a Labour MP whom you have in the past been only too happy to invite to PR luncheons will be seen as political bias. Although you are a Conservative, you are supposed to appear to be even-handed about these matters."

I then go on to explain that Sir William Rees-Mogg does not seem to understand the important practical and ideological issues involved in the Bill and that it is important for Members of Parliament to have access to him to discuss the issues involved.

7.30 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: There is one small textual amendment that my hon. Friend might like to make to his letter before he sends it. Will he make the abolition of the GLC conditional—"if" rather than "when"?

Mr. Sedgemore: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. We were discussing matters this afternoon in an unnamed Committee Room of the House, and I am sure that he will get his way. "If" will be the paramount word in the letter. I undertake to write that excellent amendment into my letter.

It is pathetic that the chairman of an unelected quango, when asked to discuss future major issues that we are dealing with in Committee, should, in effect, put his finger in his mouth and say, "I am not prepared to talk to Brian Sedgemore." We should not perhaps be too worried about what Sir William Rees-Mogg says, because anyone who can do what he did 10 years ago, and write a book and say that our economic problems could be solved by God and the gold standard is no doubt capable of writing a load of tosh about the Arts Council and misunderstanding the ideology of the authority that he runs.

We should send a clear message to Sir William Rees-Mogg from the House this evening. It is that his arrogance and ignorance are not just damaging to the impartiality of the Arts Council: they make it important that we have new procedures for considering Bills in the House. The amendments that we are talking about provide for an excellent procedure that we should have, perhaps not just on this but other Bills.

Mr. Soley: Any Secretary of State should be deeply disturbed by the number of people from all parts of the Committee and by the individuals and groups outside it who have condemned the Bill, not just because it is a bad Bill in terms of organisation, but because it is thought to be undemocratic. That is extremely important.

The problem for the Government is that many people inside and outside the Committee are deeply suspicious of their motives. It is important to put on record why we are suspicious and why many people outside the Committee, across the political spectrum, are suspicious of their motives. The first reason is that the authorities whom they seek to abolish are controlled by their political opponents. They are Labour authorities and a Conservative Government are seeking to abolish them.

I shall not build on my points in too much detail now but I may at another time in another place. The second point that needs to be borne in mind and which we have from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is that, because the Conservative party does not like the GLC's policies, it will abolish it.

Thirdly, the Government have made the point a number of times, inside and outside the House, that they want to cut public expenditure. We all know that they were elected on a ticket of cutting public expenditure and we all know that they have failed to cut central Government public expenditure. They have ended up trying to make local authorities cut their public expenditure for them. It is a classic case of, "Don't do as we do; do as we tell you."

The fourth reason for questioning the Government's motives is that it is becoming increasingly clear that they want to silence opposition. Let me spell that out. It is not just the silencing of Labour-controlled authorities, but what is perhaps more important and deeply disturbing, they wish to silence some of the minority groups that they do not like. That is why they have picked on the GLC.

I believe that the GLC has been far-sighted and brave in supporting many of the groups that it has. I wish to encourage it to do so, but the Government do not like that. No one gave the case away more than the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) when he went down what I regard as a profoundly dangerous road. He was saying that if we do not like what a local authority is raising money for, we should abolish that local authority because that level of rates should not be imposed on the individual. It follows that if a Government are spending the public's money in a way that is not popular, we should abolish the Government. I am all for abolishing the Government, but I wish to do it through the ballot box. I want that for local authorities as well.

This is a bad Bill. It is not just that the alternatives have not been thought out or that the many minority groups — the Victim Support Scheme, the ethnic minority groups—and major groups such as the police and fire service will be disrupted and disorganised as a result, but people here and outside profoundly distrust the Government's motives, and the Government must justify their actions.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: We have had an interesting and useful debate. I am sure that the Committee will forgive me if I say that much of it was a repeat of the arguments that were deployed by both sides of the House on Second Reading. I hope that the Committee will forgive me if I do not rehearse the arguments of principle on the main substance of the Bill.

The amendments call, in a variety of ways, for some form of inquiry from a Royal Commission at one end of the scale to a local inquiry of some kind, to which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke briefly.

I shall start by reminding the Opposition Front Bench what their environment spokesman said about the Labour party's attitude to structural reform of local government about three months before the 1983 election. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) told a Labour party conference:

> "We shall therefore legislate to create unitary district authorities which will be responsible for all the functions in their area that they can sensibly undertake. We shall, of course, consult carefully and genuinely before we introduce our legislation. However, we shall set up no more inquiries. We shall legislate and we shall legislate so that these reforms will be in force during the lifetime of the next Parliament."

If that was the view of the Labour party spokesman on the environment, I fail to understand how the Opposition have the effrontery to table and speak to this group of amendments. It is absurd. They make clear what they were going to do and that they would have no inquiries.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): We said we would consult.

Mr. Jenkin: I am coming to consultation. I take the point, but there is a second large hole in the arguments that have been addressed to the Committee about that. They said that they would undertake their reform of structure, with unitary authorities devolving to the local level as far as could sensibly be done. I repeat the words of the right hon. Member for Gorton:

"we shall set up no more inquiries. We shall legislate".

Mr. Tony Banks: In the context of those remarks by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), will the Secretary of State comment on the position of the Greater London council? Secondly, will he accept it from me that I disagree very strongly with the views expressed by my right hon. Friend? I ask my hon.

Friends to be as rational in approaching those remarks as I have asked Conservative Members to be in approaching the Government's proposals this evening.

Mr. Jenkin: I can understand that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) may disagree with what one of his party's Front Bench spokesmen said, but the point is undeniable. The Labour party made it clear at its national conference on local government that that was its intention. According to my research, the right hon. Member for Gorton, who was the Opposition spokesman on the environment, and who presumably held that shadow portfolio throughout the 1983 election, campaign, appears not to have addressed one word on radio, on television, or to any audience to which he put out a press release, on the subject of the Conservative manifesto commitment to do the same in the metropolitan areas and in Greater London.

The hon. Member referred to what the right hon. Member for Gorton said about the GLC. His view was clear and I quoted it on Second Reading. He said:

"We shouldn't regard the existence of the GLC as sacrosanct. In my view it is an enormous bureaucracy which has a dubious role to play."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 30.]

The right hon. Member for Gorton has never made any secret of his dislike of the metropolitan county councils and of his desire to see local government powers returned to the city of Manchester, where his constituency is. He has never made any secret of his views about the unsuitability of the GLC. He made it perfectly clear that if a Labour Government had been elected they would have legislated without any inquiry.

Therefore, I listened with some cynicism to speech after speech from Labour Members saying how disgraceful it is for the Government to proceed with this sensible reform of local government without having indulged in a Royal Commission, a committee of inquiry, an audit commission, a local inquiry or anything else. It is a lot of humbug.

Mr. Straw: It is not humbug, because we have a record in government of consulting to a very great degree, as the Secretary of State knows, in the area of local government. He knows that we did so in setting up the Redcliffe-Maud Commission. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) also consulted extensively before bringing forward proposals for a much more modest measure than the Bill before the House.

The Secretary of State apparently disagrees — I understand why — with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Therefore, should not the Secretary of State have established a proper inquiry into the proposals before going ahead?

7.45 pm

Mr. Jenkin: I am not expressing a view on whether I agree with what the right hon. Member for Gorton said. I am saying that it is sheer hypocrisy for Labour Members to chide us for proceeding with this reform without having an inquiry, when it is clear and on the record that their own Front Bench had committed their party to do precisely the same thing. *[Interruption.]* So let us hear no more about that. We have consulted widely on our proposals, and I shall itemise them. In response to the views expressed, we have made a number of changes in what we originally proposed, and we have now brought legislation to the House. I found it very strange to have to sit here for nearly three hours listening to abuse of the Government for not having an inquiry before proceeding with the Bill.

With regard to consultation, there is a huge hole in the arguments which have been addressed to the Government Benches——

Mr. Favell: My right hon. Friend has dealt with the humbug of the Labour party. The 1983 manifesto of the alliance says on page 24 that the alliance would

"revitalise local government, restoring its independence and its accountability to the local electorate by . . . simplifying the structure of local government to make it more effective by abolishing one of the existing tiers of local government. This will be done by stages against the background of our proposals for the development of regional government. It would inevitably involve the eventual abolition of the Metropolitan Counties."

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is right. I think that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) quoted the provision in the 1970 Conservative party manifesto, where it was said that inquiries would be set up.

There has been complete inconsistency in the arguments from the Opposition. On the one hand, we are accused of not having consulted properly on all the details of the proposed reform, and I refute that accusation. The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and one or two of my hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmore), charged the Government with preparing proposals which were not complete in every jot and tittle. We were accused of not having a proposal in the Bill for dealing with the Woolwich ferry. We were accused by my right hon. Friend of not having provided for precisely how the refuse disposal arrangements for London were to work. Yet, almost in the same breath, hon. Members have accused the Government of failing to consult.

Within a month or two of the general election we published a White Paper. As I said at the time, it was a White Paper with very green edges. It dealt in great detail with how the main proposal would be carried forward. Every chapter of the White Paper ended with a series of questions addressed to the readers. We made it clear that we were very prepared to listen to detailed arguments about the proposals.

Mr. Tony Banks: Yes, but the Government ignored them all.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is wrong, and I can give numerous examples showing that we took the fullest account of the views put to us by a wide range of people. We were prepared to listen to all the views that were put forward.

If there has been any lack of effective consultation on the details, the real blame rests with those authorities and those trade unions which have refused to enter into sensible bilateral discussion with the Government, with the staff commission or with anybody else, because they hoped that the whole thing would go away.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State explain why he has refused to offer the same amount of money to the staff affected by abolition or by transfer as his right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) did in regard to the housing transfer order in 1982 dealing with former GLC housing?

Mr. Jenkin: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that if the interests that he represents—I understand that he is sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees——

Mr. Corbyn: And I am proud of it.

Mr. Jenkin: I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman is proud of that; he would be proud of almost anything. If the union that sponsors him, which represents many local government employees, were prepared to respond to the invitation of the staff commission to discuss precisely that question, he would get the answer to it. As it is, his union has refused point blank to take part in any discussions. I do not know how he has the effrontery to stand up and ask a detailed question about the staff proposals. We published a lengthy document and invited the unions to discuss the matter. So the hon. Gentleman missed the point.

I should like to refer to the origins of the proposals——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: What about the changes that the Government have made?

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman would like it, I shall deal with the changes that we have made now. We were accused by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown) of ignoring consultation. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said that Ministers had not listened. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) said that there were no concessions to informed opinion. I have to tell them that they were all absolutely plumb bang wrong. The Opposition have welcomed warmly the decision, which was not in the original White Paper but which is now in the Bill, that the Inner London education authority should be a directly elected authority. In making that decision, we were impressed by the cross-party weight of opinion from Inner London that that would be an improvement in our proposals, and we accepted it.

Our original proposals on planning in the six metropolitan areas and London were criticised by planning experts as unnecessarily complicated. We therefore came forward with a radical change — the new idea of a unitary local plan, which has met with much more support. No doubt it will be debated during proceedings on the Bill, but it represents a significant change from the original proposal.

In our original proposals, we were accused of failing to take adequate account of what I might call regional arts institutions. We therefore came along with proposals, which again have been widely welcomed by the arts lobby, for more central funding of regional arts. It has almost ceased to be a factor in the abolition argument.

We were criticised that in the White Paper we were not making sufficient provision for the continuity of local government support for voluntary bodies. On Second Reading I spelt out the four measures that we have introduced, all since the White Paper, in response to consultation, to improve support for the voluntary bodies.

Originally, we envisaged that a local district council would be able to run its own bus service, but we made no provision for the fire service and the police service being devolved to the district council. In response to the many powerful representations from district councils in various parts of the country, particularly the west midlands and Merseyside, which wished to get back the powers that they had as county boroughs, we included in the Bill the power, after a reasonable period, to make an application to the appropriate Secretary of State.

On a relatively less important matter—but it was important to the people concerned—we were charged that in the White Paper we had not taken account of the value of the mobility scheme within London offering the choice of exchange of houses. We have brought forward proposals, which were spelt out in the Yellow Book, for a mobility scheme. Therefore, to say that the Government have ridden roughshod over public opinion and that we have paid no attention to people's views is a travesty of the truth. I hope that we shall hear no more of it.

I was asked a perfectly fair question by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and, I am sorry to say, some of my hon. Friends made the same charge against the Government, that somehow the proposal was dreamed up in the last few days before the manifesto was published.

Mr. Straw: Come on.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman also made that charge. I regret that some of my hon. Friends made the same charge. Nothing could be further from the truth. The argument about whether the GLC should change has been going on for years in London. Motions have been passed in London borough councils, in council after council, calling for the abolition of the GLC. We all know that the metropolitan county areas have never had the support of the metropolitan district councils from the day they were set up. Resolutions were being passed, councils were subscribing to the Sheffield resolution, letters were being written——

Mr. Wareing: Which councils on Merseyside?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman knows that only in 1982 Liverpool city council passed a resolution calling for the end of the Merseyside county council, under the leadership of Sir Trevor Jones. Therefore, it is all the more surprising that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is criticising the proposals. These arguments have raged for years. There was plenty of cross-party support for the proposal that we have now put forward. I understand that people may criticise some of the details. That is what the Committee stage of the Bill is all about, but to imagine that the proposal was somehow conjured out of nothing in the last few weeks of the 1983 election campaign is a travesty.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) made specific charges about the lack of consideration of this specific proposal within the Conservative party in the period leading up to the election and said, among other things, that it had gone to the Cabinet for the most cursory of examinations, when two Members spoke up in favour of it, and that was it. Was the hon. Gentleman correct?

Mr. Jenkin: Neither the hon. Gentleman nor my hon. Friend the member for Harrow, East has been a member of a Government. Perhaps they do not understand how the Cabinet committee system works. The details of such a proposal are most unlikely to be handled in Cabinet. The papers all go round. Those who are members of the Government know that perfectly well.

I can tell the hon. Member for Blackburn that on the issue of local government reform we had more piles of

paper and hours of discussion in the year that led up to the election than on almost any other subject when I was Secretary of State for Industry. I shall refer to the point made by the hon. Member for Woolwich. There was a substantial amount of preparatory work in the Government before the election. When I arrived in the Department of the Environment after the election it was clear that a great deal of preparatory work had been done before the election in my Department and the other Departments concerned. As the Secretary of State for Industry and a member of the Cabinet, I had been aware of what was happening and was taking part in the decisions. The fact that a final decision was taken only shortly before the election does not mean that the analyses on which that decision was based were not exhaustive.

It does no credit to the case of those who seek to attack the proposals if they try to pretend that there was not a great deal of care and discussion. We did not discuss all the details because we were going to consult on them. We have put out many detailed consultation papers and have responded in considerable measure to the points that were made to us—

Mr. Dykes *rose—*

8 pm

Mr. Jenkin: I have given way to my hon. Friend, and he refused to give way to me. My hon. Friend said that there was massive opposition to the proposal in Harrow. Harrow borough council supports it. The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said that there was no support for it in Greater Manchester. He is a member of the Trafford council which supports this measure. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed), who has great experience of these matters and to whom I listened with great care, attacked the measure as creating massive centralisation. If one measures it by the budgetary expenditure this year, 95 per cent. of the expenditure will go to the boroughs, either individually or jointly. In the case of the metropolitan county councils, virtually 100 per cent. will go to them.

We shall examine the powers during the Committee stage of the Bill. This is not a massive centralising piece of legislation. It represents substantial devolution to the boroughs and districts. The hon. Member for Woolwich and many other hon. Members said that no local government reform has been carried out without it being preceded by a substantial inquiry. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Redcliffe-Maud. The fact is that the changes that took place following Redcliffe-Maud bore almost no relationship to what his committee had recommended. It reminded me of the examination question to a student who was asked to describe the principles of the Archimedes pump. He replied, "I know nothing about the Archimedes pump, but here is a list of the kings of Israel and Judaea."

When in opposition, the Labour party wants nothing but delay and indecision. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) was absolutely right. These amendments are a recipe for more delay, more uncertainty and more indecision. There is a mass of information based upon the Herbert report, the Redcliffe-Maud report and the Marshall report. Those reports give us all that we need by way of analytical background to all forms of local government. What then was needed was judgment in the light of experience. We have made that judgment. We have looked at the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council, made our judgment and brought forward our legislation. I ask the Committee to reject these amendments.

Mr. Cowans: Before dealing with the reply of the Secretary of State may I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who has just become the father of a boy. Perhaps the Secretary of State would set up a Royal Commission, part of whose job should be to consult on the name.

I understood very well the speech of the Secretary of State. It went like this: "if you do not have a case and if you do not have any facts, try to attack everybody else." During the course of the debate, to all of which I have listened, there were seven Labour speakers, two alliance speakers and five Tory rebels. I know what rebels are because I have been a rebel. The total number of Tory Members who support the Bill is three, one of whom immediately admitted that he had not read the Bill. He made a fantastic speech. The hon. Member had not read the Bill but he spoke about abolition, which proved to me that he had not read the Bill. It would be interesting if the Secretary of State could convince the members of his own party. He has not done so up to now.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) who had not read the Bill——

Mr. Tony Banks: Or the amendment.

Mr. Cowans: If the hon. Member had not read the Bill it is exceedingly unlikely that he would have read the amendment. If one has not read the Bill one cannot amend it. The hon. Member succeeded very well, not having read the Bill. He spoke at great length. If the hon. Member for Wirral, South were to read the Bill he might be able to convince the chamber of trade on Merseyside. I do not know any rabid Socialists who are members of the chamber of trade on Merseyside. Even the chamber of trade says that Merseyside county council has been successful in promoting the economic and business life of the region and has done much to promote tourism and the arts.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman will know that earlier in the year Merseyside chamber of commerce expressed views that were against the abolition of the Merseyside county council. Subsequently, it thought again about the matter and in September decided that it was prepared to support the abolition of the Merseyside county council. One or two of its members expressed doubts about the original meeting. They said that it was not a very well attended meeting. It came back a third time last month, in November and by a decisive majority decided to confirm the opinion that it supports the abolition of the Merseyside county council and the main principles of the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Cowans: So it is one down, with 55,000 to go. If the Secretary of State is right about the Merseyside chamber of commerce, stand by—here we go. Against abolition are the United Kingdom Association of Professional Engineers, the School of Advanced Urban Studies, the university of Bristol, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and, for the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire, (Mr. Heddle) the National Union of Ratepayers' Associations. They are supposed to

[Mr. Cowans]

be on the side of the Government. Also the CBI—there are no rabid Socialists in the CBI, are there?—the National Trust and the Royal Town Planning Institute are against abolition. If the Secretary of State stands up and says that Merseyside county council has changed its mind, he ought to stand up and say how many of these other bodies have changed their mind. So it is one to the Secretary of State and eight to me.

It is absolute nonsense for the Secretary of State to stand up and talk about my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). He suggested that what my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton said was bad and that the Government would do better. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton said that the Labour party would consult before legislating. If the Secretary of State believes that to be bad, why does he not do better and accept the amendment about the Royal Commission? The Secretary of State should not accuse somebody of doing something badly when the Secretary of State is doing it even worse. My right hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that this legislation had been cobbled together on the back of a cigarette packet. That may be true, but I fancy that it was cobbled together on the back of an old grocer's bag.

The Secretary of State assures us that this is long-standing, well-planned legislation. If he is right, there was something wrong with his predecessor, his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who on 23 February 1983, which is not so very long ago, said that he did not have any plans to change the existing system. So it cannot be all that well planned. Need I remind hon. Members of today's date?

Before talking about a long-standing, well-established well-thought-out plan, the Secretary of State ought to start talking to his colleagues in Cabinet. That might be infra dig, because there is only one person in the Cabinet, but the right hon. Gentleman might start a precedent, and it would be helpful if he did.

I could go on for a long while, but I am conscious of the time. I thought about preparing a few notes for the debate, but I decided against it, because I thought that I should come here with an open mind and to listen to the debate—unlike Conservative Members who have been dragged screaming from the Tea Room to support the insupportable.

I have kept an open mind and, leaving aside the speeches of my hon. Friends, the arguments that have convinced me about the merit of the amendment have come from the Tory Benches. Conservative Members have made some tremendous arguments.

I do not accuse the Secretary of State of not listening, but I do accuse him of not hearing. The right hon. Gentleman has accused the trade unions of not coming forward on this issue. But they have bombarded him with paper, left, right and centre and he has not looked at any of it. He would not even publish the replies so that hon. Members could read them. If he cannot convince his own Back Benchers and will not publish documents so that unbiased observers can read them, where is his case?

No one on the Opposition side opposes an examination of local government. Far from it. We should welcome such an examination across the board, with those who serve in local government, and those who are serviced by it having an input. Instead of that, the Secretary of State has drawn up legislation on the back of an old Woodbine packet. It means nothing to anyone on his side and nothing to anyone on the Opposition side. More important, it has got everybody outside completely confused.

As the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) said, it is not too late and it is not a sign of weakness to have another look. The Government have had another look at some matters. Dare I mention student grants? When the second look revealed 150 Conservative votes against the Government, lo and behold, the Government changed their mind. I do not think that there will be 150 Conservative votes against the Government on the amendment, but, although the case has been well made by my hon. Friends, it has been made even better by Conservative Members. The Secretary of State's hon. Friends have made our case for a Royal Commission or an independent body to examine the matter in detail. The test of any amendment is whether the case for it has been made. I submit that the Government's case for refusing to accept the amendment has not been made.

The Secretary of State's action in refusing to accept the amendment is like accusing a man of murder, taking him to court and hanging the jury.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 182, Noes 233.

Division No. 46] **[8.14 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*

Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*

Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 2, in page 1, line 8, at beginning insert

'After a Parliamentary tribunal of inquiry has reported on local government in Greater London and the metropolitan counties and'.—*[Mr. Straw.]*

The Committee divided: Ayes 185, Noes 229.

Division No. 47] **[8.25 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert

Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tony Durant.

8.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 1, line 9, after 'force', insert—

'and after the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament proposals for an independent inquiry into the implications for the unit cost of local government services and local government spending in London and the metropolitan counties'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 9, in page 1, line 9, after 'force', insert—

'and after the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament a detailed analysis of the implications for public expenditure in the three years following the abolition date'.

No 30, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add:

'such day as may be appointed by an Order by the Secretary of State.

(3) No order shall be made by the Secretary of State under subsection (2) above until the Secretary of State has presented to parliament a report on—

(a) the percentage of the expenditure of those councils in the financial year 1984-85 which would have been the expenditure of London boroughs of metropolitan districts had this Act been in force during that year;

(b) the percentage of the expenditure of these councils in the financial year 1984-85 which would have been the expenditure of bodies other than London boroughs, metropolitan districts or ministers of the Crown had this Act been in force during that year; and

(c) The percentage of the expenditure of those councils in the financial year 1984-85 which would have been the expenditure of Ministers of the Crown had this Act been in force during that year.'.

No. 31, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add:

'such day as may be appointed by an order by the Secretary of State.

(3) No order shall be made by the Secretary of State under subsection (2) above until the Secretary of State has submitted an analysis of the savings he anticipates from the abolition of the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils to a Select Committee of the House of Commons.

(4) The Select Committee referred to in subsection (3) above shall be empowered to commission such studies of the costs and savings likely to result from abolition of those councils as it sees fit.'.

No. 39, in page 1, line 15, at end add:

'provided that the Secretary of State has by that date laid before Parliament a report setting out the basis on which the provisions in subsections (3), (4) and (5) below shall be given effect.

(3) For a period of three years from the abolition date no increased expenditure shall fall on the Consolidated Fund other than expenditure set out in the Financial Memorandum to this Act;

(4) For a period of three years from the abolition date no borough or district shall receive greater or reduced financial support from the Exchequer or from other local authorities as a result of the provisions of this Act;

(5) For a period of three years from the abolition date services provided before the abolition date by the Greater London Council and metropolitan county councils shall be continued by successor authorities at the same level and same unit cost as in the financial year 1984-85'.

Dr. Cunningham: From the outset of the announcement of this policy, the Government and sucessive Ministers have made great claims about the savings which would result from the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. Indeed, in the beginning the savings were said by Ministers to be of primary importance. That has changed somewhat, particularly since the appointment of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who in a short time has slightly changed the emphasis of Government policy.

These amendments address themselves to this crucial issue. It has been our contention, and the position of the

[Dr. Cunningham]

councils, from the outset that, far from large potential savings, at best there will be no savings to ratepayers or taxpayers as a result of these cobbled-together proposals. The likelihood is that there will be significant costs.

It has not gone without notice that the *Financial Times* today carries a withering leading article about the Government's proposals, and argues that on none of the tests it applies does the Bill stand up to the questions posed. It is a devastating criticism of what the Government are proposing. That is not surprising, because on this issue perhaps above all others, the Government are in a terrible mess and have indulged in claims, counter-claims, contradictions and in some cases plucking figures out of the air in briefings to their own supporters for this and previous debates.

The Government began by claiming that savings of £120 million per annum would result from the abolition of these seven Labour councils and that 9,000 jobs would go. There was no apology for getting rid of 9,000 people who are at present employed by these authorities. However, there has never been — and there still is not — any systematic or authoritative justification for that claim, which incidentally has in the latest briefing now slipped to £100 million per annum. In reality, it is likely to slip much further.

The Government have simply never gone beyond assertions and generalities in attempts to justify their claims. Those attempts have never been taken seriously in the House by the majority of the Government's own supporters, let alone by my hon. Friends and myself. They have never been taken seriously by the GLC or the metropolitan county councils, nor by any of the independent bodies and organisations which have systematically examined them.

The Government seem to have been relying on abolition to make savings related to policy. That in itself is an interesting question. It implies that the real reason for abolition is not that there was some unnecessary tier of government but simply that the present Administration did not like the policies pursued by the Labour-controlled authorities. There has been a considerable change since, following a Conservative victory in the GLC, the Prime Minister said:

"This is our greatest prize."

That was the Prime Minister's description of Conservative control of the GLC at that time.

During Second Reading on 4 December, a former Conservative Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)—I wish that the right hon. Gentleman was in his place now—said that the proposals were pushed into the Conservative manifesto a few days before it was published and after the election had been announced, and that that was done against the wishes of Conservative party policy committee, After the right hon. Gentleman made that speech, I wrote to the Prime Minister to ask her whether that statement was true. I received a reply from No. 10 Downing street early this evening. The letter is not very long, and if the Minister would like a copy I should be happy to provide one for him. In no sentence in her reply does the Prime Minister deny what her right hon. Friend said. In the final paragraph, she says:

"You should be aware . . . that the commitment to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan Counties was the result of long and detailed preparatory work and members of the Cabinet were involved in that policy-making process."

The Minister for Local Government is not a member of the Cabinet, much as he would like to be and much as some of us would like him to be too. If he were, it might be a more sensible body. However, if the proposals before us are the result of

"long and detailed preparatory work",

that simply shows what a confused and convoluted state of mind exists collectively in the policy thinking of the Conservative Cabinet. That will be no surprise to the 4 million people who are out of work and the many others who are suffering as a result of the Government's policies.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): When I heard something about this matter, I asked the Prime Minister in a written question on what date she had become publicly committed to these proposals. The Prime Minister replied —I speak from memory, and will correct myself if I am wrong—that the date was 18 May 1983.

Mr. Cunningham: I have seen the instructive reply to which my hon. Friend refers. There is no evidence that there was much preparatory research, consideration or discussion of what, by general consent—not only in the House but outside—is a shambles of a Bill.

However, during the period between the publication of the White Paper and the publication of the Bill, other people with real interest in these matters, principally in the GLC and the metropolitan counties, have put their considerable expertise and experience—and that of other bodies such as Coopers and Lybrand—to work on these issues. Some serious analysis of the cost of the proposals has been done. As the Minister knows, the Government have never responded to those reports and documents. Coopers and Lybrand found, in brief, that with a high level of co-operation between district authorities and boroughs, a saving of £4 million to a cost of £9·5 million per annum could be expected. That is a minimal saving, and it assumes the best possible level of co-operation. Those eminent consultants thought it more likely that co-operation would be limited. In that case, they said, instead of any savings, abolition would involve a cost of between £36 million and £61 million per annum.

8.45 pm

With the publication of the Government's yellow document or statement a few months ago, Coopers and Lybrand were commissioned to produce an update of their estimates in the light of the Government's proposals. They concluded that an extra cost of up to £69 million would be incurred in the six metropolitan councils.

With the publication of the right hon. Gentleman's statement on 29 November, Coopers and Lybrand again considered their findings. Given that no new evidence was contained in the right hon. Gentleman's statement, they stood by their estimates. There will be a real cost to the taxpayer and ratepayer from abolition. The officers of the GLC have estimated that there will be transitional costs of about £65 million in 1986-87 for redundancy payments, administrative costs, the setting up of the new joint boards and quangos, and other odds and ends in this mish-mash of a Bill. The figures do not include the substantial costs likely to result from less efficient delivery of services.

Ministers should try to reconcile the independent consultants' estimates with the Government's arguments.

They have made no attempt to do so. The reports and investigations have been brushed aside, dismissed, and in some cases derided, and no realistic attempt has been made to counteract the arguments. Such behaviour sits ill on a Secretary of State—I understand why the right hon. Gentleman is not in his place at the moment—who, at a Conservative party conference in 1983, said:

"I am a Tory, and I have been brought up as a Tory, and I believe that the burden of proof is upon the man who advocates change, and if he does not satisfy that burden of proof, then change should not be made."

The Opposition endorse those sentiments. In this case, on the question of costs and savings, there is no proof; what is worse, no serious attempt has been made by the Government to produce any proof.

A number of questions arise about the proposal to establish residuary bodies. The proposals are a mess. It is plain that the Government do not have much idea what the residuary bodies are to do or how they are to do it. They are to take over certain responsibilities such as debts of the MCCs not specifically allocated elsewhere, superannuation functions and funds, and property of the MCCs not specifically passed to the district councils. Those are almost all long-term functions.

The same is true for the GLC. The Secretary of State is giving himself power to pass debt management and superannuation functions to one district council in each area if all the districts ask him to do so. What are the chances of that being agreed in practice? We should like to hear the Minister's thoughts on and answer to that. What will happen if the districts do not agree? What will happen to costs and savings and the management of those functions?

The residuary bodies are enjoined to secure that their work is completed within five years but, as their work is ill-defined and as such bodies have never before existed on this scale, is that realistic? If they are to be under pressure to dispose of assets and land holdings in that time, is there not a real danger that the value of those assets will not be realised to the public good? Is that not a hidden cost to the public?

Residuary bodies are to be required to make proposals for their own demise. They are to wind themselves up. However, such proposals can include proposals for successor bodies or for keeping the residuary bodies in being in some other form. There is no estimate of the cost of any of that either. In addition to the well-known and much-rehearsed arguments about the costs of joint boards, the quangos and the seven new precepts or charges on the district rates, a bombshell was dropped recently when Mr. Maurice Stonefrost of the GLC reported that there were likely to be significant real costs because of the way in which the GLC has funded its operations from its capital fund and from the results of winding that fund up.

I must draw attention to the fact that the fund was established when the GLC was under Conservative control. It has been used efficiently and effectively by successive administrations to fund projects. On 29 November 1984, the Minister for Local Government wrote to the chairman of the council concerning arrangements for its outstanding debts. He had set out his proposals in a written reply which appears in the *Official Report* for 16 November. He reported that account had been taken of representations received on the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities". It is clear from examination of his proposals that, like the rest of the burden of evidence which was submitted following the publication of that White Paper, little if any account has been taken of the main points made by the GLC in response to the White Paper. That is especially true of the implications of the GLC's capital fund.

To service its debts and accounts, the authority has made repayments of £113 million a year. The charging of a market rate of interest enhances the value of the fund and ensures that all services are treated equally and bear the full economic cost of their consumption of capital. The fund has been built up from some £58 million in March 1978 to £820 million in March 1984. It is a significant fund. It is important to note that the GLC finances 26 per cent. of the total debt under its management. That was £3·18 billion in March 1984. That should be compared with the 2 per cent. which is financed from the London boroughs. All these statistics are provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

More than 60 per cent. of net capital expenditure on the council's services is now financed from the fund. At the end of March this year, the fund's value—£820 million—represented 65 per cent. of the total debt of directly administered GLC services. That way of funding its activities brings major benefits to the council, such as a reduction in public borrowing, which is in line with Government policy and a strengthening of the council's borrowing position. The council has relatively low interest costs which average £15 million a year. That is lower than the London boroughs for the past five years. The fund also safeguards the credibility of the council's reputation, thus enabling it to contribute to present and future financing of London's capital programme.

This is an important issue. The implications of writing the capital fund off will—no doubt this is one of the Government's subterfuges—probably result in short-term rates reductions through the cessation of repayments. However, in the longer term, writing the fund off is likely to lead to an increase in public sector borrowing. According to Mr. Stonefrost's argument, it could lead to an increase in the medium term of perhaps £750 million, given that the boroughs are likely to finance only a small percentage of capital expenditure from their capital funds. Writing off the fund is also likely to lead to an increase in rate costs in the longer term of about £20 million a year because of the relatively higher average interest rates borne by the boroughs as compared to the GLC and because rates of interest charged to market lenders to finance a constant volume of assets are greater than those required by a capital fund.

It appears that the Government have taken none of that into account. I understand that the Minister or the Secretary of State—I am not sure which—has sent an urgent message asking for consultations about the implications of all this. That shows that, here again, there is a glaring hole in the Bill and in the Government's thinking and preparation for what they are proposing.

To take all the evidence into account, the reality is that there will be no savings, except perhaps as an expedient in year one or year two. There may be a reduction in the rates, which the Government seek to engineer for their own political purposes. The reality is that, in the longer term, it will cost everyone much more. It will cost significantly more for less effective services, less democratic control and less accountability and for organisations which will be more remote and obscure to the people of London and the metropolitan county council

[Mr. Cunningham]

areas. There is no case, argument or evidence for or substance in what the Government have said about savings through these proposals.

It is also significant that the widespread calls from the Labour party, other political parties, the House of Lords, CIPFA and other bodies are for an independent investigation into the financial implications of the proposals. The Government have brushed them aside and ignored them. That confirms our belief that the Government have no evidence to substantiate their case.

Even Government supporters, such as the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, say of the Government's existing claims:

"These targets, however, seem unduly modest. If the whole exercise of abolition, which carries the considerable risk that non-co-operation between district councils might damage certain services, is to prove worthwhile in the long run, substantial savings for business ratepayers . . . must be obtained."

The Association does not even think that the Government's present, false, transparent and unsubstantiated claims make abolition worth while, not to mention the reality of the real costs to those who will be affected.

That sums it up. The Government have no friends, no arguments and no evidence. They deserve no support.

9 pm

Mr. Maples: I wish to spend some minutes addressing one aspect of the pubic expenditure and cost implications for local authorities. It relates to the way in which block grant and grant-related expenditures will be redistributed among them, and how the London boroughs in particular will have to pay for the services that they will have to take over from the GLC.

In the White Paper the Government made the correct and acceptable statement that no authority should be unduly financially advantaged or disadvantaged by the change. They then published two consultation papers in the original round of consultation papers. One was about block grants and the other about the London rate equalisation scheme. It would not understate the case to say that both papers left various questions unanswered. The paper on the London rate equalisation scheme, which is clearly the more complicated, states:

"It is not possible at this stage to produce a detailed model of the effects on individual London Boroughs of the disappearance of the GLC precept."

It is disappointing that in the Yellow Book published in the summer the argument is taken no further. We seem to be left in a position where discussions are still continuing on a complicated and extremely important matter, especially for the London boroughs which are effectively subsidised by the GLC rate now.

I shall ask my right hon. Friend to deal with two specific aspects. Regarding the block grant, will the GREs that are allocated to the boroughs in respect of the GLC expenditure that they take over be at the level of the GLC's present GREs, or will they be closer to what the GLC actually spends? If it is to be somewhere between those two points, how will it be calculated? If a borough takes over services which are similar to those which it provides now—for example, by taking on an extra park or leisure service—will its new GRE in respect of that be less than the sum of what it had before and what the GLC had? Will it always be a case of adding the two?

For many London boroughs, especially my own, it is not the GRE that is important but the expenditure limit and the target. Therefore, most important, how will those two figures be set? How will the target be set, and how will the expenditure limit be set for rate-capped authorities? Will it be set in relation to the GLC's GREs in respect of the expenditure that is taken over, or in relation to what is actually spent? I expect that it will be set somewhere in between, and I shall be interested to know how that will happen. I hope that the boroughs will not be asked to adjust the GLC's expenditure to their GRE assessments immediately.

As the difference between what the GLC will spend next year, even under its expenditure limit, and its grant-related expenditure assessment is over £2 million, this matter is important, and we shall wish to know how the Government envisage it being adjusted by the boroughs. I fear that the shortfall, if there is one, will impinge, as always seems to happen, more heavily on the poorer boroughs, of which mine is one.

If the boroughs are to attract additional block grant in respect of GLC expenditure, which the GLC does not presently receive, from where will that additional block grant come? If the overall figure for block grant remains fixed, some of it must come from the existing grants to the London boroughs to pay for expenditure that they are taking over. By the mechanism of the block grant, the boroughs will probably be worse off.

It is not enough to make up the GREs. We must know how the targets and expenditure limits will be set, and how the penalty system will operate. Even if a borough spent below its target, could it lose block grant if it failed to reduce expenditure to the level of the GLC's previous GRE? I am sorry that there are so many initials in my speech, but I did not invent them. The purpose of block grant is set out most clearly in the Government's consultation paper, which states that a central aim of the block grant system is to compensate authorities for differences in their expenditure needs and their rateable resources so that, in broad terms, local government in each area can provide similar services by charging their ratepayers the same rate poundage. It would be comforting to have an assurance that that will be the effect of the changes, that similar authorities will charge similar rate poundages, and that the re-allocation of the GLC's expenditure and targets will not result in their being prejudiced.

Will my right hon. Friend develop the Government's thoughts on how the London rate equalisation scheme will be extended? One of my few worries about abolition is that the GLC carries out the redistribution of resources from the wealthier boroughs to the poorer ones. We know that three of the 32 London boroughs subsidise the others. The two boroughs that pay most—Westminster, including the City, and Camden—which contain only 6 per cent. of London's population, contribute 36 per cent. of the GLC's income. That is a subsidy to the other London boroughs of 30 per cent., or £240 million at present. In addition, those authorities contribute to the existing London rate equalisation scheme by about another £80 million a year. The total subsidy from those three boroughs to the other 29 is about £320 million. I do not know Lewisham's share of that, but if it lost only £10 million on a pro rata basis, that would mean another 30p on the rates. I am sure that the Government will ensure that that will not happen, but I wish to know a little more about the mechanism by which

they will ensure that it does not happen. The consultation paper recognises the difficulties, but neither it nor the Yellow Book takes the argument much further.

Will the London rate equalisation scheme be extended by equalising expenditure and subsidy on the GLC's present grant-related expenditure assessments, or on the GLC's present expenditure? Will the boroughs have to find the full £320 million, or will the sum be calculated on the basis of the GREs? If it is the latter, the boroughs will have considerable difficulty, because the expenditure that they take over will, of necessity, be higher than the GREs. It is considerably higher at present. It is impossible to envisage the boroughs reducing it to GRE level in the foreseeable future—it certainly could not happen within a year or two. Although some reductions could be made, if the rate equalisation is based on GREs, the other 29 boroughs will be seriously prejudiced.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman is making a characteristically thoughtful speech about local government finance. Does it not occur to him that the pertinent questions that he is directing to his Front Bench are the questions that should have been answered during the long consultation in the run-up to the proposals, about which we heard?

Mr. Maples: I thought that that was what I was seeking to do. I said that I was disappointed that the Yellow Book did not come up with answers to these questions. I asked my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government to say where the Government think that they will find solutions to these problems. I would rather hear my right hon. Friend's reply before saying whether I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

On the London rate equalisation scheme, will the subsidy be extended on the basis of the GREs or on the basis of the GLC's expenditure? If it is somewhere between the two, how will that be done so that the boroughs are not prejudiced? What mechanism will be used for doing this? Are we to have a negative block grant, which would have serious implications for the principles behind the rating system, or is it to be done on some other basis? If so, is that other basis to be statutory so that we know that it will go on in the future? Of paramount importance, do Westminster and Camden agree to whatever arrangements the Government have in mind? Under the present system of levying rate by the GLC, this is not open to debate, but it might be if we were simply asking them to write the cheque for a pool or to accept a negative block grant system.

If I understand it correctly—I may be wrong because every time I think that I know something about local government finance I find that I know far less than I thought — the London rate equalisation pool at the moment is distributed to the other boroughs on the basis of their total rateable values. That is a strange way to do it because, by distributing the pooled subsidy on the basis of a borough's total rateable value, it is likely that the wealthier boroughs will do rather better than the poorer ones. Would it not be more appropriate for whatever goes into the London rate equalisation pool in the future to be distributed like the block grant, with the intention of equalising, as far as can be, the rates that have to be charged in different boroughs for the same services, and not simply on the basis of a borough's total rateable value?

These are matters of general importance. They are the remaining points about which I have concern if the GLC is abolished. I think that the figures for my borough are that the GLC spends about £25 million a year and raises about £10 million in rates. Effectively, we are subsidised to the tune of £15 million. I would be concerned if I felt that any of that £15 million had to come out of the already heavily picked pockets of the ratepayers of Lewisham. I would welcome my right hon. Friend's assurances about that and his reasons as to why that will not be so.

Mr. Chris Smith: I rise to support the amendment. I do so because I do not think that the Government have told us the whole truth, or even very much of it, about the costs of the abolition proposals. That is especially true of the Greater London council. I shall pass briefly over the obvious costs of the operation of the abolition—the new offices, the new boards, the servicing of the network of enterprises that will be set up, the cost of any redundancy payments if the Government go ahead with their proposals for the sacking of staff and so on. Anyone with any common sense will know that the proposed operation of abolition, with more diverse operations being brought in in place of a centralised organisation and existing functions being carried out by those diverse entities, will cost more rather than less.

Having looked briefly at that, one has to look at what lies behind the Government's claims of potential savings. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) touched on the reality when he spoke about the Government seeking policy rather than administrative savings. It is surely true that if the Government are to achieve the savings that they have so far spoken about both inside and outside the House, they will have to do so by means of policy changes and by the removal or diminution of functions presently carried out by the GLC.

9.15 pm

I shall briefly consider two areas of policy. I want first to ask the Government what they have in mind as to how funds will be devoted in those areas, and as to the costing of the future operations of the various boards, quangos, enterprises and boroughs that are to take over the GLC's functions. If the boroughs take over the housing functions that the GLC now has, what will the provision be for the repair and maintenance of the transferred GLC stock? At present provision flows through the housing investment programme allocations made to the GLC and thence to the boroughs. What also will be the fate of the projects in support of the single homeless that are presently carried out by the GLC?

There are brief references in the yellow document, although there have been none in ministerial speeches or in the Bill, as to what will happen to the houses in Thamesmead and Tower Hamlets. What will be the exact fate of the seaside and country homes to which the GLC now has right of access? The yellow document promises us a guarantee in the legislation of continued allocations for Londoners, yet the Bill has only an extremely vague and broadly worded clause that does not offer the guarantee being sought.

What will happen to the fund of housing association schemes, including those in the pipeline and those that might have been expected to be built with GLC funding? Above all, what will happen to any mobility schemes for those wishing to transfer across London from one property to another? At present all of those functions are carried out by the GLC. They cost money, and if the Government have their way and seek to produce the savings that they

[Mr. Chris Smith]

say that they can make through these proposals, some at least of those functions will have to go, and the Government should tell us which. Alternatively, to which of those functions will they dovote less money than is at present devoted?

The funding of voluntary organisations is a matter of great concern to Londoners. It is estimated that the GLC will spend about £53 millon this year on the support of voluntary organisations. What are the Government's intentions? A later clause talks about provision for boroughs jointly to fund individual organisations and projects. It specifies a limit that the Secretary of State can set. So far we have been told that it is likely to be £10 million, so what will happen to the remaining £43 million? The Government speak about making large savings as a result of the GLC's abolition, but if they are to make them by reducing the funding of those organisations, as we can only suspect from the details that have so far been given, they should come clean and tell the people of London what they will stop funding and what they will continue to fund. We can then have a sensible and reasonable debate on these issues.

I have cited only two specific policy areas. I could go through a whole list of functions carried out by the GLC, and ask the Government exactly which of them will go and which will be carried on. But over and above that, there is the overall question raised by the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) — which is especially important for the poorer areas of London — and relates to the GLC as a redistributive mechanism in taking money from the richer parts and peoples of London and putting it into the areas of greatest need. Who or what will perform that function when the GLC is abolished? What arrangement do the Government have in mind to ensure that that happens?

The Government must either accept the amendment, which would ensure some independent analysis of costs, or they must be far more honest about the amount of money that they expect to save and from where it will come. If it is to come from services and functions carried out by the GLC, which are likely to disappear with abolition, they must tell the people that so that they can make up their minds about the Government's plans.

We are asking for some honesty from the Government. I know that it is a rare commodity these days, but we have the right to expect it.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): The amendments and the preceding debates have been about abolition — will it be simpler or cheaper and has there been any in-depth inquiry into the costing? The response from the GLC and the metropolitan counties makes it clear that the impression given by the Secretary of State that their observations about the proposals and the costings had been carefully considered was not true. The Government have ignored arguments in favour of the retention of county councils. They have rejected the argument about the effect on services. They have rejected the argument about the future of transport, consumer services, economic development, art, culture, leisure and emergency services — especially the fire brigade, the police, planning, conservation and waste disposal.

Does the Secretary of State seriously believe that the public will accept the claim that an in-depth study has taken place into the financial implications and effects of the abolition measure? The Government have been dismissive of the majority of the replies that they have received. The whole exercise is one of deceiving the public — an attempt to persuade the public that the Government are going through a democratic process before any decision is made. Yet the decision has already been made—the die has been cast.

This is an ill-conceived piece of legislation that will be forced through despite the protestations of the GLC, the metropolitan counties and the voluntary organisations.

Although the latest proposals differ from the original, the Government have given no further scope for consultation. They stand accused of making major changes without meaningful discussion and without realising the consequences of their actions. Is it any wonder that such proposals give the impression that this legislation is nothing more than a politically motivated act to take control of and undermine local democracy — which, in turn, means the loss of accountability? That danger has already been recognised by the amended proposals to allow ILEA to become a directly elected authority.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science claimed that the nature and scale of the importance of the education service in inner London, taken together, justify a directly elected authority in this special case. If that is a special case, what about the Greater Manchester council and the met counties which are responsible for police, the fire service and public transport? The joint boards will not have the same accountability as these bodies. They will be indirectly elected and will not be answerable to the electorate. Why should the Secretary of State make a concession with ILEA, yet have a blinkered approach to the overtures of the met counties? That is gross inconsistency, and that fact is recognised.

The observations put to the Secretary of State about the fact that he will be empowered to control for the first three years the expenditure and manpower of those boards and the fact that they will be administered by nominated representatives can only lead to the conclusion that this legislation is a further attack on the responsibility of local government, especially in vital respects such as police accountability. The police authority in Greater Manchester spends about £10 million above the sum the Government say should be spent. About £4 million above the Government's figure is spent on fire services. The multi-function GMC has the necessary flexibility to determine its priorities in the light of local needs.

What real consultation has there been about the cost of police and fire services? The GLC and the met counties cannot accept the statement by the Secretary of State that the proposals will lead to a transfer of power to the London boroughs and the metropolitan district councils. Those councils would claim that the suggestion by the Secretary of State—that functions will devolve either individually or jointly to local democratically elected councils, thereby decentralising powers at the local level—is totally false and misleading. The major and vital functions, such as police, fire and public transport services, and minor functions, such as the registration of animal trainers, will be allocated at the district level. Fewer than 20 per cent. of the services will devolve to district councils, where full acountability will be preserved.

The Government's arguments about the spread of local democracy are extremely bogus. Bodies will be able to precept the district councils and will at the same time be

acountable only to the Secretary of State. The Government have not shown where savings will be made. The Government do not know what the financial outcome will be. The GLC and the met counties are urging the Government to publish as a matter of urgency their detailed estimate of the minimal savings that will be made, with information of how those savings will be achieved by successor authorities.

For all their arguments, the GLC and met counties know that the abolition die is cast. The Government have closed their ears to any intelligent argument. As the *Times* editorial on 1 August said:

"Ministers will seem to believe that in this matter assertion can substitute for argument."

Does the Secretary of State truly believe that the GLC and met counties take him at his word when he says that the abolition issue has not been settled yet? The Government believe that they have a mandate to abolish those county authorities and, at the same time, to rid themselves of political opposition. The name of the game is to rid themselves of Ken Livingstone and the GLC. That is why the Government are willing to take these draconian steps which put democracy at risk.

The Government have completely ignored local government. Mr. G. A. Harrison, the chief executive of the Greater Manchester council, said:

"The Bill is very similar to the White Paper 'Streamlining the Cities' and, quite clearly, the Government have ignored the mass of comment received when only 9 per cent. of respondents supported the proposals. If the Government is serious about wanting to make local government cheaper, simpler and more local, the Bill must be regarded as a failure in that all the information available confirms that none of these will be achieved. What is more likely to happen is that the proposed successor bodies will be blamed for not making the system work. An independent inquiry must be held if yet another costly reorganisation of local government in the metropolitan areas is to be avoided in the very near future."

The question has not been answered. Will those arrangements lead to simpler, cheaper and more accountable local government? The Opposition know the answer; I do not believe that the Government have considered it.

9.30 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): If one were looking for an object lesson in how not to go about reforming local government, I suspect that what we have seen over the past 18 months would be a good example.

First, we have had no Royal Commission to discuss the functions, role and structure of local government. Secondly, we have introduced proposals that apply to a percentage of the country only, under the bogus argument that we are abolishing two-tier local government whereas, in relation to the shire counties, we are maintaining two-tier local government, and the Government seem pleased to be doing so. Thirdly — this is the point of the amendments—we are making major structural changes in local government without any understanding of the costs involved.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) made a thoughtful contribution. I congratulate him on being the only one, I suspect, to understand the language of local government finance. He may be seated in the wrong position, in view of the contribution that he can make. He pointed out some of the many difficulties involved in financing the new structure. Those questions should have been answered by the Government or by an independent inquiry before we reached legislation.

If one studies the history of these proposals, one sees that the Government have tried throughout to obscure the issue of costs. During last year and the early part of this year, we considered the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 which took the right to vote from people in the GLC and metropolitan county areas. In the run-up to that Act, the Government talked glibly about the possibility of savings from the metropolitan counties being about £120 million. In all, 12 parliamentary questions asked the Government to detail and substantiate that figure. At no time did the Government say how that figure was arrived at. We went into a legislative procedure whereby we took away people's right to vote on a blank cheque and blank prospectus. People lost the democratic right to vote on their services without understanding the costs involved in the proposed changes.

I should have thought that any responsible, decent Government, before taking away people's right to vote, would have told them what the costs or savings were. Some of my hon. Friends would rightly point out that no financial saving is as great as losing the right to vote and exercise a democratic choice. We went through the first part of the year losing the right to vote without the Government substantiating that figure of £120 million.

We have now come to the latter part of the year and to the Local Government Bill. The Government are now saying that there will be savings of £100 million, half of which will apply to the metropolitan counties. During the past 12 months, the savings in relation to the metropolitan counties have been halved. The Secretary of State may well leave the Department of the Environment in the same way as he left the Department of Industry. If this process goes on much longer, we will have a Government who will say, "We shall make a loss on the proposals rather than a saving." With the present rate of inflation, in terms of the potential costs, and deflation in terms of the potential savings of devolution, if the Government are managing the country's money in the same way, we have a great deal to worry about. I suspect that all the evidence is that they are managing the Government's money in exactly the same sort of way. The figure has changed during the year but yet again we have a figure that the Government are not prepared to spell out in detail or put to any independent inquiry.

I am not saying that the Coopers and Lybrand report or the PA Management report—both of which cast doubts on the Government figures — are correct to the last penny but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, it is up to the Government to substantiate and support change. One would have thought that the Government would produce the figures rather than spend time sniping at the Coopers and Lybrand report and the PA Management report. The Government have significantly failed to do what they should have done.

We are now legislating without any indication whatever of the costs. I take the simple view that if a large organisation, enjoying certain economies of scale, is abolished, there is a cost to the ratepayer. In other capacities the Minister has often talked of the advantages of economies of scale, but in terms of local government some of those advantages seem to have disappeared.

Waste disposal in west Yorkshire is very eficient. It is now to be moved from a county level, where there are

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

considerable economies of scale, to five individual districts. In regard to land, labour, computer services, secretarial and legal services, additional costs must be involved.

I believe that the Government can deliver cost savings. Conservative Members should recognise how those savings can be delivered. They are not intrinsic to the Government's proposals and do not flow from them. They can be delivered only by taking away our right to vote, so that those of us in the GLC area and in the metropolitan counties do not have the right to make a choice, and by rate-capping the new joint boards and committees, so that Whitehall sets the level of service, of expenditure and of jobs.

The Minister can get his savings, but he will not get them honestly. He will get them by imposing on all of us who live in the metropolitan areas a loss of services and of jobs. The measure is not about saving money by the reform of local government; it is not about creating a better local government structure. It is a further attempt to reduce services and jobs and to ensure that those in local communities who depend on local government will have less to look forward to in the future.

Mr. Cartwright: I support the group of amendments because I believe they are crucial to our discussion of the Bill.

The Government's claim that cost savings will result from abolition is a central factor in the argument for the Bill. The Government have regularly argued that streamlining cities, and removing a bureaucratic tier of government which is no longer needed, will produce substantial savings for the ratepayer. But, as other hon. Members have said during the debate, it has been impossible to get any clear and convincing evidence to support that claim.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) rightly drew attention to the very different assessments made about the transitional costs by GLC officers and by the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill. Both accept that there will be transitional costs, but there is a wide variation between the two calculations. Ministers will no doubt argue that the GLC officers are interested parties in making their calculations and producing their figures, but it is just as easy to say that the Department of the Environment is an interested party and that its figures might be open to some challenge and doubt.

The situation gets even more complex in regard to the metropolitan counties, where we have celebrated firms of accountants reaching very different conclusions. The Coopers and Lybrand report was referred to earlier. It states clearly that savings will not result from abolition. Its study concluded:

"the proposed structural changes cannot be expected to lead to savings in themselves . . . Savings, therefore, can only be sought as a result of policy changes about the levels of services, and hence expenditure in an area."

That was the judgment of Coopers and Lybrand. Price Waterhouse, an equally celebrated firm of accountants, was retained by another group of interested parties—a consortium of district councils. It came to a different conclusion. Having looked at three of the metropolitan counties, it said in its study:

"in the area of rationalisation alone, excluding any policy or efficiency changes, a saving in staff costs of around £20 million can be made."

Therefore, those are two very different judgments by two firms of accountants of national repute. Surely it is difficult for hon. Members to reach a balanced judgment when there is such conflicting evidence. That alone is enough to make a case for an independent and impartial judgment.

What do our constituents make of all this? I think that my experience will be like that of many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Committee. My constituents make a simple judgment that every time we reorganise local government, it costs them money. I was reminded of that when I read the editorial in this evening's edition of *The Standard*. It had some unkind things to say about the Secretary of State, for example that he "has a credibility problem." The editorial goes on to say:

"As a gift bringer to ratepayers, he is about as believable as Santa Claus, and a lot less jolly."

That seems unkind, but *The Standard* goes on to advance some criticisms about the claims made by the Secretary of State yesterday about the impact of rate capping and the great benefits that it is held to bring to ratepayers. The judgment of *The Standard* is:

"The trouble is, most people just don't believe it. We certainly don't . . . Much the same goes for the plans to sweep away the GLC. Most people just don't believe they will save money or improve matters."

Faced with such a judgment from a newspaper such as *The Standard*, I suggest that the Secretary of State would be well advised to take on board the idea of an independent inquiry into the financial implications of the Bill. Whether he does or not, I shall advocate that course by voting for the amendment.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I agree with the sentiments expressed by hon. Members who have spoken so far in the debate. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), who has forebodings about the effect on local authorities in the London area of the abolition of the GLC. There will be financial consequences, particularly on poorer authorities such as my own in Waltham Forest.

In my time in the House I have never seen a Bill so shoddily presented in terms of its financial consequences. The explanatory and financial memorandum is vague in the extreme. In the Secretary of State's speech on Second Reading there was little of substance on that important point, yet the savings to be made were one of the major arguments put before the people of London—to the extent that any arguments were put before them—in the general election and subsequently. If one judges by the Secretary of State's speech on Second Reading, the main area of savings that the Government estimate will be made will come in the area of local authorities taking over services. That means either that the functions transferred to local authorities in London and the metropolitan counties will not be adequately funded or that money will be handed over and pressure will be put on them through the block grant, penalties, and so on to reduce their expenditure.

What is being proposed will put pressure on local authorities' existing resources when the GLC's and other functions are transferred. It will mean a crowding out, a pressure on existing local authority services. Local authorities in London will be in a real dilemma. Those which accept their responsibilities to the ratepayers and electors in their areas for maintaining services as far as possible within the rate-capping legislation, will have to

put up their rates to cope with the consequences of transferred functions, particularly if they are not adequately financed, which is probably the Government"s intention.

9.45 pm

The extra costs that will be incurred by local authorities have not received much attention. The Bill will mean that in both the Greater London area and the metropolitan counties an increased burden will be placed upon local authorities and their councillors. The extra work that is to be transferred has to be carried out not merely by public servants employed by local authorities but by democratically elected local councillors. I challenge the Minister to deny that there will be more local authority committees and quangos, which will have to be attended by local authority councillors. This will impose a heavier burden upon councillors. They will be unable to carry out their job as well as they carry it out now because of the extra functions, which they do not want, which will be thrust upon them. This will have an impact upon the services that they can offer to their electors.

In addition, there will be extra expense. Councillors obtain allowances for attending meetings. There will be many more committee meetings. There will also be many more outside committee meetings, which councillors will have to attend. I do not know whether the Government have taken that point into account. The Government claim that there will be financial savings. I invite the Secretary of State to undertake to conduct an inquiry within a year after abolition into the savings made so that after the Bill is passed we are able to judge whether savings have been made.

In the case of hospital closures, one of the main arguments for closures put forward by district health authorities is that financial savings will be made. My own experience is that if one tries to find out whether financial savings have been made after a hospital has been closed it is impossible, because of the accounting arrangements, to do so. If we do not pin down the Secretary of State we shall find that he will make assertions and claims that can never be contested after the event because figures will never be available.

Mr. Tony Banks: By any objective standards, the Government's failure to make out their financial case is manifest. It is interesting to note that only one hon. Member on the Conservative Benches stood up to state his position. A number of very important and leading questions have been asked. I look forward to the summing up by the Secretary of State as, I am sure, will the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) who could refer to an internal Department of the Environment document, reference LGFIDG, which indicated that the Government were concerned about the fact that the passing of the GLC functions to the boroughs would result in rates being raised. If GLC expenditure at 1983-84 levels were maintained, an 8·2 per cent. rate increase would be required in Lewisham.

The Department of the Environment document states that some form of safety net should be written into the calculations. There are three ways in which this could be done. I ask the Secretary of State to say whether these ways are being considered by him and his Department in order to engineer rate reductions in the boroughs, following abolition. This could be by means of an enhancement of the take from the rate revenues of the three boroughs which provide the vast bulk of the GLC's finance: Camden, Westminster and the City and to enhance the take from rate revenue by the London equalisation scheme. The second way would be substantially to increase GREAs and targets within the individual boroughs so that they could obtain the whole of the GLC's disaggregated GREA and target and thereby be eligible for a greater block grant. The third option would be so to engineer the GREAs and targets for the boroughs in 1986-87 as to ensure that major reductions in costs are achieved.

These are the ways I assume the Government will operate if they are to produce savings but, as has been said by Labour Members, that could be achieved only by a substantial increase in unemployment through cuts in services and large numbers of redundancies.

We are in great difficulty, because we do not know precisely what the Government's financial case is or the background to their calculations. In their 1983 manifesto, the Government justified abolition by saying that the GLC and the metropolitan counties were wasteful and unnecessary. The estimates of savings have gradually diminished almost to the point of disappearing—from £120 million down to transitional costs.

We need to know the figures and we need to have them judged objectively. It is for the Government to make their case. If the Government would accept an independent and impartial audit of their financial claims and the counter-claims made by the GLC and the metropolitan county councils, the public would be able to judge for themselves who is speaking the truth.

I give the Minister the undertaking that I gave on Second Reading, and I should like him to respond to it. I have full authority to say that, if the Government will commission an independent audit into their claims on savings and the services that will be devolved to the boroughs, the GLC will co-operate with him and the inquiry and will provide all necessary facts and figures to the independent auditors so that at last the electorate can see who is speaking the truth—the Government or the local authorities.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The debate has ranged more widely than the amendments. I shall seek to answer some of the broader points that have been made as well as those related to the amendments.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred to an article in the *Financial Times* by Mr. Robin Pauley, who wrote about the capital debt. As we announced in our White Paper "Streamlining the Cities", we proposed to write off the debt to internal capital funds. However, that is not real debt; it is simply a method of internal financing by which the ratepayers have paid over time for the GLC's capital spending programme. Writing it off does not lead automatically to an enormous increase in public sector borrowing.

It will be for the successor authorities to decide, within the capital control system established by the Government, how far they need to replicate the GLC's capital programme and whether to finance that spending through internal sources, including capital funds, or from external borrowing.

Attempting to make this rather old story a little more interesting, Mr. Pauley speculated about the Treasury beginning to worry and Department of the Environment

[Mr. Kenneth Baker]

officials asking the director general of the GLC for urgent advice. As usual, the truth is a little less exciting. I am at one with my Treasury colleagues and I have followed the usual path of consulting the local authority associations and the GLC about our debt proposals before reaching final decisions. They have been invited to comment by the end of January.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) made a well-informed speech about GREAs and targets. Those will be debated in detail and, no doubt, at length on clauses 64 to 78, but I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a letter that I placed in the Library yesterday. It was written by an under-secretary in my Department to the chief executives of the London boroughs. It is a detailed letter, but the passage on targets also answers the point made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks):

"Ministers have made it clear . . . that if targets are set, they will not be looking for a higher level of savings on those services transferred to the boroughs than would have been sought from the GLC. What we envisage is that the target which the GLC would have been given would be split between the successor bodies along with the expenditure concerned."

On GREAs amd block grant it is also rather detailed. It reads:

"As stated above, our aim will be to ensure that the post-abolition arrangements as a whole maintain the existing balance between ratepayers in different parts of London, and between ratepayers in London and those elsewhere."

The actual details will, of course, have to be worked out in the spring of next year on the grants working group. Our proposals would lead to a report being placed before the consultative council on local government finance in July.

On rate equalisation, the letter states:

"At present we believe that this is likely to require the continuation of London rate equalisation arrangements in order to avoid a windfall gain to ratepayers in the high resource authorities in central London at the expense of those elsewhere. Nevertheless, the new arrangements will be designed to ensure that all London ratepayers stand to benefit if expenditure on former GLC services is reduced after abolition. In particular, Ministers have made it clear that, provided savings are achieved, London authorities can expect to benefit from the grant which the GLC has forfeited as a result of its exceptionally high rate of spending in recent years."

Mr. Maples: I had hoped that my right hon. Friend would go further into that as it is important to many of us to know exactly how it will operate, whether it will be a statutory obligation, what Westminister and Camden think and whether they are willing, as well as the level and whether it will be related to the GLC's GREAs or its spending. I hope that we may have that information at an early stage.

Mr. Baker: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. As he would expect, I have a working group on this. We certainly see the continuation of rate equalisation as an important part of the financial arrangements. It is a statutory scheme at the moment.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) spoke of problems that could arise from policy changes not taken into account in the explanatory and financial memorandum. He raised a mass of questions about housing and voluntary organisations. I believe that voluntary organisations are best dealt with when we reach clause 46, although the subject will come up on several other clauses, as will the subject of housing. The GLC's HIP allocation comes out of London's allocation and would go direct to the boroughs. The mobility scheme will continue as a statutory scheme.

On the more general issues actually relevant to the amendments, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) raised broad questions of accountability. I do not criticise that as, all Committee debates on the Floor of the House range fairly widely. It has been suggested that joint boards will not be truly accountable and that they will not be as representative as the present arrangements for fire and police committees. I wish to draw attention to certain anomalies in the present system. I am told that on the Greater Manchester police authority there are no county councillors from either Bury or Rochdale, which have a combined population of 380,000, whereas in the future both will be represented.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As a constituent I can approach my county councillor who has access directly to those on the police committee and is also a member of the parent body, the county council, the police committee being a committee of that council. With joint boards that access will no longer exist.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman supports my point. At the moment the county councillors representing the areas covered by those metropolitan districts do not serve on the police authority. The fire service is different because that is a committee of the authority. I think that it is fair to say that there will be direct representation in the future. Solihull, with a population of 200,000, is also not directly represented on the west midlands police authority.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central asked about the distribution of money among successor bodies. In the metropolitan counties, only a fractional part—less than 1 per cent. of current spending — will become the responsibility of bodies outside local government. For example, the Arts Council is taking on certain responsibilities in the metropolitan counties, but it is a fraction.

Much has been made of the proportion of expenditure that will become the responsibility of the joint authorities, but I remind the Committee—

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Local Government Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. — *[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Again considered in Committee.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Baker: I was referring to the split between the responsibility for expenditure now and in the future. In London the situation is clear. The GLC proper has current spending of about £530 million this year. That is not in dispute. That excludes ILEA and the payments to LRT. That is a reasonable measure of the level of service activity. A small amount of that—about 5 per cent.— will go to bodies outside local government, for example, the Sports Council and the Arts Council. The boroughs jointly or individually will be responsible for the rest— about one quarter for the fire service and three quarters for the other activities taken over by the boroughs.

Mr. Tony Banks: We are back where we started, and there are arguments on both sides about the figures. The figures provided to me for 1984-85 expenditure show a GLC net expenditure of £950 million. Is the Minister leaving out of his calculations debt servicing, housing deficits and waste disposal? If he is, he should not. If he is not, the figures just do not tally.

Mr. Baker: I would be happy to answer a question and to set out how the figures reconcile. The £530 million to which I have referred covers waste disposal and housing deficit. It does not cover debt interest, which is additional.

That brings me to my next point about residuary bodies. Those bodies will really be trafficking the money provided by the lower-tier boroughs. They will provide that money to service the debt and the pension obligations, but it will be the obligation of the boroughs to do that as this is borough money. Indeed, half the GLC capital debt today is already the responsibility of the London boroughs, although it is paid through the GLC because the housing has been transferred. For that function the residuary body will, as it were, stand in the place of the GLC.

Various points were made about the Coopers and Lybrand report. It is certainly a professional job. However, just the other day I read a cutting from the *Liverpool Daily Post* and noticed that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), when asked about costs and savings in this report, said with his rather earthy wisdom:

"My experience of management consultants is that in the main they do the job they are employed to do. They come up with the answers that are required by their 'masters'. It in no way surprises me."

On our estimates for savings, we have made it clear from the outset that a detailed assessment of the savings that will result from abolition will depend on the various separate decisions made by all the authorities involved. At this stage, therefore, one can only make broad statements, and that is what we have done. We have stated our views in the financial and explanatory memorandum, and I gave the background to those estimates in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey).

We identified three areas where savings will be made. I am not talking about policy savings, as the hon. Member for Islington, South, and Finsbury suggested, but savings resulting from the abolition. Savings will be made in central administration, in connection with highways, and in planning. The county councils will cease to be planning authorities.

I shall reiterate the key points in our estimate. First, I find it hard to believe—and I am sure that other hon. Members share my view—that the elimination of a whole tier of government will not bring savings. The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) said that there would be more committees. At present, the GLC has 60 committees, sub-committees and panels to administer its affairs. When the Tories were in command, they needed only about 30.

An Hon. Member: How many Cabinet Committees are there?

Mr. Baker: When a Minister is asked how many Cabinet Committees there are, even if he knows the answer—which I do not—he is not allowed to give it.

The existence of large bureaucracies in the authorities brings with it inevitable overheads. Those overheads will go.

Secondly, in the case of some services, the existence of two tiers with related jobs means overlap and duplication. Even the MCC consultants agree that savings might be found in central administration and central services. I certainly agree with them on that point.

The expenditure of the councils under consideration is some £432 million a year above their targets and some £600 million a year above their grant-related expenditure assessments. To say that there will be no savings from better adminstration and from an examination by the boroughs and districts of——

Mr. Tony Banks: It is done by manipulating the GREAs.

Mr. Baker: No. As I have said, the savings are not policy savings. They are made in the areas of administration, highways and planning—in the internal organisation.

The hon. Member for Copeland has said that some people consider the savings to be modest. As the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) rightly said, there have been other reports. It would be fair for me to draw the attention of the Committee to the Price Waterhouse report.

Mr. Fatchett: It would be useful if the Minister could tell us how much of the overspend is derived from additional administration, and how much from the provision of services. If it is derived from services it is true that there is a policy objection to the metropolitan counties; if from administration, we are talking about the structure of government. Which is it, or what is the balance between the two factors?

Mr. Baker: I will answer that question as soon as I have dealt with the Price Waterhouse report. That report considered some of the metropolitan counties and districts and estimated that there would be a manpower saving of some 3,500. That is close to our own estimates.

There was also a joint report by the chief executives and borough treasurers of Bury, Rochdale, Stockport and Trafford. They suggested a saving of £11·5 million in the Greater Manchester council alone. Such figures point to levels similar to those that we have estimated in the Bill.

There has also been a report by four London boroughs —Bromley, Kensington, Wandsworth and Westminster —which estimated that they would save about £35 million on the administrative side—this will interest the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett)—and that by changing policy they could save another £65 million, making £100 million in all. We have not included those policy savings. If the hon. Gentleman presses me about whether it should be administration or policy, I should say that there are substantial savings to be made in the administration of the GLC. I have mentioned its tremendous number of committees and the superstructure that has been built up. In the 12 months from September 1983 to September 1984, its staff records show an astonishing increase of 1,280 in the number of staff in post. That is a 6 per cent. increase in staff in an authority which has little more than one year to live.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Perhaps I might be allowed to conclude as I think that the Committee wants to move on to the next group of amendments. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friends in some part

[Mr. Baker]

of our proceedings. There are substantial savings to be made from efficiencies, changes and the elimination of duplication and from the removal of a tier of unnecessary, costly and remote government. For those reasons I hope that the Committee will reject these amendments.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): The Minister has failed to answer major criticisms about the Government's proposals concerning savings. If the Minister is convinced that savings are justified, why is he afraid of these amendments? Why is he afraid of amendment No. 8 which asks for an inquiry into the implications for local government unit costs? If what he says is to be believed, he would not be afraid to accept it. Why is he afraid to lay before Parliament, as requested by amendment No. 9, a detailed analysis of implications for public expenditure? If his arguments are justified, he could give us such an analysis. Why is he afraid of amendment No. 30, which would enable us to know what percentage of expenditure of the councils that are to be abolished will be borne by the districts and London boroughs, what percentage will be borne by the quangos and joint boards and what percentage will be the responsibility of the Minister? If what he says is true, and there are savings to be made, why does he not accept that amendment and tell us the facts? Why is he afraid of amendment No. 31, which would set up a Select Committee to examine the costs of his proposals? We should remember that it was the Conservative Government who established Select Committees for such purposes.

As suggested by amendment No. 9, Parliament must be entitled to assurances that the same costs and levels of expenditure will be maintained by the London boroughs, the metropolitan districts, the joint boards and the quangos. Has the Minister given the game away? Will there be significant savings only if there are changes in policy? That means cuts in services and job losses. Is this not another attack, not on councils, but on people most in need, who are served by the councils that are to be abolished?

I should like to consider the Government's argument that they are streamlining the cities and getting rid of two-tier local government. Earlier today, the Labour party manifesto was quoted as favouring one-tier local government where possible. The Redcliffe-Maud commission favoured one-tier local government where possible but concluded that it was not possible in urban areas and conurbations. The Bill does not set up one-tier local government. It establishes and maintains two-tier local government, but one of the tiers is not to be democratically elected. That is the difference. If the Government really were streamlining the cities and getting rid of a local tier of local Government, we might accept that savings could be made.

Irrespective of the arguments about joint boards and other proposed arrangements, none of them can work without management costs. The Government want to replace seven authorities with at least 19 joint bodies, a host of joint committees and other co-operative arrangements often with statutory backing. Where will the administrative savings come from? Seventy per cent. of Merseyside county council's expenditure will go not to the districts there but to the joint boards and quangos that will be established. How can we therefore envisage administrative savings? Has the Minister given the game away? Are not the savings those which will result from changes in policy and from the continuation of the trend that the Government have established, in which 61 per cent. of local authority expenditure funded by central Government has dropped to 48·8 per cent? Grant has been cut in metropolitan areas, and indeed, throughout the country, which is causing cuts in services and the rate increases, for which the Government criticise the GLC and metropolitan counties.

10.15 pm

The tremendous upheaval that abolition will cause will not be justified by the estimated savings, which could be a mere 2 per cent. of the metropolitan counties' total expenditure. Local government expenditure as a proportion of GDP and public sector spending has fallen during the past five years, while central Government expenditure has risen.

To take Merseyside county council as an example—this is true for all authorities—much of the increase in costs borne by the local authoritiy, which is to be abolished, has been caused by matters outside its control. I refer to police pay, the needs of the regions, penalties on grants and so on.

If the amendments are not accepted, these proposals will be a recipe for increased bureaucracy, the continuing duplication of services, and the continuation of two tiers, one of which will no longer be democratically elected. The proposals are opposed by the Labour and alliance parties and by all informed opinion outside the House. Despite what the Secretary of State says, they continue to be opposed by voluntary organisations, which see their funding cut and the duplications that the system will create, and recognise that that will cause them and the electors great difficulties.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 186, Noes 231.

Division No. 48] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Anderson, Donald	Carter-Jones, Lewis
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Cartwright, John
Ashdown, Paddy	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Ashton, Joe	Cohen, Harry
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Coleman, Donald
Bagier, Gordon A. T.	Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Conlan, Bernard
Barnett, Guy	Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Barron, Kevin	Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Corbett, Robin
Beith, A. J.	Corbyn, Jeremy
Benn, Tony	Cowans, Harry
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Craigen, J. M.
Bidwell, Sydney	Crowther, Stan
Blair, Anthony	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Boothroyd, Miss Betty	Cunningham, Dr John
Boyes, Roland	Dalyell, Tam
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	Deakins, Eric
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*	Dewar, Donald
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*	Dixon, Donald
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*	Dobson, Frank
Bruce, Malcolm	Dormand, Jack
Buchan, Norman	Dubs, Alfred
Caborn, Richard	Duffy, A. E. P.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Campbell, Ian	Eastham, Ken

Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Maxton and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*

Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

10.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 1, leave out line 10.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 12, in page 1, line 10, after 'Council', insert

'shall be replaced by a directly elected authority representing the area presently administered by the Greater London Council, such authority's functions and powers to be determined by Parliament following an enquiry by a Select Committee of the House of Commons into the functions and powers of the Greater London Council.'.

No. 46, in page 1, line 15, at end add—

'(3) On the abolition date there shall be established for each metropolitan county and for Greater London a body corporate to be known by the name of that county with the addition of the words "Precepting Authority" or to be known as the Greater London Precepting Authority, as the case may be.

(4) The authorities established by subsection (3) above shall consist of members elected by the local government electors of the metropolitan county of Greater London, as the case may be, in accordance with this Act and the Representation of the People Act 1983.

(5) The authorities established by subsection (3) above may in respect of any financial year, or part year, beginning with the abolition date issue precepts to the appropriate rating authority for the levying of rates to meet, to the extent the authority considers reasonable in all the circumstances, the expenditure of the bodies or persons or joint committees (other than directly elected bodies) to whom functions are transferred by this Act.'.

Mr. Hughes: I have the privilege to move this amendment which stands in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends in what I sense is the most important debate on the most important amendments to the most important clause to be debated during the Committee stage of this most important Bill.

The amendment would delete the GLC from the list of councils that the Government propose to abolish. The effect of all the amendments would be to ensure the continuance of directly elected government for London across London. We seek to do no less than to take the heart out of the Bill. We seek to do so because we believe that to do away with a single tier of Londonwide government without any proposal for a better Londonwide alternative is mindless as well as heartless. We seek to do so because we believe that the obsession with abolition that only as recently as last year entered the mind of the Prime Minister and her Government, if carried into legislation, will take the democracy from the city that is at the heart of our nation.

To abolish the GLC and to put no Londonwide democracy in its place is to decapitate democracy in our capital. So it is to retain the GLC that we move the amendment, with retention as its first objective. We know that the GLC is not and has never been perfect. We also know that, before it, the LCC was not perfect. The GLC is not the model regional authority that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I would wish, but it is easier and, we believe, cheaper to improve government in our capital city by extending and improving the existing structure than by knocking down the edifice that was first erected in 1889 and making no real attempt to replace it with any structure at all.

It is not that there will not be one structure to replace the GLC, but that there will be no replacement and many replacements at the same time. The Liberal party has always been in favour of regional government for London, as for elsewhere, and we have a record of consistency that is unparelleled for any party that has been in the House since before the Herbert commission reported. Compared with all our partners in Europe, Britain does not have a happy track record, and this is not a very happy, altough unique, proposal.

The report of the Institute of Local Government Studies was published last year, comparing the proposal for London with other metropolitan and capital cities in western Europe and north America. Page two states:

"The turbulent history of recent local government change in England amazes our continental neighbours . . .While reform outside the United Kingdom has generally been gradual, through a long programme of amalgamations which give priority to initiatives by local municipalities and tailor metropolitan institutions to the particular case, the English metropolitan areas have undergone one traumatic reorganisation in recent times, and in the case"—

not our concern at the moment—

"of the West Midlands, two in the space of eleven years."

The report continues with this telling phrase:

"Amongst European democracies British local government must now seem a very tender plant."

The Government intend to pull up by the roots the best example of the tender plant of local government primarily and quite clearly because they do not like the colour of the flower. Our objections are clear. The proposal to abolish the GLC is not based on an objectively strong or argued case. The economies asserted have not been proved. But, even more important, the clause that we seek to amend would try to ensure that instead of London logically having, as it does have, a unity throughout its area, there would be no co-ordinating tier of government. We believe that there should be a tier of Government to co-ordinate and complement the functions of the boroughs across the square miles of Greater London, the boundaries of which are, for most people and most purposes, artificial and of little day-to-day relevance.

We say also that to abolish the GLC will not, as has often been said, result in government not being carried out for London—it will be carried out in a much less co-ordinated, much less simple and much less accountable manner. This clause, unless amended, will result in the fragmentation and dispersal of the functions of London's government.

The proposal was put forward in the manifesto because the Government said that the GLC was wasteful and unnecessary. They said that they would return most of the functions to the boroughs. Of course, that is untrue. Most of the functions were previously not with the boroughs, but were at county level. If the proposals go through, two thirds of the expenditure will go elsewhere than to borough councils. Only 15 per cent. of the services will go to them.

The Government accept that only 12 per cent. of the cost of local government in Greater London is borne by the GLC, so on any scale of values it cannot, even at its worst, be that wasteful. In the argument about what is necessary, the Government do not appear to have struck a supportive chord among the people of London and its surrounding areas.

We do not accept that joint boards are an acceptable alternative. If the Secretary of State does not understand that, I can tell him that, rather than a GLC, whose councillors I and the other residents of London elected four years ago, working for London, there will be running London a Secretary of State whom I did not put in the job,

[Mr. Hughes]

a joint board which I did not choose for the job, or a quango appointed to the job by other than those who pay for the services.

Rather than 33 relationships across London, there will be 500 different relationships—different bodies levying the moneys from the ratepayers to pay for services. At the end of the day, the process of democracy will not work. Democracy is about choosing between priorities — making choices to do one thing rather than another. When the roads are the responsibility of one department, industry and employment policies of another, and the fire service of a joint board, when planning is the responsibility of the Secretary of State advised only by a planning commission and when waste disposal goes elsewhere, choices about priorities—which is what democracy is all about—can no longer be made.

It is untrue to say that decisions will be left with democratically elected representatives. Under the Bill, those who take over the government of London will have an enormous plethora of controls ultimately exercised by the Secretary of State and his right hon. Friends at the top of the bureaucratic tree of the Civil Service and Whitehall Government.

The overwhelming view of Londoners—50 per cent. in January and 74 per cent. when they were last polled —even in the constituency of Finchley, represented by the Prime Minister — and, I have no doubt, in the constituency of Enfield, Southgate, as we shall see tomorrow — is that the Government must think again. The chaos and confusion, let alone the inevitable job losses, jobs that the transition will cause are complex and unnecessary.

From 1885, when the metropolitan board of works was set up, London has had an unbroken line of multi-functional, democratically elected governors for its services. This Government propose to break that line. Our amendment would solve for the Government the problem of the embarrassing position they have got themselves into by their political misjudgment of the views of the people whom they are meant to represent.

I end with a quote from the report comparing these proposals with those affecting other European capital cities. The report states:

> "It is easy in the United Kingdom for a government to abolish an institution. It can almost invariably find support from those who see themselves likely to gain powers from its abolition. It is much more difficult to replace it with sound and robust alternatives that will have the public support on which they will depend to succeed."

I ask the Committee to accept either the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) as a second-best alternative, or our amendment as an even better alternative, and to reject the proposal to abolish the GLC. The proposal is unacceptable. We resist it, and we ask the Government and those hon. Members who would normally support the Government to think again on this issue and to change the Government's mind.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was kind enough to trail my amendment, so perhaps I can make it plain to hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber that I intend to confine my remarks to amendment No. 12 which stands in the name of a number of right hon. and hon. Friends and myself and which is preferable to the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey.

The Government are guilty of reflex politics in this regard. It all began on a night in 1981 when there was a putsch or pogrom, or whatever one likes to call it, and Mr. McIntosh was replaced by Mr. Livingstone. Incredulity became hostility, and a Tudor attitude of "off with his head" became the whim of the moment. We found in last year's manifesto a commitment which, I suggest to my hon. Friends, had not been sufficiently clearly thought through — a commitment to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties. I know that many of my hon. Friends feel strongly about manifesto commitments, and that is reasonable. Manifestos are a general expression of intent by a political party; but we still have a constituency system. Each of us is individually answerable to our electorates.

It so happens that in my constituency we had 50 copies of the Conservative election manifesto. I think that we got rid of 23 of them—I believe that three were bought and 20 were given away. I know that 53,000 copies of my election address, or thereabouts, went out and that the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties did not feature in the document—comprehensive and excellent though it was. Therefore, I do not feel that I am at all bound by that last-minute pledge, rushed in as it was without adequate consultation. Yet, at the same time, I am deeply sensible of the susceptibilities of my hon. Friends who feel that the otherwise excellent document that emanated from central office has a binding effect. That is why my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have devised this amendment.

10.45 pm

We have accepted the logic and logistics of a large majority. We understand that the metropolitan counties, which a Conservative Government of whom my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was proud to be a member brought into existence a decade ago, are likely to be swept away. We accept that there is strength in the argument and that the cities within those metropolitan counties will have directly elected authorities governing their affairs. We also accept that many legitimate critcisms can be made of the GLC, although I rather think that if Sir Horace Cutler had been returned to power in 1981 we would not be debating this measure.

My biggest objection to the Bill—that is why I have not and will not vote for it on any occasion—is that it is entirely peripheral to the major issues facing our nation today. Be that as it may, my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister have decided that the GLC will go. So, in a spirit of conciliation and compromise, which used to be the hallmark of the Tory party before it exchanged a philosopy for dogma, we are prepared to say, "All right, let it go, but at the same time"——

Mr. John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My hon. Friend will never make PPS now.

Mr. Cormack: My hon. Friend talks about PPSs. We have in this Government more PPSs than in history. It is the largest collection of eunuchs in high places since the Pope disbanded the castrati.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Just because my hon. Friend did not become a PPS.

Mr. Cormack: I was a PPS long before my hon. Friend was out of nappies. I found it a delightful but somewhat restricting experience and I did not continue.

We are saying, "All right, we will accept what you are seeking to do in respect of the metropolitan counties, albeit reluctantly; we will accept what you are seeking to do with the GLC, albeit reluctantly, but we will not accept that London, the flower of cities all, the greatest city in the world, should be without a directly elected council".

It is a sad coincidence that this week we should be commemorating the 200th anniversary of the death of Dr. Johnson, who said of London:

"when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford"—

in 1984, all that life affords apart from a directly elected council. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend's knowledge of history is about as profound as his knowledge of parliamentary tactics. I just wish that he would listen for a moment. He can have his own go later if he catches your eye, Mr. Armstrong.

In the amendment we are seeking to say to the Government, "Here is an opportunity to heed the words of those who, over the past few months, since the paving Bill"—that iniquitous measure—"was brought before the House have said, 'Please think again.'" We are not calling in aid a galaxy of pseudo-intellectuals of the Left; we are calling in aid men of great experience who have served local government well and nobly for many years. They are people like Sir Horace Cutler and Lord Marshall——

Mr. Dykes: Bernard Brook-Partridge.

Mr. Cormack: And Bernard Brook-Partridge. My hon. Friend can mention many Conservatives, and doubtless he will do so. There is also Desmond Plummer. All those who have had deep and proper experience of London government believe that it is necessary that London should have a centrally elected co-ordinating authority.

This week a letter came into my possession. It was written by an eminent elder statesman of the Tory party. He said:

"No one person or a collective is entitled to take the Conservative party along a course fraught with difficulties during the necessarily long gestation period without keeping an ear to the ground to see that the earth is not shifting."

They are wise words, uttered by a very eminent Conservative local statesman, as I shall call him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who was it?"] I shall reveal the source later. I was given the letter by a colleague who received it from the person in question and does not wish the writer's name to be revealed at the moment. I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the Committee are prepared to accept my word.

I should like to quote from a speech made by Neville Beale, the GLC member for Finchley, who happens to represent an area that is not entirely unfamiliar to the leader of our party. He says:

"Sir Horace . . . commissioned a detailed study of local government in London by the man who is now Lord Marshall and, until recently, vice-chairman of the Party. Whether everyone agrees with Lord Marshall's conclusions or not, it is a matter of some regret that the incoming Tory Government in 1979 appears to have ignored his report."

He says of Mr. Livingstone:

"the case against Ken Livingstone is not the same as the case against the GLC. Nor is the case against the GLC the case for the particular proposals in the Abolition Bill which received its Second Reading in the Commons . . . It is painfully obvious that many Tory MPs and many Tory Peers are deeply troubled by what is happening, even if reluctant to defy the Whips."

I suggest to my hon. Friends that there is deep unease throughout the country at what is being proposed. Supporting amendment No. 12—modest proposal that it is—would give my hon. Friends an opportunity to say to the Government,

"You do not have to tear up your whole measure but you can rethink this particular central provision in it".

I should be disappointed if we did not get a positive and helpful reply from the Secretary of State this evening.

Infallibility is a characteristic of few Governments. It is no answer to cogent arguments to ride roughshod over them. We have seen that happen too often in recent years. We have seen the attitude that there is a God-given right to govern. There is sometimes a case for a little humility when looking at the voting figures. A few weeks ago Mr. Walter Mondale polled in the popular vote roughly the same as the Conservative party polled in the popular vote in this country last year. He has retired from politics; we are assuming that we have a right to do whatever we want to do.

I urge my right hon. Friend to remember that he was a distinguished member of a Government who brought in the very apparatus that he is now seeking to destroy. He has a great knowledge of London. His own county councillor has told him that on this occasion he might well be advised to think again. He should listen to Alan Greengross, Horace Cutler, Neville Beale and the voices on his own Back Benches. I hope that he will——

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Don't knock me over.

Mr. Cormack: I must apologise to my hon. Friend. The last thing that I would wish to do is knock her over. Her contributions to our deliberations are always elegant and enlightened.

Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State please think carefully before he rejects the amendment? We do not wish to press it to a Division, but press it to a Division we most certainly will unless there is a categorical assurance that there will be a directly elected authority to represent this great capital city.

Mr. Pavitt: The House always enjoys listening to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), because he is one of the few Members who not only enlighten the House but relieve some of the acres of boredom that my late right hon. Friend Nye Bevan warned us about when we first came to this place.

I should like to go back into history and say why, much to my regret, I think that the hon. Gentleman's case is falling upon deaf ears on the Conservative Front Bench. I should like to refer to directly elected representatives. I suppose that I am the only person in the Chamber who spent long and weary hours in 1963 on the Standing Committee of the Bill that created the GLC. During my 20 years in the House I have been bedevilled by two Tory Ministers—one is the right hon. Member for Leeds, North East (Sir K. Joseph), who inaugurated that Bill and afterwards had a disastrous reorganisation of the National Health Service—I served on that Standing Committee—and the other is the present Secretary of State for the Environment, who later had the task of undoing the mess that had been made of the NHS. Of course, I served on that Standing Committee. Now we reach this Bill.

[Mr. Pavitt]

The history has been made plain in previous debates. In talking about the colour of the flowers, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) put his finger on the important point. The purpose of the original Bill in 1963, which this one now seeks to obviate and obliterate, was entirely the political motive that Herbert Morrison's LCC had to be changed because it had been Labour-controlled since it was established. To do so, that original 1963 Bill incorporated pieces of Kent, including Bromley, and eliminated the Middlesex county council, to arrange boundaries. It looked as if two things would happen — first that the GLC would become Conservative-controlled instead of Labour, and secondly that many of the 32 boroughs that were created would also be Conservative. Neither of those things happened.

When the Secretary of State for the Environment, who followed the history of that first Act closely, was consulted about the Bill, he realised the great mistake in the Conservative party's judgment: following the establishment of that new large body, there were elections. Therefore, when the Bill was first mooted, there was a good deal of discussion in the contacts that the right hon. Gentleman was having with the Prime Minister of whether or not to have an election or how the Government would get out of having one. The right hon. Gentleman is a serious political operator. He was not going to face the possibility again of having a directly elected responsible body in charge of all the strategy that is needed for the greatest capital city in the world because the last time that was done by his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East, the Tory party lost out. Therefore an excellent case has been made out by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who moved the amendment.

11 pm

Throughout our debates a plea has been made from this side of the Chamber that the Conservative party should not desert its democratic principles, but it has fallen on deaf ears. Although I hope that the Secretary of State for the Environment will come to the Dispatch Box and say, "We shall return to the philosophy of Disraeli, Iain Macleod and Macmillan. We will accept the amendment so that there will be democracy for an elected authority" I do not believe that it will happen. I have passed the age when I believe in miracles.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): I do not intend to spend long upon discussing the merits and demerits of Amendment No. 12. Even though I may take no further part in the debates I believe it to be essential that one hon. Member for London should endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) has proposed.

I supported the Bill on Second Reading. I believe that it is desirable to abolish the Greater London council and to redistribute its functions. I have also supported the Government in defeating various amendments. However, I do not favour abolition unless some of the strategic functions can be replaced. I cannot agree that 7 million Londoners should flounder at the mercy of a disparate collection of 32 boroughs. This will lead either to chaos, or to a vacuum, or to an alternation of both.

If the amendment is passed I shall be glad to continue to support the Government in their efforts to abolish the GLC. If the amendment is not accepted or if, worse, is defeated, I shall give no further support to what I believe to be a fundamentally deficient Bill. I shall oppose it if it remains unaltered after the Report stage, at its Third reading.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I do not wish to apportion blame. All hon. Members on the Government side of the Chamber agree that the Greater London council should be abolished. Our only concern is what should replace it. We are concerned about accountability, a point which was made frequently during the debate on Second Reading. I do not wish to deal with that subject tonight, but with the provision of a framework for London that is both effective and efficient. If the Bill remains unamended it will create a multiplicity of precepting bodies. They will impose precepts upon the boroughs either individually or as a group.

Secondly, each precepting body will be orientated towards its own functions and will not have an overall view of London. Each precepting body will require its own premises, equipment and staff and it will also require borough councillors to serve upon it. This could impose an intolerable work load upon them, given their borough duties.

Lastly, I do not believe that my right hon. Friend can deny that as a result of the quangos and joint boards there will be fragmentation, which will lead to less efficiency.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have listened with some astonishment to my hon. Friend. He does not appear to have taken on board that there are no extra precepts for the outer London boroughs. There is one extra precept for the Inner London boroughs. There is to be one joint board for London. During the last few minutes my hon. Friend has spoken as though there is to be a plethora of precepts and joint boards. I must ask him to address himself to the proposals contained in the Bill, not to a figment of his imagination.

Mr. Leigh: All that I can do is to refer my right hon. Friend to those who are involved in local government in London and particularly to members of the Conservative group on the GLC, who have studied the proposals carefully and are convinced that there will be major rate increases in outer London. The difficulty with the new structure is that it will not be directly elected and, therefore, it flies in the face of accountability.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) is asking for a new structure which will be directly elected and primarily concerned with policy-making and not with executive government. It will not be a local authority for the purposes of the Act and will not have section 137 and 142 powers to abuse. Its functions will be precisely defined. It will not be able slowly to acquire powers and thereby become a GLC Mark II.

Mr. Wheeler: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend's argument. Can he tell us precisely what function he would give to the new authority? As he is proposing a new authority, he ought to be able to tell us what he would give it to do.

Mr. Leigh: I am about to deal with that. The authority's functions would include the fire brigade, civil defence, flood prevention, land drainage and refuse disposal. It would also have planning functions and be

involved with the structure plan and the resolution of conflicts between the boroughs. It would also have financial functions.

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): My hon. Friend started by saying that the strategic authority would not have executive functions, but he is now outlining functions that are all executive functions.

Mr. Leigh: I say that all the powers that can possibly be devolved to the boroughs should be so devolved. As my hon. Friend knows, some powers cannot be devolved to the boroughs and have to be vested in some sort of authority.

The new authority could have financial functions for debt management and rate equalisation, and ad hoc functions, including responsibilities for historic buildings, arts, regional policy and the green belt. Those are all Londonwide functions. For funding, the authority could make an annual bid to the Secretary of State.

What are the advantages of such an authority? It would be accountable, cost-effective and efficient. It would not be a local authority, and it would provide a voice for London, avoid the multiplicity of joint boards and quangos, provide a framework for policy-making, avoid the centralisation of power in the Secretary of State, provide an easy mechanism for rate equalisation, eliminate duplication, strengthen and not weaken the executive arm of the boroughs, by ensuring co-ordination, and standardise delivery of services.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): My hon. Friend stressed that the authority should be accountable, but he says that it could be financed by a direct bid. I have always understood that one of the essences of accountability is that the authority raises money. According to my hon. Friend it will not raise money, but will simply apply to the Secretary of State. Is my hon. Friend commending that form of accountability to the House?

Mr. Leigh: I am simply trying to be helpful to the Government. I am not proposing a GLC Mark II. We are trying to devise a framework that is efficient.

My hon. Friends who support the Bill face a difficulty. What will they do about the functions that cannot be devolved to the boroughs? There must be a Londonwide voice for London.

Let me throw out a last lifeline to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. If he is not prepared under any circumstances to accept a directly elected body, I hope that he will listen to Mr. Bob Vigars who is a member of the GLC and is worried about the Bill. He does not believe that the good government of London would be helped by fragmentation. I do not say that his solution is a desirable one, but it is better than we have at the moment. He is asking for a statutory LBA. I do not believe that that is necessarily the best solution but at least it would provide a Londonwide framework and a voice for London. If my right hon. Friend is not prepared to accept the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South, I hope that we will consider that alternative.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Earlier this week I said that the Opposition were the true democrats and custodians of democracy and that we wanted an extension of democracy. It is painful to hear the reactions of the Conservatives who are in the process of taking democracy from the people in the GLC and metropolitan county areas. I make no apology for my position. It is absolutely clear. I am for the continuation of the GLC and all the metropolitan councils. I shall take the example of Tyne and Wear to illustrate my points.

In an area of high unemployment, deep economic problems and all the consequent social problems, it is essential to have elected representatives accountable to the people through a strategic authority which can help to solve some of those problems despite the attitudes of the Government. That is why I support amendment No. 46.

Democracy must also be simple and clearly understood. The Government's proposals will make the situation extremely complex and difficult to understand. One authority for Tyne and Wear is to be replaced by seven authorities, each with its own functions. That is absurd. How people in the area are to understand the differences in how the bodies operate is beyond imagination. I have personal experience of a similar situation, having lived in a new town, where there was a development corporation, controlled centrally, a elected town council, an elected district council and an elected county council, and many people were confused about the functions of those bodies.

In my area things are fairly simple at present. There is the borough council—in this case, Sunderland—and the county council. In place of that, we are to have eight different bodies directly accountable to the Secretary of State, the joint boards and joint committees accountable to a body consisting of elected representatives from the district and borough councils, and then the local council.

Despite what the Government say, it is clear that only minimal power is to be transferred from the strategic county authority to the borough council. It is estimated that it will amount to a maximum of 20 per cent. in terms of spending power, while the joint boards, joint committees and residuary authorities will have 80 per cent. In other words, the main services now administered by Tyne and Wear county council will go to three different bodies.

By no stretch of the imagination can Conservative Members claim that that is an extension of democracy. It is an extension of confusion and of Government control and an increase in centralisation. We want an increase in decentralisation. We believe in accountability. We believe that elected representatives should do what they believe is right in their elected authorities for three, four or five years and then come before the electorate to answer for their actions during that period. How can that be accepted when there will be a plethora of committees? In fact, no one can forecast how many committees there will be.

11.15 pm

Mr. Cowans: My hon. Friend is making a tremendous case. While the case put forward by Conservative Members in respect of the GLC is valid, it is equally valid in respect of every metropolitan county. The case is that there is no need for residuary boards if there is another authority in London, and that applies to every met county.

Mr. Boyes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting the argument so succinctly.

I guarantee that, as a result of this reorganisation, the job prospects and conditions of the people of my area will become worse. When Labour is in power in a few year time, it is absolutely inevitable that the outcry will be such that it will be necessary to reintroduce a tier of strategic government to carry out the functions needed to get our people back to work and to raise their standard of living.

Mr. Dykes: Although as time goes on some of the peripheral and tangential arguments change about what local authorities should do, the central arguments always persist. That theme was part of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who ably presented the amendment on behalf of a number of my hon. Friends following the amendment proposed by the second Bench below the Gangway.

Whatever may now be said by Ministers in their awkward position—and we all sympathise greatly with the dilemma faced by my right hon. Friend and his colleague—the essential truth always remains.

I hope that colleagues from outside the capital city will accept our apologies for talking about London. The central function of London government was best summed up and encapsulated — despite the fact that he had recent difficulties over another political battle of a totally different kind—by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science in his former capacity as Minister for Housing and Local Government. During Second Reading of the London Government Bill he rightly, and with great conviction and enthusiasm, quoted the

"masterly Report of clarity, humanity and vision"

of the Herbert Commission and said that it formed

"the basis of the . . . Bill".

He said that

"Greater London is, in a very real sense, a single city"

unit needing a directly elected Greater London council. He added:

"One would have thought that this proposal that Londoners should have an effective say in the shaping of their own environment would have an obvious appeal".

He continued:

"Those who find it unpalatable must face up to the question of what they would have instead".

He also rejected specifically and with great clarity and enthusiasm the use of joint boards or a joint board for Londonwide strategic functions. In the same debate, he said:

"No solution can be found by submitting these great tasks to delegates of local authorities responsible for part only of the area and its problems and some of which have responsibilities which are not only different from but often in conflict with the interests of London."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1962; Vol. 669, c. 51-53.]

If we examine these matters in a dispassionate way, there is no reason why we should conclude that the basic rationale for the creation of a Greater London authority is no longer valid. It has not been changed by the short-term political considerations that may have arisen in various accidental ways since the last general election.

The basic arguments remain entirely valid. None of my hon. Friends could say tonight, in all honesty and with conviction, that everything has been fundamentally changed by a multitude of tangible factors that necessitate an entirely different basic structure for London's Government, which must now be devolved to some extent to the boroughs but mostly to central Government or to quangos and joint boards. In the old days such an idea would have been anathema to any Conservative Government. I find it most disappointing that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues on the Front Bench do not have the courage to admit the solemn obligation of Conservative Governments to the traditions of our own policy, which I had assumed to lie in devolution, decentralisation, passing down local functions, though at the same time they could encompass creating—as we did in the early 1960s—a dramatic new authority to undertake the strategic planning of the whole Greater London area.

There is no reason for any basic change. My right hon. Friend and his colleagues use an entirely spurious argument when they say that some or most of the functions would be returned to the 32 borough councils. On all the evidence, that is entirely wrong. Most of the GLC's citywide functions were inherited from the London county council, Middlesex and other county authorities. They cannot easily be divided among the boroughs. Hence there is to be an elaborate jungle—a nightmare structure—of quangos, joint boards, trusts and agencies, all relying on the patronage and decision-making powers of the Secretary of State.

The abolition scheme is designed to look like a plan for decentralisation but we know that in practice it is a very different thing. The financial breakdown reveals the true position in clear statistical terms.

As a traditional old-fashioned Tory, I will resist to the end of time — like my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst)—the idea that all power should end up in Whitehall. That was the traditional philosophy of the Labour party. Indeed, it still is that party's philosophy, although for tonight's purposes the Opposition are pretending that that is no longer so.

The Bill is a sad reflection of the opportunistic change in the Government's proposals since the general election. It results from an ill-thought-out, ill-considered proposal. Because it was not discussed with anyone in the Conservative party structure at any level, even the Cabinet, we are now lumbered with pretending to want to pass this ill-judged proposal into law.

The amendment is a valid proposal and should be supported not only by Conservative Members but by hon. Members in all parts of the Committee. The Government have achieved only very modest majorities on the previous amendments. They should think again before the Bill goes upstairs, and have the courage to change their mind.

Mr. Tony Banks: Although I have sat through so many debates about the GLC and the met councils since June 1983, I still find it unbelievable that this proposal is seriously made. I know that I should not, but I find it unbelievable that, after 95 years of directly elected citywide government in London, the Government are proposing that that voice is no longer needed. The Government might not have agreed with the noises that have come from county hall. They certainly have not agreed with the politics of those who control it, but surely that is not an argument for abolition of the GLC—that is an argument for getting out on the doorsteps and campaigning through the ballot box to get a change in that political control, not to steamroller it aside saying, "We do not like its politics and the people who control it, so we shall abolish it."

It is monstrous to suggest that 32 London boroughs can speak for London or, indeed, that the Secretary of State can speak for London. I understand that his Department has rejected the idea of a Minister for London, so who will speak for London?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Quango speaking.

Mr. Banks: It is marvellous how strong tea can produce so much wit. It is amazing that the Government

should persist in the idea that 32 boroughs can speak for London. The London Boroughs Association has never been able to speak for London. Even if it were suggested that it should be a statutory body, I do not believe that its ability to speak for London would be improved. People on that association are there to represent their boroughs. They will, as is their right, fight their corner and for their boroughs, not with a Londonwide voice. The continuing battle between county hall and this place has gone on for many years. I shall quote from a pamphlet written by the Progressive party in 1898, when a Conservative Government under Lord Salisbury again proposed the breaking up of London's government. It was called tenification at that time. The pamphlet said:

"There cannot be a town of Kensington or a town of Whitechapel, because the town life of a Londoner is not restricted to his own parish. Live where he may, the interests of his life are metroplitan, and no paper constitution of local mayors and councils can make it otherwise."

That is as true today with 32 London boroughs as it was then.

If the GLC's powers are devolved, not to the boroughs but to indirectly elected boards, as is suggested in the Bill, the following factors will arise. First, the boards will have a single purpose orientation. They will look after only one service. There will not be the argument on those boards that is found among Labour groups in county hall, or among Conservative groups, about conflicting demands of service. Secondly, the board will have no mandate for its services. It will have no programme for action on a citywide basis. Thirdly, it will be ineffective in resolving conflict because, as with the London Boroughs Association, representatives on indirectly-elected joint boards will argue for their small part of London. That is not good for London. It does no make good Londonwide sense. Although I have grave reservations about amendment No. 11, I share the desire of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) for citywide government. We have it at the moment—it is called the GLC—and this amendment will in no way act as a substitute.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): In moving Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said:

"To most Londoners London is a series of separate local areas with very diverse characteristics. Camden has little in common with Croydon; Hackney has little in common with Harrow; Redbridge has little in common with Richmond."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol 69, c. 27.]

That is correct to an extent, but I do not believe that it is possible to consider London, our great capital city, merely as a collection of 32 Greater London boroughs. There is a need for a central voice to discuss many issues—for example, traffic. The GLC proposes very soon to introduce a ban on lorries in the London area at night and at weekends. That is a dotty proposal, which will do great damage to commerce in London if it is implemented.

11.30 pm

Under my right hon. Friend's proposals, those matters will pass to the Ministry of Transport. I have no great quarrel with that, but if the Department gets it wrong, where will we be able to criticise the proposals and discuss them? I doubt whether we will be able to do so on the Floor of the House, although I believe that it should be within the ambit of Parliament.

The issue of roads transcends the interests of individual local London boroughs.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Will my hon. Friend clarify one matter? In common with other hon. Friends and Opposition Members, he calls for a city wide voice. Is he asking that the authority should be merely a talking shop, capable of expressing opinion, or that it should be cloaked with executive powers? They are not one and the same thing.

Sir Philip Goodhart: I am not arguing for executive powers. The mere impact of debates has an influence on Ministers and the civil servants who prepare Ministers for them.

Mr. Cormack: Is it not interesting that many of those who are most vociferously against our suggestion are most vociferously in favour of the European Parliament?

Sir Philip Goodhart: I am not sure whether it has executive powers or not. I think that it is limited. The debates on some matters may have only a degree of interest.

The issue of roads transcends the interests of the individual Greater London boroughs. At least once a week I travel on the south circular road. If ever one wanted a monument to a lack of planning ability on the part of the GLC, the south circular would prove the case. At long last the Secretary of State for Transport has asked for a survey of needed improvements to the south circular. It may get it right, but it may get it wrong. The matter must be discussed by a central body.

Public transport also transcends the interests of one single Greater London borough. Obviously, our constituents have an interest. We are delighted that at long last politicians have been removed from the day-to-day control of London Regional Transport. To think that our constituents will not have an interest in the plans, performance and policies of London Regional Transport is absurd. We cannot spend one or two days a year discussing this on the Floor of the House, nor can it be effectively discussed by the London Boroughs Association.

We need a special Committee of the House to discuss such Londonwide issues, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will introduce an amendment on Report showing that the Government support the idea. I note that my right hon. and sometime Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) did not think much of the idea on Second Reading, when he said:

"Such a Committee would not have been democratically elected for London."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 191.]

I could not believe my ears when I heard him say that, but I checked it in the columns of *Hansard*, and there it was. It is difficult to imagine a more nonsensical argument against the concept. Whatever one may say about hon. Members who represent London constituencies, all of us received a higher proportion of votes at the general election than did any candidate at the GLC elections. To suggest that such a Committee would not be democratic is to misunderstand the meaning of democracy. I hope that the Government will be able to support this concept.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): As a London Member of Parliament, may I begin by making it clear that I regard the GLC as outdated, expensive and outmoded, and I have no hesitation in welcoming its departure. However, in January 1983 I chose to have a public debate in my constituency—my colleagues will tell me that

[Mr. Robin Squire]

that is a dangerous precedent — and invited for that purpose one of my hon. Friends and colleagues from London. We were to discuss the need or otherwise for a Londonwide body. We had a good, ding-dong debate that covered all the issues, and at the end of the meeting it was clear that a large majority of those present — most of whom were Conservatives—concluded that there was a need for a Londonwide body.

Invigorated by my practical demonstration of accountability, I was a little nonplussed a few months later when the election manifesto arrived, and I realised that the odd problem had appeared. As a consequence of that commitment, the Government are no longer addressing the central question, which is how best local government should be organised in Greater London. Instead they are addressing the question how best to dispose of the functions of the Greater London council. That is a very different matter, but one that, in the context of the way in which the debate has developed, has become almost the inevitable one, rather than the one I would wish.

It is true to say that one can distribute services in almost any way and they will still work.

The Government's proposals will work with fewer problems than has been suggested by the Opposition and with more problems than my hon. Friends have suggested. However, I am concerned that they lay great stress on the operation of joint boards. I speak as the former leader for several years of a large outer London borough, with all the powers, such as education and social services. My experience led me to believe that arguably the weakest role in local accountability was the operation of joint boards. It requires members who have been elected in a borough or district capacity to position themselves instead on a county or boroughwide basis. Above all, the role tends to fall on the shoulders of those who are not necessarily the most competent, but on those who happen to be available for day-time meetings, and those whom the Leader can rely on, rather than on those who have great expertise in the subject under discussion. Therefore, I am concerned at any proposals that would increase existing joint board activity, and remove a Londonwide authority elected for that purpose.

My colleagues will be relieved to hear that I do not want to make a long speech, but I should like my right hon. Friend to bear in mind my fears, and those of other hon. Members who have spoken. If this amendment is unacceptable, for whatever reason, will he at least keep an open mind on the subject, because many of us remain concerned, through public debates and private conversations? We want to see more than we have so far seen to be satisfied that the current proposals are necessarily the best.

Mr. Ashby: In debating this amendment, we have to ask ourselves what the current functions of the GLC are. We have had a lot of nostalgia from hon. Members who were members of the GLC some 15 years ago, but they do not know that the GLC is now a eunuch. It is a body with no powers. I was a member of the GLC between 1977 and 1981. I was vice-chairman of the development committee for a year. In that year, I drew up a list of all the land that the GLC possessed, which extended from Land's End to John o' Groats. Little of it was in London, and little of it was of any relevance to London. We got rid of it, and so the GLC ceased to have a relevant function.

I was chairman of the legal and parliamentary committee, where my prime function was to prepare the Greater London Council (Money) Bill, which I notice went through on the nod the other day. That is an unnecessary function of the GLC. My next role was three years as chairman of the housing committee, and in that time, we devolved housing from the GLC to the boroughs. If housing had not been so devolved, we should not be able to debate this Bill, because that was the major function of the GLC. Once the housing was gone, there was nothing left for the GLC to do.

Parks are virtually non-existent, and what parks there are could easily be devolved to the boroughs. What importance is there in the parks? The GLC makes no impact on the environment. Road repairs are nearly all done locally, and the major thoroughfares are looked after by the Ministry of Transport. The only major road being built is the Rochester way, which will soon be finished. The fire brigade runs itself — *[Laughter.]* Oh yes it does. Hon. Members should reflect that the GLC had the ambulance service for a few years until it was taken from it. There was no outcry about that, and the ambulance service runs very well. What happened to the fire service before 1964? We had a first-class fire brigade service in London, which was running very efficiently. We could easily return to that.

11.45 pm

Mr. Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashby: I shall not give way for the moment.

The GLC's real function was strategic and was to produce the development plan. I believe that the development plan must be updated from time to time, but that is something that could easily be done by an ad hoc forum composed of the various elements of the boroughs. The only great hope for the GLC was docklands, but it is not developing that, because that has gone to the docklands development corporation. The board is doing a first-class job. After docklands what else was left?

I believe that the support for the GLC that we have heard represents a misunderstanding of its present lack of functions. I well remember the pamphlet of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). But 1976 was before housing was devolved. Once housing had gone, what was left——

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is saying only that the Government can take more and more powers away from the GLC. We know that, but does he or does he not believe in democratic accountability?

Mr. Ashby: It is not a question of democratic accountability. The fact is that those functions have gone. What is left? Well, something very important is left.

Mr. Dykes: I do not want to prolong the debate, but as my hon. Friend has asked what is left, perhaps I can refer him to page 15 of that pamphlet, which states:

"There are three main principles to put forward:

1. The GLC must become a proper strategic authority within the South East Region.

2. There must be clearer lines of responsibility between the GLC and the boroughs.

3. The boroughs must be seen to be the primary units of local government in London."

Quite apart from housing, what about that?

Mr. Ashby: My hon. Friend is saying that we should get rid of the GLC but have a strategic south-east authority that covers the whole of the south east of England. That is a different argument. Some peole are in favour of regional policy although I am not one of them. However, that is a completely different thing. I do not see how my hon. Friend can argue like that. He is arguing there for something completely different.

I said that something was left, and that is the representational role. By that I mean a purely representational role and something that has been abrogated by the present regime in county hall, which does not like being representative. I would be in favour of having a lord mayor for Greater London——

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend would be marvellous.

Mr. Ashby: I would rather enjoy that role, and am grateful to my hon. Friend for that remark. But there is a case for having someone who is truly representational with a budget of several million pounds who is able to give great dinners — *[Laughter.]* — and to go to the great cities abroad representing London. But the very laughter that I hear illustrates the absurdity of the only representational role that one can think of for the GLC. It would be frivolous, and it would not be acceptable or understood — *[Interruption.]* Wandsworth can run Battersea park. There is nothing special about that park. There is nothing special either about Burgess park. They can all be run by the boroughs.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Ashby: There is absolutely no reason for maintaining the GLC.

Many people who are now speaking against the abolition of the GLC, not so long ago were in favour of its abolition. Many ex-members of the GLC, who are not protecting their own hides and are looking at the issue objectively, are saying that enough is enough. They favour abolition. There are dozens of hon. Members with——

Mr. Charles Morrison: By giving way, my hon. Friend has saved me the need to make a speech. With his great experience and knowledge of the GLC, will he comment on the report of Lord Marshall about the future of the GLC? After all, it was drawn up on the basis of a careful inquiry. Lord Marshall was empowered to recommend, if he felt so inclined, the abolition of the GLC, but he actually came out against that.

Mr. Ashby: Lord Marshall really stressed the representational role of the GLC. Anyone who has seen the recent agendas of the GLC will realise that it is an expensive debating shop on every subject except London — *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who intervenes from a sedentary position, wants to replace the GLC mark 1 with a similar GLC mark 2 talking shop, producing nothing. I suspect that any attempt to find a solution to the problem will produce the same results.

The remaining areas that cause some of us concern, such as historic buildings and the green belt, are dealt with effectively in the Bill. With those out of the way, there is no other function for the GLC or any GLC mark 2, 3, 4 or 5.

Mr. Straw: With this group of amendments is included amendment No. 46, which proposes that the precepting authorities should be subject to election. As many Conservative Members wish to speak in this debate, and as it will be for the convenience of the House generally if it is concluded at a reasonable hour, I shall not say anything further about that amendment. There will be another opportunity, as the vote on the amendment will not arise until tomorrow evening.

On the issue raised by amendment No. 12, the speech by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) was frivolous and ill-informed. It emphasises how important it is that there should be the fullest parliamentary scrutiny of these matters before the House and the Government reach a final decision. Although the amendment is not perfect, it is far better than the Government's proposal, and for that reason we shall support it.

I hope that the Secretary of State will realise that he has been lumbered with a commitment with which he probably disagrees and which he believes is not worth the candle. It is still not too late for the right hon. Gentleman to listen to counsel from both sides of the chamber. Proverbs have warned of the dangers facing the Government:

> "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall".

Despite the fact that the Government have an enormous paper majority—they have not been able to wheel out that majority tonight; on three occasions tonight, the Government's majority has been cut to less than 50—it is important that the Government should listen to the arguments and the merits of the case and, for that reason, support the amendment.

Mr. Wilkinson: The last thing I would wish to do at this hour is to delay the Committee. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves. Throughout the spring and summer, between 12 and 15 of his hon. Friends representing London constituents sat long hours and worked hard trying to work out the best institution for London's government when the GLC was abolished. We support the abolition of the GLC. We are not convinced that the Government have adequately thought out what is to replace it.

The principle is simple: those aspects that can sensibly be devolved to the boroughs should be devolved; those that can more effectively be fulfilled at the centre should be carried out at the centre. The instrument for the power of execution should be directly elected, because in the past the Conservative party has not been afraid of direct elections. The support that the Government have enjoyed from hon. Members representing the shires has been given because they, like Conservative Members representing London constituencies, believe that the extra arrogation of powers to the Secretary of State, the degree of centralisation and the multiplicity of joint boards—the quangos—are not helping.

This legislation may prove to be boring. Indeed, the Government may wish to bore us into submission. I believe, as I said on Monday night, that, for our party, this will prove to be a devolution Bill. It will prove to be a parliamentary morass. We shall get deeper and deeper into the morass, and that will not be for the good government of London. London needs an elected voice to represent its interests to Government and to the nation. The Government may not realise that, but most Londoners do.

Londoners will judge this measure by how it affects their pockets. The financial implications are extremely

[Mr. Wilkinson]

sketchy and have not been thought through. I know that a careful and thorough analysis has been done by a highly qualified person, known to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That document, which has been suppressed for the time being, proves that, far from reducing the costs to London ratepayers this measure means that they will pay more. I shall not say more than that. That document will be published shortly, and I suspect that it will, at a stroke, destroy the main rationale for what I regard as a thoroughly undemocratic measure which is not worthy of our party. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will oppose this measure in supporting the most excellent amendment on the list—amendment No. 12.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I shall be brief. I have two questions to ask my hon. Friends who are opposing this amendment. London is our capital city, and we all know what it means to us as our capital city. What is this geographical entity for which a few of my hon. Friends are pleading on behalf of some new local authority?

12 midnight

All right, it would include the City of London; it would include Westminster. I suppose that it would include Blackheath, where I was born, which used to be part of Surrey. Does it include Greenwich, Woolwich, Richmond — ancient old boroughs — Hendon, Dagenham and Camberley—umbilically attached to London? How far does it go? Does it go as far as Rugby 82 miles away and 56 minutes by train, closer in terms of communication with London than many of the places on the undefined periphery of this London that my hon. Friends are talking about?

My second question is one that has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg). What is the institution that my hon. Friends want? What is the scope of it? What powers should it have? The reality surely is that either it will be an embarrassment—an unloved and unwanted extravagance like the European Assembly, forever sentenced to posturing, lacking power and forever seeking power—or it will be instead a resurrected, second GLC? That is what they have said that they do not want. If they do not want it I suggest that they vote against it.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I agree with one thing that was said by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—that this is probably one of the most serious debates on the Bill. The amendment spoken to by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) raises one of the issues relating to London that has caused the most argumem. Many issues have been aired.

If I have one criticism of the debate—it is perhaps churlish of any Minister to criticise a debate, but I think it is a fair point, and I hope I shall go some way to remedy it—it is that many who spoke about London perhaps did not do so with the historical perspective of why we are where we are and why the Government have brought forward this measure.

When the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) quoted from the document called "The fight for the county council — an elector's catechism of February 1898" he made the fair point that the argument was raging then. I shall rehearse with the Committee why I think we are where we are, and justify the decisions that the Government have taken and the proposals that we have brought before the House.

There are three amendments in this group. They all have a common theme. They all seek to retain some form of directly elected body for each of the seven metropolitan areas. The amendments are different. The amendment moved by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey would preserve the GLC as it is—warts and all—with no changes. There are few hon. Members and few people who have been involved with the GLC or local government in the London boroughs who can support that.

There are arguments for some form of Londonwide body—and I shall deal with them—but not for the GLC as it is. Amendment No. 12 relates to some form of replacement authority. Amendment No. 46 which was spoken to by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) is different. It contains the strange proposition of an elected precepting authority separate from the joint boards that have operational responsibility for the services. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said that he hoped to be able to argue that point later. Perhaps in view of the time I will not deal with that at length now. I will say only that I hope that, when the time comes, the Committee will reject amendment No. 46.

I have just referred to amendment No. 11, which would leave the GLC untouched. I do not think that anybody wants that.

I shall devote the rest of my remarks to amendment No. 12, to which most of my hon. Friends and one or two Opposition Members have spoken. It deals with one of the key issues in the Bill. We welcome the fact that those who have put their names to the amendment recognise that the GLC in its present form must go, but I do not think that they have made out a case for a replacement body directly elected.

The word "metropolis" emerged about 150 years ago in the history of London government. That is how far the arguments go back. We have to remember that the formation of the first Londonwide body, when London was very much smaller than it is today, arose out of the need to have a sewerage system. It was the sewerage commissioners who first established the Londonwide body. I have nothing whatever against sewers; indeed, Disraeli was chided by his opponents as having a policy for sewers. But the public health legislation of Disraeli was, of course the foundation of much of our public health today. Today our main sewerage system is the responsibility of the Thames water authority.

There followed the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1855. It was a compromise between those who wanted local government for the vestries and those who wanted some form of metropolitan authority. But by the end—*[Interruption.]* If I may say so, the Committee has asked me to take the debate seriously, and I hope I am doing so. The argument is a very real and genuine one and it has lasted for over a century. *[Interruption.]* By the end of the 19th century there was a strong Conservative commitment to localism and a strong Liberal commitment to centralism.

When the Conservative party established the LCC in 1899 they saw it as part of a system that would consist as

well of strong London boroughs. In 1899 they went on to create the boroughs, but they did not become the powerful bodies that were envisaged at the time. Even then they were having worries, concerns and doubts about the LCC. On Second Reading I quoted the words of the then Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, and I quote them again. He said:

"We might have obtained a much more efficient machine if we had been content to look upon London as what it is, not as one great municipality but as an aggregate of municipalities". —[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 28.]

The argument continued. The Ullswater Commission was appointed in 1921, when the London suburbs fought off control by the LCC, but in 1950 London's rapid growth gave rise to pressure within the Tory party for reform. The hon. Member for Blackburn mentioned the "Powell plan", conceived by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) in 1955. It proposed the abolition of the LCC and the transfer of most of its functions to seven new county boroughs, which would form what is now recognised as the inner London area.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Secretary of State is giving us a very interesting historical lecture, but will he agree that each time the government of London was examined by the various bodies they came to the conclusion that a citywide body and a citywide voice were necessary?

Mr. Jenkin: I do not deny that at all. It is a matter of history. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop the historical perspective. I was asked to treat this as the most important amendment in the Bill. I am sorry —although the hour is late, my hon. Friends deserve a full reply.

The Powell plan led to the establishment of the Herbert Commission, which reported in 1960. It recommended a single council for Greater London, originally with 52 London boroughs, smaller than the present ones, but with the enormously important provision that the London boroughs should be the primary units of local government——

Mr. Dykes *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I am sorry. I hope that my hon. Friend will bear with me. The point is that until then there had not been powerful boroughs in London. None of the boroughs up to 1964 had ever had full powers anything like those of most purpose authorities with three exceptions—the three county boroughs of Croydon, East Ham and West Ham. All the rest had lesser powers. The creation of the GLC, so vigorously defended by the Labour party today, was bitterly opposed, line by line, clause by clause by the Labour party in 1962 and 1963.

The most important point is that the creation of those powerful London boroughs alongside a GLC——

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Jenkin: May I develop this argument?

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: All right, I shall give way.

Dr. Cunningham: Why does the right hon. Gentleman keep emphasising the point about powerful London boroughs when he introduced a Rates Act to stop them being powerful in the way that they want?

Mr. Jenkin: With respect, that is irrelevant to the argument. The great majority of London boroughs will not and will never need to be rate-capped, and the hon. Gentleman knows that.

The point that I was making before the hon. Gentleman diverted the argument is that the creation of the strong London boroughs in 1964 contained within it the seeds of the destruction of the GLC, because what has become clear in the 20 years since then is that once one has the London boroughs, responsible as they are for over 80 per cent. of local authority spending in London, most purpose authorities with all the major local authority functions, it becomes impossible to have a viable separately elected authority on top of that without the inevitability of conflict, argument and confusion.

In a long and perceptive lecture on the history of local government in London, an academic, Mr. Kenneth Young, commented:

"The GLC has always been too weak to be effective. But at the same time it has been too powerful to be accepted."

Mr. Wilkinson: Could my right hon. Friend explain to the Committee who will pay in the boroughs for the cost of the additional functions transferred from the GLC, upon abolition, to the boroughs? That is an important point as this year, for example, my own borough of Hillingdon already faces a rate increase of about 40 per cent., as my right hon. Friend knows, largely because of central Government policy. This is an important point, and I ask my right hon. Friend to give the Committee a clear explanation.

Mr. Jenkin: That does not directly arise on this amendment, but I can assure my hon. Friend that in the financial provisions towards the end of the Bill there is a series of clauses designed to make sure that the GRE, rate support grant, and so on, which go or should go to the GLC if it spends at a reasonable level will, of course, be distributed among the London boroughs so that they have the resources as well as the rateable capacity to pay for the services that devolve upon them.

12.15 am

These are complicated and technical matters, but the provisions are intended to ensure that no fortuitous gain or loss occurs as a result of the redistribution of the powers among the boroughs. The London rates equalisation scheme will also preserve a substantial measure of redistribution, as happens between the wealthy and the poorer boroughs of London. We shall come to that matter at a later stage. My hon. Friend does not have anything to worry about.

It is scarcely surprising that the argument for the abolition of the GLC began to be heard quite soon after it was set up in the early 1970s. Serious thought was given within the Conservative Party to the abolition of the GLC. Before the 1974 general election a Conservative policy statement promised an urgent review

"of what further powers should be devolved to the London boroughs by the GLC".

The same Mr. Kenneth Young put forward the view that, had the Conservative party won the general election in 1974, a Bill would have been introduced to abolish the GLC.

The conflict that has taken place during the last 100 years has represented a conflict between the centralists pressing for uniformity and central control and the localists who are arguing for as much power to be given to the

[Mr. Jenkin]

borough councils as possible. It is the Conservative party which has usually, though not always, followed the localist cause while the Liberal and Labour parties have always followed the centralist cause. In his speech the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey put forward the traditional centralist argument for London: that as much power as possible should be given to the centre. He followed the very honourable tradition of the Liberals who during the last century have put forward the same argument. Those who support the Conservative party have argued consistently, and successfully in 1964, for devolution of power to the boroughs.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): It was the Secretary of State's party that took away from democratically elected local government their powers over health, water and transport and it was my party that opposed him.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) made a powerful speech in which he indicated how the various powers have been withdrawn from the GLC and given to other appointed bodies, which are accountable ultimately to this House. Very few people now argue that health or the water authority functions should go back to the GLC. The Thames water authority covers a far greater area than that of the GLC. And so it should. There is a conflict between the localists who favour local government and those who favour big authorities with a strategic role. The Committee know that this Government's view is strongly localist and that it was the starting point of "Streamlining the Cities". The Bill gives effect to those principles. Virtually all of the service functions of the GLC which I spelled out on Second Reading — 95 per cent. of them — will go to the boroughs.

There will be only one joint authority for a Londonwide service to look after fire and civil defence. That is to be a joint responsibility with the boroughs.

An interesting aspect of the debate — I say this without implying critisism — is that we have heard a variety of different views upon what this replacement, directly elected body should do. My hon. Friend for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) gave a very long list of functions which, with the exception of section 137, seemed to me to make it indistinguishable from the present GLC. My hon. Friend may have an opportunity to spell that out.

The amendment moved by my hon. Friend for Staffordshire, South approaches this problem from the other end. He does not ask what that body should do. I listened to every word that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshitre, South said and he did not address himself to what the proposed body would do. The amendment does not spell it out. It says that there should be a body and that a Select Committee should decide what it does. That is standing the argument on its head.

The only way to decide whether there should be a replacement body is to consider in detail what it would do.

Mr. Cormack: I intervene at the request of one or two of my hon. Friends to point out that the amendment refers the matter to the House of Commons and, thereby, provides an opportunity for proper consultation, which we have not had up to now.

Mr. Jenkin: I responded to that argument some hours ago on the first amendment. I told the Committee how much consultation there had been and spelt out the considerable extent to which the Government had responded.

If we are to have a replacement body, the first question to ask is what it will do. Could it have service functions? My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West effectively made it clear that there are almost no service functions of the GLC that cannot perfectly well be devolved to the boroughs. The Government have identified the fire brigade and civil defence, but no one in his right senses would argue that we needed a separate body for the whole of London to deal with those services.

Mr. Charles Morrison: Will my right hon. Friend address himself to the question that I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) about the Marshall report?

Mr. Jenkin: I have discussed the matter with Lord Marshall. He made a number of recommendations about what the GLC might do. He has since recognised that few people accepted his proposals and thay they are now a dead letter. The fact that he reached a different conclusion in the 1970s is a fact of history which should not govern what we do now.

The real question is whether there is a strategic role for the proposed body. The word "strategic" never appeared in the Herbert report. That committee was concerned only with service functions. There is no strategic role for the Greater London area. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) asked a reasonable question. If there is a strategic planning role, it will inevitably cover a substantially wider area than Greater London.

Let us examine the major decisions that have had to be taken about London. We are now considering the future of London's airports; that is not a matter for the GLC. We have had to consider the east London river crossing; that has had to be a matter for the Department of Transport. The GLC had all the planning powers necessary to redevelop docklands, but nothing happened for 20 years until those powers were taken out of its hands.

Mr. Gorst: My right hon. Friend has not yet replied to the important question whether there are any Londonwide functions, considerations or discussions on which the London boroughs will have to reach agreement or whether there will be an enormous debate on that level that will go unresolved.

Mr. Jenkin: We have always recognised that the London boroughs will need to reach agreement on certain issues — waste disposal is clearly one — and the Bill contains a reserve power if that is necessary.

There is also the power relating to charities — [HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I sense that the Committee is anxious to reach a conclusion on this amendment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Finally, there are deep contradictions between the boroughs as main organs of local government and the idea of a separate elected authority on top. As has been shown in London, they really cannot coexist. Local government should be local and powers should be devolved to the boroughs. That is what the Bill does. I shall certainly keep an open mind, as a number of my hon. Friends have

requested, but I have heard no arguments today to convince me that it is right to have a separately elected upper-tier authority for London. I therefore ask the Committe to reject my hon. Friend's amendment.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I shall take but one minute. The Secretary of State has been thrown many lifelines in the interests of democracy for London, but he has taken none of them. The 6,750,000 people of the largest capital in western Europe want to be able to participate in the way in which their city is run in the future. There are two options before the House, either of which is preferable to the Government's proposals. I urge all hon. Members to support at least one and preferably both proposals to amend the clause and keep elected government for London.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 27, Noes 237.

Division No. 49] **[12.26 am**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Dykes, Hugh
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Gorst, John
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hicks, Robert
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Penhaligon, David
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Torney, Tom
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cartwright and
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark

Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 12, in page 1, line 10 after 'Council', insert

'shall be replaced by a directly elected authority representing the area presently administered by the Greater London Council, such authority's functions and powers to be determined by Parliament following an enquiry by a Select Committee of the House of Commons into the functions and powers of the Greater London Council.'.—*[Mr. Cormack.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The Committee divided: Ayes 210, Noes 233.

Division No. 50] **[12.37 am**

AYES

Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Benyon, William
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cartwright, John
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hicks, Robert
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Lamond, James
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Leighton, Ronald
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Keith
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Tinn, James
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Patrick Cormack and
Mr. Hugh Dykes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Crouch, David
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David

Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman. I ask the Secretary of State to recognise that he and his Cabinet colleagues have just suffered a moral and humiliating defeat.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: It is worthy of note that the Labour party did not vote for the amendment to keep the Greater London council. It has changed course. The public will be interested to note that.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Patrick Jenkin.]*

Committee report progress; to sit again this day.

Pound Note

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

12.50 am

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): This debate, coming as it does before the end of 1984, ensures that the pound note will not be reduced to small change without at least a voice being raised in the House of Commons on behalf of the millions of people who, like me, believe that the pound note has become part of our heritage and must be saved. Having studied the speeches of Lord Glenarthur in another place this week, and recalling the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn Budget statement, may I say that the drastic decision to abolish our pound note is a financial decision that does not measure up to strict examination.

We are advised that an annual saving of £3 million will result. That is nonsense. It is within my knowledge that the sheer weight of the £500 bags of £1 coins will dramatically increase the transportation costs of foreign exchange, and inter-bank branch circulation will be more expensive. Banks supplying currency to industry and commerce to meet wage bills will have to pay more for security. It may take security officers two or three journeys from bank to vehicle against one at present, thus adding to their time and risk at each end of the contract. Storage of £1 coins is also a headache for the banks.

We hear today that job losses may occur in the paper producers and printers of banknotes. I ask the Government to reflect on the queues that will result at cash desks when the staff and customers have to deal with 10 or more coins in change for a £5 note. It is widely believed that to abolish the £1 note will cost £14 million a year rather than save £3 million. Against that background, the House is entitled to demand a financial inquiry before the pound note is withdrawn from circulation.

It cannot be argued that people will get used to the new pound coin in time. We have had it for months and it is unwelcome. The small pound coin hides itself away in the middle of our coin range. It is almost identical in diameter to the 5p and 20p coins, and is slightly larger—but not by very much—than the 1p coin. Our coinage is in a mess, derived from a mixture of inflation and decimalisation. The 50p and 10p coins are both larger than the £1 coin. Switzerland has a complete coin range, with the major coin—the five franc coin—as the largest, then down to two francs, one franc and half a franc. Even in France, the 10 franc coin is large and substantial. The United States coinage is sound. Charities, which rely on impulse donations of £1, £2 or £3 slipped into an envelope, claim that they will suffer. Many people cannot afford to give £5. This also applies to pensioners who like to slip £1 or £2 into birthday cards or letters to their grandchildren. London taxi drivers find the £1 coin confusing and they handle money all day long. For the elderly, we are creating a financial horror.

Bank headquarters are asking their branches to push the new £1 coins, but many people refuse to accept them. We are flying in the face of public opinion, and have produced a psychological devaluation of our respective currencies. Lloyd George introduced the £1 note when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer back in 1914. It was a state financial provision because of the war in Europe. The House may be surprised to learn that that happened during an Adjournment debate. Therefore, it is fitting that today I use the same parliamentary procedure in my endeavours to save the £1 note.

In the name of the people of this nation, I beg the Government to pause and reflect on public opinion, which is calling out to save the £1 note. Let the Government hold a financial inquiry, and if any doubts remain, let us have a referendum so that the House may have the benefit of the advice of the millions of our citizens who hold such affection for the £1 note.

12.56 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): After the excitement that we have had today, I wish to deal seriously with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) about a matter so important to all of us as our national currency. I begin by congratulating him on having obtained this debate at such an appropriate time, so that we can deal with the issues that he has put before the House.

My hon. Friend has made a number of important and telling points about the change from the pound in note form to the pound in coin form, and in particular he commented on public opinion. No Minister offers a referendum from the Dispatch Box because, as my hon. Friend knows, in our political system a referendum has been used only for the most major constitutional questions. In recent times, it was used on the question of membership of the European Community and it was proposed in the case of the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies, all of which were constitutional matters. We do not deal with our affairs by referendum. However, it is not on those grounds that I must resist the beguiling plea to consult the public in that way. I do so because of the nature of the problem of changing currencies.

I entirely accept my hon. Friend's comments that there is an untidiness about the structure of our coinage. Unfortunately, after the period of rapid inflation that we suffered in the 1970s, the existing structure of the coinage was no longer convenient because some of the coins were the wrong size in relation to their purchasing power. My hon. Friend pointed to Switzerland, which has a more self-evident graduated currency. That is enviable, but it is no accident that it has happened in a country such as Switzerland, which has not suffered the ravages of inflation and has been able to maintain such a pattern. I have no immediate further proposals about alterations in the currency, but I assure my hon. Friend that I shall take serious note of what he says about the structure of the currency. It may be that, in the years ahead, we shall consider that further changes are needed.

We have responded to a number of the difficulties caused by the size of the coins already. The introduction of the 20p coin was a good example of this. When the 10p coin was doing service on a much larger scale, unless a 50p coin was offered in change for a pound for a very small purchase, one was apt to get nine 10p coins that formed an extremely inconvenient cylinder in one's pocket. Therefore we introduced a 20p coin to reduce some of the weight. But the 20p coin was not popular when we introduced it, and had we at the time had a referendum or a public opinion poll, or whatever might do service for that, it is very likely that the verdict would have gone against the coin. It certainly would have gone against the

50p coin 15 years ago, when that was introduced. But after a short while the 50p coin was found to be a very useful part of the currency.

If we go back a bit further to the introduction of the Treasury note in 1914, to which my hon. Friend alluded, we know that there would have been an absolute outcry if it had not been the beginning of the war. The note was introduced then because of the emergencies involved in the war breaking out. But people at that time felt that to have the pound in the form of a piece of paper was a great insult to the currency.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will remember that a few years ago the size of the pound note shrunk. There were all sorts of disparaging references to pieces of paper like soap coupons, and so on. But concern is now expressed about that same shrunken pound. Although cost is a significant factor in the decision, it is not the reason that triggered it. With the persistent inflation of the 1970s, the purchasing power of our units of currency fell to a point at which their usage changed. By 1976, the pound's purchasing power was less than that of the 10 shilling note when it was withdrawn from circulation. Of course, it is considerably less than that again today. Indeed, the purchasing power of the pound today is about equivalent to that of the half-crown when I was at school. In those days people were not saying that they must have a half-crown note. We managed pretty well without such a note. Of course, in those days the 10 shilling note was worth much more than the pound note is today.

Because of the change in the purchasing power of the pound note, its usage has also altered, particularly in recent years. No hon. Member could say that pound notes are not now in a much dirtier state, and are more often torn and damaged than they were a few years ago. That is because people no longer keep pound notes carefully in a separate segment of a wallet or in a hip pocket as they used to, separate from their coins. They tend to keep them in their pockets or purses, alongside coins, and so the notes suffer. If one looks at the issue in that way, paper is not a very satisfactory material for something that is being used as a coin.

Various comments have been made about the possibility of doing more to maintain the quality of notes in circulation. We have obviously looked at many of the options. A year ago my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Fox) suggested plastic notes. But of course forgery is an absolute bar to that solution. We have looked at other means of dealing with the problem, because the servicing of the note issue has become increasingly expensive as notes have been used in that way. But we have not found a satisfactory solution. It is because of the way in which pound notes are now used that we were led to this decision. They now circulate much more between individuals and retailers without going back through the banking system where they could be replaced by new notes.

It is not just a question of the cost of replacing the notes through printing new ones, but also of the notes staying longer in circulation than before, without coming back centrally for renewal. That situation has been deteriorating over the past few years. It was in response to that change that the Government decided that they should introduce the pound coin. It is not some extraordinary decision by the Government alone. It has happened in other countries. In France a 10 franc piece was introduced in 1974, and no notes of that value are now issued. The Germans have a five deutschmark piece, worth about £1·40, which was introduced in 1974 and there are now no notes of that value in Germany. The Japanese introduced a 500 yen coin, worth about £1·70 in 1982, and the note has long ceased. The Swiss five francs is worth about the same, and that has been around for many years. It is not an isolated decision. Other countries are also making the same decision. For example, Australia and Norway are introducing new, higher value coins in 1984.

My hon. Friend made a fair comment about the difficulties faced by people using the pound coin. It is sometimes criticised as being too heavy. It is not as heavy as the 10p piece, which is worth only a fraction of its purchasing power. Its thickness and edge, apart from its different colouration, are deliberately designed to make it easily distinguishable by touch from other coins. As they come into use more generally, they will be easy to distinguish—especially by the blind, whose interests we consulted before taking a decision. They thought it a great improvement on the note.

My hon. Friend mentioned that people liked to put a pound note in an envelope at Christmas or send it to a charity. I assure him that it will not disappear overnight. It will be around this Christmas and next Christmas. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that it would continue for at least a year. I cannot say more than that as we shall have to see how things progress. It will be around at this time next year, so it is not a sudden change. In fact, by this time next year it will be two and a half years since the pound coin was circulated, which is a long transitional period.

Mr. Dickens: Is my hon. Friend saying that we shall print more pound notes during 1985?

Mr. Stewart: No, that is not what I said. The issue of new pound notes will cease at the end of 1984. However, there are more than 500 million notes in circulation, and they will, no doubt, continue to be in circulation for some considerable time. There will not be a sudden change on 1 January from all notes to all coins. The pound note will remain in circulation for at least a further year.

The pound coin is already increasing rapidly in circulation and it is only when it comes into common usage that it will be more readily distinguished by the public and its advantages will be fully realised. Quite apart from the convenience to the blind, there are specific applications for a coin of that value that have not been fully taken into account for the very good reason that not sufficient of them have been in circulation to encourage those who have meters and vending machines to convert them. For the sake of those who have gas and electricity meters, it will be convenient to have a £1 coin, which is not too large, and which will save the collection of a large number of smaller value coins.

Many businesses held back converting machines until the pound coin was in wider use. The Royal Mint has issued more than 200 million pound coins, and more coins are being produced. I believe that, in a few years' time when people have become used to the pound coin, they will like it as they have learnt to like many other coins which were initially unpopular. At the time the 50p and 20p coins were issued, there was substantial resistance to them, but I do not receive any letters of complaint about them now. It is always difficult to make a transition of this kind, because the public are naturally conservative about

[Mr. Stewart]

currency. They are always reluctant to have any currency changes. If we had had to conduct a referendum or public opinion poll on currency changes, we would still be using groats and nobles, or the Scots among us would be using placks, bawbees and unicorns. There has always been an inherent conservatism about the currency.

The Government have a duty to ensure that the currency is maintained not only in good condition but in accordance with the current needs of individuals, shopkeepers, the financial system, and so on. I assure my hon. Friend that all those factors have been considered. The decision might well have been taken several years ago, but we felt that it was right to wait until there was a clear-cut case. We have allowed an unusually long transitional period for circulation of the coin and note together. The decision was right. The factors that led us to make the decision were justified and they have not changed.

I understand the point that was so well put by my hon. Friend. The public are instinctively suspicious and, therefore, hesitant about using new coins until they have been in circulation long enough and in sufficient quantities to be widely familiar. I accept that, until recently, that has not been the case with the pound coin. With increased usage, the pound coin will be a much more useful and respectable part of the currency than initial reactions suggested. I take on board my hon. Friend's point about the relative size and weight of coins. Those factors must be considered. As I said, already we have introduced a much lighter 20p coin to reduce the great weight of 10p coins. We shall continue to examine all the options. It is helpful for the House to have an opportunity to discuss the questions raised by this change.

I genuinely thank my hon. Friend for giving us an opportunity to consider these matters. I frequently discuss the future of the coinage with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because he is the Master of the Mint and has overall responsibility for the nation's coinage and currency. My responsibilities are more to do with day-to-day matters of the Royal Mint. We take account of the public impact of changes we make and carefully research coin specifications before introducing a coin into the currency. At that time it was necessary to make the change.

Some of the reactions have been exaggerated. I am not accusing my hon. Friend of that. It is frequently said that people will not take the pound coin and that most people regard it as highly unsatisfactory. There have been one or two tests. One major store found that less than 3 per cent. of its customers actively disliked the coin. The Post Office test showed that that applied to an even smaller proportion of people. It is an instinctive reaction to a new coin and not one that attaches to the pound coin as distinct from other new coins.

I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the factors that he mentioned have been and always are taken into account when any decisions are made affecting our currency. There are sound reasons for our decision in this case.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Job Creation

1. **Mr. Knox** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new fiscal and monetary measures he plans to achieve a higher level of employment.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Rees): Employment is already rising. Our policies offer the best chance of sustained growth of output and employment.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with the statement in the 1944 White Paper on employment that a country will not suffer from mass unemployment as long as total demand for its goods and services is maintained at a high level?

Mr. Rees: I prefer to direct my hon. Friend to the measures introduced by this Government to improve the supply side of the economy, which will make a more lasting impact on this problem.

Mr. Loyden: What evidence is there that the Government's economic policies are working, when unemployment is rising, and all the signs are that it will continue to rise in the coming years?

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman is taking counsel of his fears. I can cheer him up by reminding him that the number of people in work has increased by 250,000 over the year to June 1984.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: Would it not be constructive to encourage a reduction in interest rates in London, which would have the effect of reducing the exchange rate, thereby making our goods more competitive overseas and imports more expensive, and putting us on purchasing power parity with the Common Market?

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend, with his knowledge of these matters, will know not only that interest rates have come down, but that the policies of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer are designed to reduce interest rates. Therefore, I am sure that my hon. Friend will support the Government's policies to contain public expenditure.

Mr. Terry Davis: Do Treasury Ministers repudiate the Treasury's economic model, which shows that increasing public expenditure by £1·5 billion would generate more jobs than using the same amount of money to reduce income tax? Will the Chief Secretary come clean and tell the House that the Government care more about cutting income tax than about cutting unemployment?

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman is obviously referring to some assumptions fed into the Treasury model by various commentators with whom he is in sympathy. Therefore, I do not necessarily accept that conclusion. If the hon. Gentleman will reflect a little, he will realise that cutting taxes by raising thresholds could make a considerable impact on the labour market. Therefore, I hope that we shall have his support for any measures that we wish to carry out in that direction.

2. **Mr. John Browne** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of current economic trends upon the creation of new jobs.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): The number of people in work has risen by about a quarter of a million in the year to June 1984. Growth in employment is set to continue in 1985.

Mr. Browne: I thank my right hon. Friend for that most heartening of replies. Does he feel that, to an important extent, this rise in employment is due to the growth of new and smaller businesses, which in itself is a reflection of the Government's introduction of policies for enterprise?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. Self-employment, for example, has increased by some 400,000 between the middle of 1979 and the middle of last year, and the recent CBI survey suggests that prospects are best in the small firms and services sectors. The importance of small firms was marked by the reduction in the small firms rate of corporation tax, which was reduced substantially in this year's Budget. I hope that there will be further progress in the small firms sector next year.

Mr. Wainwright: Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that many of those new jobs are part-time only and involve relatively low skills? What will he do to enhance public demand for the skilled labour that is now on the scrap-heap because of his policies? Will he give those people a chance to get back into the labour market, by Government investment in public works?

Mr. Lawson: I do not think that many of the self-employed are part-time, as they are working full-time and very hard indeed. Of course there is a need to create more jobs, and that is why I am determined to find room within the scope of our public expenditure policy to reduce taxation in such a way that it will create greatly increased job opportunities in the years ahead.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that abolition of the wages councils would do a tremendous amount to increase employment opportunities? Is he aware that the electricians' union has already slashed the rate of pay for apprentices from 37 per cent. of adult wages to 23 per cent., and that, as a result, the number of apprentices has doubled?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend's example is correct and important. Clearly, the Government will have to consider the question of wages councils very seriously.

Dr. McDonald: Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that he has failed to convince even business economists that his policies are working? They do not believe his forecasts for inflation—they think that it will be higher — or for the rate of growth — which they believe will be lower—and they say that the outlook is depressing, as unemployment will continue to rise.

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Lady always finds everything very depressing — and I am not surprised, given the company she keeps. But the CBI forecasts are very much in line with those of the Treasury.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

3. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the most recent estimate for the public sector borrowing requirement for 1984-85.

12. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Peter Rees: The PSBR for 1984-85 is projected at around £8½ billion.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the effect of the coal strike this year has been to increase the public sector borrowing requirement and, therefore, that the consequence of Arthur Scargill has been to reduce the scope for job-creating tax and national insurance cuts in next year's Budget?

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The coal strike has made a very considerable difference, in that it may add, over the financial year as a whole, about £1½ billion to total borrowing.

Mr. Leigh: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with the wise words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) in the debate on the autumn statement last week, to the effect that losing control of the PSBR in a vain attempt to create jobs would be to fail to address the fundamental cause of our problem, which is not shortage of demand, but failure to meet it? That would be a cruel deception on the unemployed, as President Mitterrand found to his cost.

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The only way to create sustained long-lasting jobs is to contain inflation, which is a principal strand in the Government's policies.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: How much will have to be added to the PSBR as a result of the abolition of the GLC?

Mr. Rees: Nothing.

Mr. Skinner: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that since the coal strike began orders for more than £1,000 million have had to be laid before Parliament to finance the deficit of the NCB and that there is the prospect that an order for more than £600 million will be laid before Parliament? Does he accept the Chancellor's view that the strike was a worthwhile investment, given that some of his own Back Benchers now refuse to support those orders? Why will the Government not admit that they have caused the economy to run down as a result of the miners' strike and have kept the strike going because they would not negotiate and wanted MacGregor to smash the NUM?

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman has entirely misquoted my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. My right hon. Friend never said that the miners' strike was a good investment — *[Interruption.]* He said that the restructuring of the coal industry was a worthwhile investment, and any hon. Member who cares about the long-term future of this country's coal industry should adopt that point of view.

Mr. Robert Atkins: What detrimental effects would there be for the PSBR if finance were made available to ensure that certain major contracts to sell aircraft abroad did not make a loss? Does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise that the creation and containment of jobs that would result from making such finance available would more than offset any potential losses to the PSBR?

Mr. Rees: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the exposure of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. He will know that, in the current state of the world market, that exposure is considerable. He will also know that the ECGD covers a range of Airbus orders. It may even have a favourable impact in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the Treasury's latest price tag for the Falklands?

Mr. Rees: It will not add to the public sector borrowing requirement this year, which was the original question put to me.

Books and Periodicals (VAT)

4. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the imposition of value added tax on books and periodicals; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): Over 500 representations from individuals and organisations have been received by Treasury Ministers during the last two months opposing VAT on books, newspapers and periodicals. Although the Government favour a shift in the burden of taxation from taxes on earnings to taxes on spending, we have no set views at present on how this might best be done. However, the representations on this subject are being carefully considered.

Mr. Winnick: Are the Government aware that extensive damage will be done to educatiom, libraries and the book trade generally if VAT is imposed, and that that damage will extend to newspapers and periodicals? Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer bear in mind that there is no more support for the imposition of VAT on those items than there would be if it were to be imposed on food?

Mr. Hayhoe: A great deal of exaggerated speculation and comment is taking place. As I have said, representations have been received, and they are being considered carefully.

Mr. Cormack: Why does my hon. Friend not end damaging speculation and prevent a major revolt—one that would make last night's Tory revolt look like a storm in a teacup—by saying that such a monstrous proposal will not be considered.

Mr. Hayhoe: My hon. Friend, who is a helpful supporter of the Government, must know that it is a well-established and accepted principle that we should not anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: How many of the representations received are in favour of the proposals? Can the Minister tell us whether such a tax was ever contemplated in time of war, let alone in peace? Does he understand that there is almost unanimous hostility to such a proposal from both sides of the House and throughout the country?

Mr. Hayhoe: I have seen the early-day motions on this subject which have been signed by hon. Members from both sides of the House. As I said, 500 representations have been received, and all are opposed to the proposal.

Mr. Adley: Will my hon. Friend state simply what factors, other than financial, tend to influence a Chancellor of the Exchequer — indeed, this Chancellor of the Exchequer—in reaching difficult decisions, such as that referred to on the Order Paper?

Mr. Hayhoe: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will take account of financial, social, economic and political considerations in forming his judgment.

Mr. Hattersley: The Minister said that he cannot anticipate the Budget. However, the Prime Minister has already done so by promising that there would be no VAT on new buildings or food. Why cannot the Budget be anticipated in this respect? Otherwise, it confirms our suspicion that it is the Treasury's intention to impose VAT on books and periodicals.

Mr. Hayhoe: The comments by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister were made in June and July, and they have been reiterated many times — [Hon. Members: "Yesterday."] The ignorance of Opposition Members is extraordinary. My right hon. Friend yesterday reiterated, in precisely the same words, what she wrote in a letter to the House Builders Federation on 5 July, and which Treasury Ministers have confirmed on many occasions.

Value Added Tax

5. **Mr. Pike** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that all items at present zero rated for value added tax will remain zero rated.

Mr. Hayhoe: No, Sir, I cannot give such a wide-ranging undertaking.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that there is great concern about the fact that switching to indirect taxation penalises the low-paid and those on fixed incomes and that we should take more income from the higher paid? Does he also accept that any introduction of VAT on newspapers, food, gas, electricity or children's clothing and footwear will be totally unacceptable? The Minister should give categorical assurances that VAT will not be imposed on any of those items.

Mr. Hayhoe: Any reasonable commentator looking back on my right hon. Friend's Budget earlier this year, with its substantial increase in income tax thresholds and modest extension of the VAT base, will have seen that the Budget was not regressive, but was in fact helpful to low-income families.

Mr. Hayes: In the light of Her Majesty's Inspectorate's estimate that 33 per cent. of educational books are bought by parents, does my hon. Friend not feel that the imposition of VAT on books would be a catastrophe for education?

Mr. Hayhoe: My right hon. Friend will certainly take those facts into account in forming his Budget judgment.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Is it not possible for the EEC —to our membership of which I am no friend—to argue logically that, since own resources are raised on the basis of a percentage of VAT in the respective member states, it is a demand of equity that the base should be the same in all the member countries?

Mr. Hayhoe: The theoretical base upon which the calculation is made is the same for all countries, and any extension of the VAT base does not change the amount that we pay under our EEC obligations.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree that many, if not most, European countries manage to survive and prosper with a much wider range of items subject to VAT than Britain? Does my hon. Friend further agree that that is another item that should be considered when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor makes his Budget dispositions?

Mr. Hayhoe: My hon. Friend's comments are perfectly true. Most member states of the Community have a wider VAT base than this country.

Job Creation

6. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs he estimates would be created by an across-the-board 10 per cent. reduction in wages; and if he will indicate those sections of the economy which would respond most to such a policy.

Mr. Lawson: Each 1 per cent. reduction in the rate of increase of real pay would be likely, in time, to add between 150,000 and 200,000 new jobs.

Mr. Atkinson: Does the Chancellor recollect that on 30 November he proposed the idea that a 1 per cent. reduction in wages would produce 200,000 jobs? Since then, most industrial analysts have said that it is deceitful gibberish to present such ideas when there is not one scrap of evidence to associate reduced wages with job creation? Will the right hon. Gentleman now stop this deceitful performance and tell the nation the truth? The fact is that many of the jobs created since the end of the war have come from firms which pay far above the national average.

Mr. Lawson: Every reputable economist is aware of the straightforward proposition that, just as people can price themselves out of work, so they can price themselves into work. The figures which I have cited are based on an examination of all the available evidence, which I shall publish in due course.

Mr. Maples: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, to the extent that reductions in real wages encourage employers to employ more people, a similar effect could be created by reducing the employers' national insurance contributions, and that that would be a good deal easier to achieve?

Mr. Lawson: I am not too sure about my hon. Friend's last point about it being easier to achieve that effect. I should have thought that it was also a straightforward matter for employers, particularly those in the private sector, to be concerned about the level of pay settlements for which they are responsible.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Chancellor accept that there is no short-term solution in pay cuts to beat the

market leaders of the world in Japan, Germany, and similar economies, where high pay, high productivity and competitiveness are the rules of the day?

Mr. Lawson: As the hon. Gentleman must know, wage costs per unit of output have been going down in Germany and Japan. If we do not achieve the same type of performance, we shall find things increasingly difficult. One of the elements in the equation is an improvement in productivity. That is something that we have been achieving to a remarkable extent. The other side of the equation—moderation in wage settlements—has so far eluded us.

Mr. John Townend: My right hon. Friend tells the House that it is up to private employers to have wage levels that encourage employment. Is it not therefore important that, without any further delay, the Government should announce that they will abolish wages councils.

Mr. Lawson: I understand my hon. Friend's point. As I said earlier, that is a factor that the Government must take seriously.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Chancellor advocating a reduction in real wages as a serious way of reducing unemployment, or is it simply a debating point? Will he confirm that a return to the unemployment level which the Conservative Government inherited from their predecessors—on his formula—would require a real wage reduction of 13 per cent.? That is very unlikely.

Mr. Lawson: I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's figures on this or anything else. I am not calling for a cut in real wages. I am calling for real wages to go up less rapidly than they have hitherto. That is what I have made clear time and again.

Economic Situation

8. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with the current state of the economy.

Mr. Peter Rees: In spite of the coal strike, GDP rose by 3 per cent. in the year to the second quarter of 1984, inflation was about 5 per cent. and employment was up some quarter of a million.

Mr. Nellist: If the Minister is so confident about the state of the economy, why, within the next few hours, are the Government proposing to introduce regulations in the House to cut housing benefit for up to 16,000 single, striking miners, and tens of thousands of other people who live with relatives? The impact of that, in economic terms, may be a few million pounds, but it will be disastrous for individuals. Does not that type of cut pale into insignificance when compared with the £4·5 billion that the Government have spent trying to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers?

Mr. Rees: I am not aware that the Government have spent any money trying to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers. On housing benefit, the rest of the House, if not the hon. Gentleman, will be aware that claims have been made which were not envisaged when housing benefit was introduced.

Mr. Forman: Would it be possible to make a modest but significant improvement in the state of the economy by implementing, at an early date, the recommendations of the recent Management and Personnel Office report on Government purchasing, which showed that savings of between £400 million and £1·5 billion could be made if they were followed through?

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend is right. We are considering urgently how those measures could properly and practicably be introduced. Significant economies could be made if those proposals were adopted.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Chief Secretary accept that to cut wages is no way to bring about an economic revival? Does he appreciate how nauseating it is to see well-paid business men on the Conservative Benches advocating the abolition of wages councils? Why does the Chancellor not accept that the wages councils offer minimum protection for the lowest paid in our country?

Mr. Rees: I shall not comment on the hon. Gentleman's nausea. He has his own tastes and approach to these problems. I suspect that those of my hon. Friends who have been advocating that course feel that it would enable people who are at present excluded to be priced back into employment.

Occupational Pension Funds

9. **Mr. Waller** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to change the tax treatment of contributions to occupational pension funds.

Mr. Lawson: I am well aware of the speculation on this subject, which I can assure my hon. Friend did not emanate from Treasury Ministers. As my hon. Friend also knows, it has not normally been the practice of any Chancellor to comment on pre-Budget speculation.

Mr. Waller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who wish to provide for their own retirement should not in any way be deterred from doing so? Does he accept that it is important for those at work to be able to plan with reasonable certainty?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend will understand that I can neither confirm nor deny rumours about the contents of my Budget. I am concerned, however, about reports that some people may be contemplating premature retirement on the basis of rumours about the tax treatment of pension lump sums. I can assure the House that there is no reason for anyone to retire early on account of such rumours. This Government would not propose and the House would not accept retrospective legislation of that kind.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer accept that his answer will give some encouragement to those who might be making their decisions in such a way as to cover themselves against a legislative change that is contrary to what he intends? Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that the task of the tax reformer is a very difficult one? If he gets it wrong he is in difficulty, and even if he gets it right the benefit will accrue only to his successor—and it is very unlikely that he will get this one right?

Mr. Lawson: There is a kernel of truth in what the right hon. Gentleman says. The task of the tax reformer is indeed a very difficult one.

Sir William Clark: Will my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will be welcome, at least on the Government Benches? Does he agree that if there is any

change in the tax arrangements for pension funds, and if the pension that has been promised is to be maintained, contributions to the fund must inevitably increase? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there were an increase in contributions that would add to the unit cost of labour, which is contrary to Conservative policy?

Mr. Lawson: I have noted carefully what my hon. Friend has said. He will understand, as an experienced Member of the House of Commons — and being particularly experienced in financial and budgetary matters — that it is impossible for a Chancellor of the Exchequer to confirm or deny or comment in any way on rumours as to what may or may not be in a forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Kirkwood: From the Liberal Benches I concur with the welcome that has been given to the right hon. Gentleman's statement. He has probably gone as far as he can go. If I am asked by my local police, for example, whether they should retire early to avoid tax, am I secure in saying no?

Mr. Lawson: Yes.

Mr. Tapsell: Does my right hon. Friend recall that when some of us first entered public life it was one of the prime aims of the Conservative party to ensure that as many people as possible in the years ahead would come to enjoy two pensions — the state pension and an occupational pension? Enormous improvements have been made in that respect in the past 25 years. Will my right hon. Friend be careful to take no steps that will reverse that trend?

Mr. Lawson: On this occasion I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He knows that I do not agree with him on every occasion. I, too, want to see a further expansion of private occupational pensions. That is the policy of the Government as a whole, and it is one of the reasons why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has put forward his proposals on personal portable pensions.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Chancellor of the Exchequer appears to have recognised that many people on modest occupational pensions are seriously alarmed at reports of his proposals. When he says that there will be no retrospective legislation, is he saying that those who are currently in occupational pension schemes will not have their position changed, or is he simply saying that any such proposals would not be retrospective to the coming Budget?

Mr. Lawson: If the hon. Gentleman studies the *Official Report* tomorrow, he will see precisely what I said.

Mr. McCrindle: May I press my right hon. Friend to go a little further than his welcome statement of a few minutes ago? As the tax-free lump sum under pension schemes is frequently seen as a nest-egg by millions of people, and as plans are made well in advance with regard to the use of the nest-egg, would it not relieve a great deal of anxiety if, in addition to what he has told us this afternoon, my right hon. Friend were able to say that any tax change would apply only to membership of pension schemes which began after the presentation of his Budget?

Mr. Lawson: I have noted carefully what my hon. Friend said. I am grateful to him for the words of welcome with which he began his question.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer accept that many people on modest incomes have been making provision for retirement along these lines and would welcome a categorical statement now, notwithstanding the convention of not saying things in advance of the Budget? In this instance, surely there is every case for saying categorically that such a scheme will not go forward.

Mr. Lawson: I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. I am sure that many people would welcome categorical statements about several matters in advance of the Budget, but, for the reasons that are well known and well hallowed, I shall not make any such statements. However, there was a particular problem in this case, in that there was a possibility that people might take premature retirement on the basis of the premise of retrospective legislation taking effect, which was wholly false. I should not like to see that happen. That is why I made my statement, which will be important to many people in both the private sector and public services.

Mr. Higgins: I welcome my right hon. Friend's condemnation of retrospective legislation, but does he agree that it would also be retrospective if changes were made in future taxation of lump sum pensions in relation to contributions that had been made in the past?

Mr. Lawson: I am not quite sure of the precise point that my right hon. Friend is making—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—but I think that the answer is yes.

Mr. Hattersley: In his carefully prepared and read supplementary answer, the Chancellor promised no retrospection in this particular. He must know — or at least he should know — that what has caused the uncertainty, particularly in the public service, and the early retirement, is not the fear of retrospection, but the fear that the new regulations will be applied for a period after the Budget. Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to end that uncertainty now, or is he prepared to see early retirements and the damage caused thereby going on?

Mr. Lawson: As usual, the right hon. Gentleman does not understand the point. The point is that several people were concerned that if they retired after the Budget they would be disadvantaged, as compared with retiring before the Budget. Therefore, they sought to retire prematurely. The assurance that I have given them means that they no longer have to make that disposition of their affairs.

Public Expenditure

10. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what proportion of total public expenditure in 1984-85 will be represented by capital investment programmes.

Mr. Peter Rees: Total capital spending by the public sector in 1984-85 is expected to be about one fifth of the public expenditure planning total.

Mr. Chapman: Is that proportion planned to decline in the next financial year and, if so, will it be in the construction and civil engineering sector of the planned capital investment programme? If so, by how much?

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend must await the table that we shall produce in the public expenditure White Paper, which mirrors table 1.13 in the previous public expenditure White Paper. Let me assure my hon. Friend and the House that the latest Department of Trade and Industry investment survey suggests a 10 per cent. increase and, indeed, a new high in construction and service industry investment in 1984 and a 9 per cent. increase in 1985.

Oil Revenues

11. **Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much more he expects to receive in oil revenues in the current year as a result of changes in the sterling-dollar exchange rate in 1984.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Moore): The autumn statement forecast of total tax take from the North sea in 1984-85 is £12 billion, £1.8 billion higher than expected earlier this year. Most of that increase is attributable to changes in the sterling-dollar exchange rate.

Mr. Brown: Will the Minister confirm that the fall in the pound and the rise in oil revenues is the only reason why the Government can contemplate tax cuts in the next Budget? Now that the Minister has this windfall from oil revenues to spend, will he confirm that public investment of those revenues could create up to 150,000 jobs throughout this country?

Mr. Moore: No, Sir, I shall not confirm the premise on which the hon. Gentleman makes his point. The figures that I gave reflect one facet of many aspects of the autumn statement. One cannot take just that one facet in isolation and extrapolate such conclusions from it, as the hon. Gentleman did.

Mr. Blair: Does the Minister realise that, having confessed that this windfall from North sea oil has occurred, he cannot escape the language of choice and priority? When will the Government choose to make the unemployed their priority?

Mr. Moore: There is no confession, but there should be recognition in all parts of the House of the unbelievable bounty that the nation has received because of the successful investment, essentially by the private sector, in the North sea, and the benefits and jobs accruing from that.

Small Businesses

13. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will take further steps to reduce the tax burden on small businesses.

Mr. Moore: The Government have already provided substantial help to small businesses through tax reductions and other measures designed to encourage their growth. In particular, the tax reliefs available in the business expansion scheme enabled more than 400 small companies to raise about £80 million of new equity in 1983-84. I hope that further reductions in taxation will also be of benefit to small businesses.

Mr. Fallon: Does my hon. Friend agree that small rather than large businesses will be the major source of new jobs in the future? Will he confirm the rumour that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor intends to offer a continuing programme of tax relief to small businesses?

Mr. Moore: I am delighted at my hon. Friend's welcome for the Government's measures in relation to small businesses, but big businesses must also be successful to increase employment. I confirm that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will seek in the Budget to help employment in small and large businesses alike through the tax system.

Mr. Stephen Ross: As the greatest difficulty faced by small businesses is high interest rates, what plans have the Government to lower interest rates for small businesses? Will they introduce a differential, with lower rates for small businesses to give them a chance of succeeding?

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that lower interest rates help. The reduction from more than 16 per cent. when the Government took office to 9½ per cent. today is a clear sign of our success. I know that the hon. Gentleman will not seek to press upon the Government demands for further public expenditure, which would drive interest rates up and deter small businesses.

Children's Shoes (VAT)

14. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received concerning the possible introduction of value added tax on children's shoes.

Mr. Hayhoe: Treasury Ministers have received some 250 letters.

Mr. King: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I appreciate that no commitment can be made one way or the other, but will he note that for many families, especially those on low incomes, the imposition of VAT on children's shoes would represent a real cost to their living standards? *[Interruption.]*

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Wakeham) *took his seat.*

Mr. Hayhoe: The whole House has shown how very pleased it is to see my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury in his place at Treasury Question Time. I am afraid that I have forgotten what the supplementary question was.

Mr. Speaker: I echo the Minister's statement. I, too, have forgotten the supplementary question.

Departmental Services (Privatisation)

15. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current estimated savings for 1984-85 as a result of privatisation schemes for which his Department is responsible.

Mr. Moore: The Treasury is responsible for co-ordinating the Government's privatisation programme. Special sales of assets receipts this year should be not less than £2 billion, but the overall benefit to the economy in terms of increased efficiency and better services will be far greater than this.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend comment on yesterday's radio statement by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who said that a Labour Government would seek to renationalise British Telecom?

Mr. Moore: My attention was drawn to that broadcast. The Opposition clearly have an innate desire to stay firmly in opposition and have no interest in Government.

Books and Periodicals (VAT)

17. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his consideration of the possible imposition of value added tax on books, magazines and newspapers.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick).

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the price of many of the major newspapers is already beyond many millions of people? Is he also aware that if VAT is introduced, as has been suggested, many local newspapers will be put out of business and many local communities denied the knowledge that they provide?

Mr. Hayhoe: I have met a deputation from the Newspaper Society, which made many of those points in greater detail. The Government are well aware of the representations that are being made, and those representations will be given careful consideration.

Publishers' Association

19. **Mr. Adley** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has yet met the Publishers' Association or its representatives to discuss his forthcoming Budget; and what was discussed.

Mr. Hayhoe: No, Sir.

Mr. Adley: May I assume that my right hon. Friend, with his usual courtesy, would be willing to meet them if requested?

Mr. Hayhoe: I think that the arrangements have been made and a date has been fixed.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Lewis: What forecast has the right hon. Lady made of a reduction in unemployment, and when is such a reduction likely to take place?

The Prime Minister: I follow the example of successive Ministers and Prime Ministers in not making forecasts about the rate of unemployment.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that an order for the biggest oil rig ever to be built has been obtained on Clydebank? Is it not true that that has happened because the firm concerned has had a 12-year strike-free record? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, as a result, the firm will now be able to take on 500 men?

The Prime Minister: I have noted that the oil rig order has gone to that shipyard. I congratulate the yard on its record and on winning the order. I hope that others will take the hint that strikes destroy jobs and that a good working record wins new orders.

Mr. Hattersley: First, may I welcome the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury back to his place on the Treasury Bench? The right hon. Gentleman represents — indeed, personifies — the triumph of democracy over terrorism. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Secondly, may I ask the Prime Minister whether she has read the three surveys published today, including one based on the Treasury's own model and one from the London Business School, previously the fount of all economic wisdom? Those surveys prove that increases in public investment are by far the most effective way of reducing unemployment. Will the right hon. Lady now respond to the demands from both sides of the House and accept that whatever additions can be made to public expenditure in the spring will be used not for cutting taxation but for reducing the wholly unacceptable level of unemployment?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept some of the findings of those three reports or the right hon. Gentleman's specific description of them. Other findings point to other conclusions. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, we realise by now that one cannot spend one's way out of recession. That has been tried before. It leads to higher inflation and ultimately to higher unemployment. There are some 12 million taxpayers with an income of £8,000 a year or less. They, too, have a right to look to the Government to raise thresholds so that they pay less tax. They will never get equity from Labour; they will get it only from us.

Mr. Hattersley: It should be obvious even to the Prime Minister that money invested directly in the United Kingdom is more likely to create jobs than money devoted to increasing consumption, which, by its nature, is likely to result in higher imports and to create jobs abroad. On the Labour side of the House and, I believe, widely throughout the country, it is understood that the right hon. Lady's obsession with a cut in direct taxes is matched and mirrored by the increased indirect taxation that has more than compensated for the reduction in that particular over the past five years.

Most important of all, as the Prime Minister has chosen the high unemployment option, are we to be relieved from now on of the lowered voice and the bogus compassion? The truth is that the Prime Minister and the Government choose high unemployment. That is the message that should be given to the country.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is not correct. Increasing infrastructure is not a cost-effective way in which to increase the number of jobs. The cost per job through increasing infrastructure can vary from £35,000 to £55,000. It is an expensive method, which tends to lead to a lot of hire of plant but not much hire of men. Reduction of tax can lead to extra jobs, as it leads to extra demand. The right hon. Gentleman's thesis that investment always leads to purchases from home sources while reduction of tax leads to purchases from abroad is not correct. In an age of specialisation, much of the investment in equipment and machinery goes abroad.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: In her worthy enthusiasm for reducing unemployment, will my right hon. Friend concentrate on the unincorporated sector of the self-employed and bring home to many of her Ministers the fact that it is not just reducing tax rates but reducing the burden of non-productive administrative work—dealing with tax returns such as VAT and national insurance — that discourages them from taking on new employees?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are still many restrictions that inhibit the self-employed from taking on more employees and inhibit small businesses from taking on extra people. Each of them raises difficult issues, but we are examining the regulations. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry hope to bring proposals before the House.

Dr. Owen: We on the alliance Benches also welcome the Patronage Secretary, although he will understand our not wishing him great success, as we hope that the rebellions will continue at the pace that has been set during the past few months. The Prime Minister is rumoured in the press now to be contemplating increased expenditure on the community programme and a restructuring of employees' insurance contributions. Why should we wait for the Budget? Many hundreds of thousands of people want action, and now. Why not action this day?

The Prime Minister: I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would know that there is a time for public expenditure surveys and a time for the Budget. I confess that there are many occasions when I wish that they happened together so that the choices that have to be made were more clearly put. Of course, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister without Portfolio are seeing whether we can better spend the £2 billion that we spend on special employment measures.

Q2. **Mr. Budgen** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Budgen: In the discussions about the BBC's licence fee, will my right hon. Friend recognise that introductin of advertising would change the nature of the BBC? Will she also examine carefully the recent introduction of early morning television and BBC local radio stations? Will she please ask the BBC why it cannot concentrate on those things that are most important to it?

The Prime Minister: I think that a number of people will agree with my hon. Friend and wonder why the BBC has to take on so many new programmes when their needs can be fulfilled by other programmes. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has to take into account the fact that the BBC licence fee is a sort of compulsory levy on the television viewer, irrespective of whether he watches BBC programmes a great deal. He will wish to balance the needs of the BBC with the interests of the licence fee payer. For that, he will need to take many things into account, but I doubt whether, this time, he will consider the introduction of advertising, although, in the longer term, we might have to consider other methods of raising the requisite revenue for the BBC.

3. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Davies: Is the right hon. Lady aware that her Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department of Transport has written a letter to all Conservative Members of Parliament promising them preferential treatment from himself, his Department and his civil servants in dealing with parliamentary inquiries — [*Interruption.*] — from their constituents? Has that letter been written with the authority or knowledge of the Prime Minister? If so, does it mark a change of policy, in that the Government are prepared to use Government funds to advance the cause of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: I do not know of the letter to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and there seems to be a good deal of dissent in the House to the interpretation that he gave of it. Inquiries from all Members of Parliament are dealt with expeditiously and courteously.

4. **Mr. Marland** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marland: Is my right hon. Friend aware that some of our Common Market partners are seeking to use bogus methods to prevent our exports penetrating their markets? Will she take this opportunity to reassure our exporters, be they in industry, agriculture or commerce, that she will use her best offices to make sure that our exporters can compete in Europe on equal terms?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That is the purpose of the Dooge committee of the Common Market. We are urging the completion of the internal market. The Common Market treaty prohibits barriers to trade, and my hon. Friend will have special reason to know of the success of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in getting rid of the barriers to the importation of whisky by Italy—something on which he is to be congratulated.

5. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lloyd: Knowing that the Prime Minister places a high priority on conforming to the letter of the law, will she join me in condemning the Conservative-controlled Trafford borough council, which is refusing to conform with both the spirit and the letter of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act by not providing adaptations for handicapped people until July next year? Will she have a quiet word with the Secretary of State for Social Services and ask him to use his powers to make that council conform?

The Prime Minister: I seem to remember that in that Act there is a good deal of discretion as to how it is applied. It is not absolutely mandatory. Any question arising from the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred would not be for me but would be a matter for the courts to decide.

Mr. Jessel: Does my right hon. Friend recall that Mr. Justice Glidewell, the inquiry inspector into the fourth terminal at Heathrow, said that if permission were granted for that it would be essential for the Government to reiterate that there would be neither a fifth terminal nor any other major expansion of Heathrow? Do the Government accept that Mr. Justice Glidewell was a distinguished inquiry inspector, whose views should carry at least as much weight as those of Mr. Graham Eyre?

The Prime Minister: I recognise my hon. Friend's very special interest in this matter. He will also recognise that, as the inspector's report is in front of us, I am unable to do other than note his question.

Q6. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fisher: In respect of the right hon. Lady's reply to me on Tuesday, does she agree that she gave a very good answer to a question that I did not ask? Will she now answer that question and say whether she thinks it sensible and reasonable to include in the costs apportioned to pits when they close costs that will continue for years afterwards, whether or not a pit closes? Will she be good enough to answer that question?

The Prime Minister: I am not an expert on accountancy—*[Interruption.]*—and neither, I believe, is the hon. Gentleman. It is not for me or for him to distinguish between, or pontificate upon, different specific methods of accountancy. The National Coal Board cost taxpayers £1·3 billion last year. That is not a matter of accountancy, but something that taxpayers have to find. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that there is no need for a subsidy for the coal industry, his remarks are most welcome.

Q7. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Proctor: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the most unpopular acts that the Government can commit is the transfer of additional resources to the European Community, with the loss of sovereignty that such an act would entail?

The Prime Minister: The decision to join the EC was made many years ago. I believe that it is and remains in the interests of the United Kingdom to remain part of that Community and to make a great success of it. It gives us tremendous opportunities in trade, and, when the internal market is complete, it will give our financial and insurance services greater opportunities than they have now.

Mr. Ron Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall follow my usual practice. In the interests of the whole House, I shall take points of order now only if they arise directly from questions.

Mr. Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have heard the answer to the question I put to the Prime Minister when, in effect, she denied the existence of the letter to which I referred. Can you advise me how I can pursue this matter? I believe that it is clear that the rules of the House have been breached by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport. Preferential treatment has been promised to Conservative Members in a matter of vital importance to all hon. Members in the discharge of their parliamentary duties. Will you, Mr. Speaker, advise me how that matter is best pursued?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have not seen this letter. I cannot be responsible for letters that Ministers write to hon. Members.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the Prime Minister seemed to indicate in her reply to my hon. Friend that the letter might be capable of different interpretations, would it not clear the atmosphere if she and the Government gave authority for it to be printed in *Hansard*?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May we ask you how we can protect the House when there is a clear indication that the facilities of a Ministry are being used in a specific political way? As the Leader of the House is present, may we ask him to make a statement about whether it is now the intention of the Conservative party to use all the facilities of the Civil Service to promulgate its own highly individual and extremely prejudiced views?

Mr. Robert Atkins: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. When you consider this matter, can you also advise the House how I and other Lancashire colleagues can raise the fact that the Labour-controlled Lancashire county council is spending £134,000 of ratepayers' money——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House can go on for ever on a subject such as this. It is plainly not a matter for me.

Business of the House

3.33 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business of the House for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 DECEMBER — Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Afterwards, motions on the Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) orders.

Motion on the Appropriation (No. 3) (Northern Ireland) Order.

TUESDAY 18 DECEMBER—Estimates day (1st Allotted Day). Consideration of the following Estimate: Class IV, Vote 5 (Industrial Support (Department of Energy)) The appropriate report will be shown on the Order Paper as relevant. The house will be asked to agree the Civil and Defence Votes on Account and the winter Supplementary Estimates.

Motion on the Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order.

Debate on European Community documents on transport measures.

The relevant numbers will appear in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 19 DECEMBER — Motion for the Christmas Adjournment.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

THURSDAY 20 DECEMBER — Debate on a motion to take note of the review by Sir George Baker, Cmnd. 9222.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 (Continuance) (No. 2) Order.

FRIDAY 21 DECEMBER—It will be proposed that the House should rise for the Christmas Adjournment until Wednesday 9 January 1985.

[Debate on Road Transport Measures on 18 December 1984

Relevant Documents

a. 4088/79 Draft directive on weights of heavy goods vehicles.

b. 9292/81 Amendment to draft directive on weights of heavy goods vehicles.

c. 9508/84 Report on weights of heavy goods vehicles.

d. Unnumbered draft directive submitted by Department of Transport on 13 December 1984.

Relevant reports of European Legislation Committee

a. HC 10-xxii (1978-79) para. 4 and HC 159-i (1979-80) para. 4

b. HC 21-i (1981-82) para. 4.

c. HC 5-iv (1984-85) para. 5.

Estimates Day: 4th Report Select Committee on Energy 1984-85 in respect of British National Oil Corporation H/C 126.]

Mr. Hattersley: The Leader of the House will know that hon. Members on both sides of the House have received much correspondence about the threatened closure of post offices. Can public anxiety be assuaged in some way by an announcement that we shall have a debate on this subject in the early part of the new year?

The Leader of the House will recall that it is 10 months since the publication of the Government's Green Paper on the long-term proposals or alternatives for public expenditure. We were promised a debate on that Green paper. May we have such a debate before and separated from next year's White Paper on public expenditure, and sufficiently early in the year to ensure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer can take part without taking refuge in the impending Budget?

Mr. Biffen: The possibility of a debate or a statement on post offices, the debates that we shall have early next year on economic affairs, and the possibility of a debate on alternatives in public expenditure can be reasonably pursued through the usual channels.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Will my right hon. Friend provide time in the not-too-distant future for a debate on BBC financing? Contrary to the view that was expressed during Prime Minister's Question Time, several of us believe that an element of advertising for the BBC would be desirable. Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people are extremely worried that the BBC may obtain a considerable increase in its licence fee, which would be unacceptable to many of us?

Mr. Biffen: I am very much aware of the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend and I shall draw them to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The fee must secure approval from Parliament, possibly through the negative procedure.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Prime Minister's memory failed her when she replied today to my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) about the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970? The Act places clear and mandatory duties on local authorities, as I made clear in a reply in the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) on 22 March 1978. Does the Leader of the House agree that it does the reputation of the House no good for right hon. and hon. Members to be misled in that way? Will he arrange for the Prime Minister to apologise to my hon. Friend and give him a proper answer next week?

Mr. Biffen: I pay proper respect to the right hon. Gentleman as the author of the legislation, but I match that with an assertion that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister needs no lessons in courtesy to the House. I shall draw her attention to the right hon. Gentleman's point.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend consider a matter that is causing increasing anxiety for the orderly progress of business in the House? I refer to Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions and European Community questions. Yesterday, 77 questions were set down for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to be answered in 35 minutes, and only nine were answered; six questions were down for EC matters and all were answered in 20 minutes. I have raised this point previously, and I ask my right hon. Friend to consider it urgently because the position is becoming absurd. I strongly suggest that the EC element be abolished and that we have one hour for Foreign and Commonwealth questions.

Mr. Biffen: I recognise the force of my hon. Friend's question. This is a matter for the usual channels. I shall ensure that the usual channels are informed of the anxiety

that has been expressed and the view that all foreign countries should be treated as equally foreign for the purposes of Question Time.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): May I ask the Leader of the House to arrange a debate on the De Lorean affair? The Public Accounts Committee considered it to be one of the greatest abuses of public money that we have seen for very many years. Since there are a number of political aspects to this matter which the Public Accounts Committee is not really fitted to discuss, will the right hon. Gentleman make sure that there is a debate to dispose of it at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Biffen: I am in correspondence with the right hon. Gentleman. I very much hope that we can continue that correspondence and come to an amicable conclusion.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 36, the case for a blindness allowance, which stands in my name and which has been signed by no fewer than 146 hon. Members of all parties?

[That this House, whilst appreciating all that has been done for the blind by this and previous governments, wishes to remind the Government of the acceptance by successive Ministers of the case for a blindness allowance; and, in particular, the statement by the then Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled (the Right honourable Member for Daventry) on 24th July 1979 that the case for an income in the form of a blindness allowance is unanswerable on its merits; points out to the Government that the blind do not normally qualify for mobility, invalidity, attendance or other allowances, unless suffering from a second disability; and calls upon the Government to take immediate action to replace the existing range of benefits available to the blind with a means-tested blindness allowance.]

A similar motion standing in the name of another hon. Member has been signed by no fewer than 88 hon. Members. This clearly demonstrates a very high degree of concern on the subject among hon. Members. Will my right hon. Friend therefore find time for an early debate on the blindness allowance?

Mr. Biffen: I acknowledge at once the importance of the subject and the large number of signatories to the early-day motions mentioned by my hon. Friend. On this occasion I shall content myself by referring my hon. Friend to the Adjournment debates which will take place after the Third Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill next Wednesday.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Leader of the House make specific provision for us to debate the motions relating to orders on regional industrial development which have been tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends? Could he also arrange for a statement to be made next week by transport Ministers so that they can make it clear that they will follow the practice, which the Leader of the House always follows, of treating all hon. Members with equal courtesy rather than offering to reply "personally more quickly than I would normally be able to do" to members of his own party?

Mr. Biffen: The first point which the hon. Member makes relates to business which will be before the House after we return from the Christmas Recess. I shall be in touch with the hon. Member on that point. As for his second point, I believe that the transport Ministers are the embodiment of courtesy. I shall relay to them the points which have been made this afternoon.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend take note of the considerable concern which has been expressed about the quite incredible suggestion of the BBC to shove up the licence fee by 41 per cent. to £65? Given the reluctance of that state-owned leviathan to be financed in any way other than by a compulsory tax and taking into account the additional costs associated with the licence, such as detector vans, the courts, the licensing authority and all the other paraphernalia associated with it, will my right hon. Friend please make time available, long before we have to vote on the amounts to be given to the BBC, for a debate upon how the BBC should be financed in the future?

Mr. Biffen: I take note of the points which have been put very powerfully by my hon. Friend. As I have said, I shall refer those points to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House confirm that on Wednesday next Foreign Office Ministers intend to lay an order—the Consular Fees (Amendment) (No. 3) Order—to give effect to a proposal which was announced on 22 November to introduce fees for entry certificates? As this is conveniently the day after a meeting of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, will the Leader of the House talk to his colleagues in the Foreign Office and, in view of the widespread concern, ensure that if they are determined to pursue this matter they will do so by means of a parliamentary procedure which is subject to approval or annulment by this House?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly look into the matter and will be in touch with the Foreign Office, as requested by the hon. Gentleman. As for the widespread concern which the hon. Gentleman alleges to exist, he may be persuaded to take such advantage as there is of the Adjournment debates which will follow the Third Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (Peterborough): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the BMA is now behaving as badly as the drug companies over the Government's proposed limited drug list? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement to be made next week in the House by the Minister for Health so that he can dispel the misinformation which is being peddled and remind the country that doctors all over Europe, and hundreds of doctors in our own hospitals, are prescribing generically, and off a limited list, and that if the BMA genuinely wants to help patients it should consult the Government in order to make sure that the limited list, when finalised, is as comprehensive as possible?

Mr. Biffen: I agree that a great deal of counter-productive lobbying is taking place on this issue. I shall refer my hon. Friend's point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen early-day motion 215 on the closure of the BSC mill in Jarrow, which will throw 246 men on to the dole?

[That this House urges the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry not to give approval to the formation of the

[Mr. Don Dixon]

new company named United Merchant Bar plc in which 75 per cent. of the equity will be owned by Caparo Industries and 25 per cent. by the British Steel Corporation, since this plan involves the closure of the Jarrow (Tyne and Wear) and Monks Hall (Warrington) Mills, making 500 employees redundant in areas of high unemployment, and also means that the British Steel Corporation will have only a minority share which could lead to an increase of imports and an adverse effect on the balance of payments; and urges that more investment should be made in the Jarrow and Monks Hall Mills to ensure their future competitiveness and their survival.]

Bearing in mind that 100,000 jobs have been lost in the northern region since 1979 and that we had a statement from the Government last week to the effect that regional grants will be cut by £300 million, may we have an early debate on the subject?

Mr. Biffen: Time will be provided for a debate on regional employment shortly after we return from the Christmas Recess. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to bring his constituency problem before the House, I suggest that he uses the advantages provided after the Third Reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that there were no fewer than 13 documents to be discussed in Tuesday's European debate but there was time for only 10 Back Benchers to speak. Will he undertake that if we have important EEC matters to discuss in future, as we may, there will be adequate time for those debates? I am sure that he would not wish us to be subjected to unfettered dictatorship from Brussels.

Mr. Biffen: As long as my hon. Friend is around, he will be a reasonable protection against that spectre. I shall take account of what he says and, in striking the balance that we have to strike between competing claims, I will try to ensure that we have adequate time to deal with these important subjects.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Leader of the House bring to the attention of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the fact that in the Oxpring community near Barnsley 2,500 gallons of petroleum have been leaked into the river Don and that wildlife has ceased to exist along 2·5 miles of that river and that all the fishing has gone in that area? There is an urgent need for cleaning, restocking and compensation.

Mr. Biffen: I will certainly fulfil the hon. Gentleman's request.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what has happened about the proposal to pay a further £120 million to the EEC to help finance its overspend in 1984? Does he agree that even if, contrary to all the practice that he fought for in the past, the House is not allowed to vote on the issue as a matter of substantive legislation, there ought at least to be a full debate in prime time so that the full constitutional and financial issues can be properly considered?

Mr. Biffen: I am afraid that my hon. Friend must exercise his generous patience a little longer. Then he can assess to what extent his anxiety has been met.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Leader of the House take a slightly less laid-back attitude to the letter, issued by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport? It would be bad enough if the letter promised preferential treatment for Conservative Back Benchers on constituency business, but it refers to political speeches made by Conservative Members at weekends. It would be intolerable if the Department of Transport were used as an adjunct of the Tory party and set against the rights of hon. Members who have serious constituency problems. Will the right hon. Gentleman, therefore, ensure that a statement is made by himself or by the Secretary of State for Transport to clear up this serious matter?

Mr. Biffen: I have not seen the letter, so I have made no comment on it. I will certainly not stand here and engage in a quick reading course. The hon. Member who first raised the issue suggested that it breached the rules of the House, and that is something on which only the Chair can rule.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that time is given for a Government statement on the visit of Mr. Gorbachev particularly to cover the point of whether or not the Government have detected any change or shift in the Soviet's understanding of the term "peaceful co-existence", away from the mere absence of war in an atmosphere of antagonistic tolerance towards a mood of co-operation and development under which we may together achieve verifiable arms control and the curbing of nuclear proliferation and international terrorism, and thereby divert economic resources to the betterment of mankind?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises important points, and I shall ensure that they are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange with his hon. Friend in the Ministry of Transport to send me a similar letter to that which he sent on 30 November to his colleagues so that when I hear from my constituents about these matters, I can more easily demolish the Minister's arguments?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly draw my right hon. Friend's attention the points that have been raised about this letter, because clearly there is concern in the Chamber that he should know of that interest.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend give thought to the fact that some 80 per cent. of our people are said never to read a book? Will he respond to questions that came up both in Treasury questions and in early-day motion 196, which by today had been signed by 189 hon. Members?

[That this House requests Her Majesty's Government not to impose value-added tax on books.]

Will he also bear in mind that Dr. Johnson said that a well-read man is the best-educated man, and arrange for a debate so that hon. Members on both sides can make clear their opposition to the imposition of VAT on books?

Mr. Biffen: There is not much that I can add to the interesting and comprehensive exchange that took place on this matter in Treasury questions earlier today.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the right hon. Gentleman either confirm or deny that during next week's business it is the Government's intention to introduce regulations to amend the Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982 to deny up to 16,000 single striking miners the right to housing benefit if they pay rent to relatives and to affect tens of thousands of other people in a similar position? If that happens next week, will it not demonstrate the Prime Minister's obsessiveness to the point of insanity with her attacks on miners, and show the effect that her pursuit of the NUM will have on tens of thousands of other people?

Mr. Biffen: That is not set down as business of the House next week, but I shall look into the matter and be in touch with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Has my right hon. Friend seen a report in *The Times* today about a speech made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on VAT for new house building, and the fact that VAT was not to be applied to that category? Should there not now be an opportunity for the unrest and concern that is felt in the country about the possible imposition of VAT on newspapers, books, periodicals, children's clothes and shoes to be alleviated by a statement before Christmas? The public need to know about this, because there is great concern on it. There has already today been a useful hint on retirement pensions. Could we not now have another hint from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Biffen: No. I think that it is time for a close season, and Treasury questions today dealt satisfactorily with this matter.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 195 concerning the death or killing of Mrs. Nora McCabe, which is supported by 79 hon. Members?

[That this House congratulates Yorkshire Television for making the programme on the killing of Norah McCabe; and calls upon the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to set up a public inquiry to look fully into the circumstances surrounding the shooting and to state what action has been taken against those responsible for the death of this young mother.]

In view of the concern expressed by the House, will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friend to institute a public inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of this young woman?

Mr. Biffen: I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to this point and to the request for an inquiry. The hon. Gentleman may wish to extend his argument somewhat if he is fortunate enough to obtain an Adjournment debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Mr. Francis Maude (Warwickshire, North): Will my right hon. Friend note that, in view of the widespread concern felt in all parts of the House, it is essential that a full debate on the financing of the BBC should take place in the very near future, and particularly before the decision on the increase in the licence fee is taken, so that the BBC may fully understand that it will be subject to the most stringent financial discipline?

Mr. Biffen: Two of my hon. Friends have already asked questions on that point, and I can only repeat that I shall draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to it.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): May I refer the Leader of the House to the answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) in which he used the word "alleged" concern? May I tell him that it is more than "alleged" concern? Has he yet been able to digest the terms of early-day motion 200, which is still gathering signatures?

[That this House requests a reconsideration of a proposal made on 22nd November to introduce, for the first time, a charge for entry certificates for Commonwealth citizens; and points out that refusal of an entrance certificate, simply because the fee cannot be paid, would not be lawful under the Immigration Act 1971.]

Although at present the signatures belong solely to Opposition Members, we could equally well gather signatures from Conservative Members.

The proposed charge for entry certificates represents an innovation for Commonwealth citizens. People who have a lawful right to come to Britain from countries such as Bangladesh, including dependent relatives, already face long delays without this extra imposition. I hope that the Leader of the House will pass on that message to the Foreign Secretary. Indeed, as arguments are probably going on now as a result of the protests, will the right hon. Gentleman get the Foreign Secretary to come to the House to withdraw his proposal of 22 November?

Mr. Biffen: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and I have already promised that I will refer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary the anxieties expressed. Those anxieties will, of course, have been reinforced by the points that have just been made.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will have heard all the demands for a debate on the alleged discrepancies in accounting with regard to mines that are scheduled for closure. Has he seen early-day motion 58, which suggests that the NCB could offer the mines scheduled for closure to the NUM?

[That this House, concerned at the possible adverse effect the strike in the coal-fields may have for job prospects in the coal industry and other related industries, recognises that the miners' leaders are concerned over planned pit closures, and calls upon the Government to urge the National Coal Board to draw up plans to offer to miners in pits scheduled for closure the opportunity to continue to work their own pits as mineworker co-operatives and to offer the pits complete with mining equipment at a peppercorn rent and, in the event of the miners declining, to offer the private sector the same mines at a peppercorn rent.]

If the NCB offered those mines to the NUM, Mr. Arthur Scargill and his friends could show clearly their confidence in them by taking them over.

Mr. Biffen: I thought that that was a well-judged contribution to our debate, and I am happy to have this opportunity to acknowledge it.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 128 and the relevant amendments to it concerning the death grant?

[Mr. Donald Coleman]

[That this House regards the present level of death grant at £30 for an adult man or woman born after 1894 as being totally inadequate; and calls for an increase in the grant to a level of at least £350.]

[As amendments to the proposed motion, in line 2, leave out from 'for' to end and add 'a substantial grant'; in line 3, at end add 'in this Session of Parliament'.]

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that this issue has often been raised in the House. When will the Government make a statement about their intentions? It is a serious matter for old people, and delay for so long is a disgrace.

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the matter is still before a Government committee that is formulating policy, but I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to the point made about the importance of arriving at a speedy decision.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a debate on the effects of the Government's rate-capping proposals on less-well-off people, including the 100,000 people in the city of Leicester who were identified by a recent survey as living in the most adverse conditions? Is he aware that the most swingeing proposals in the country for rate capping have just been made for the city of Leicester, which will impose savage, vicious and wicked cuts on the services that every citizen requires? May we have a debate on the issue before it is too late?

Mr. Biffen: I believe that the rate limitation orders will require a debate in the House, and that will take place reasonably soon. The hon. and learned Gentleman will have a chance to make his powerful speech then.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Secretary of State for Scotland—who is not a million miles away—when he intends to make a statement to the House on the disruption to schools in Ayrshire that has been caused by the provocative action of the Scottish region of the NCB and which has been testified to by impartial officials of Strathclyde regional council? That action has resulted in the stoppage of coal to one third of Ayrshire schools. Those schools are now closed and some of them may be closed in the new year. Indeed, some of them are in the Secretary of State's constituency, although he shows no apparent concern about that. When will we have a statement? When will this Scottish issue be given the degree of concern that it would attract if it were happening in the capital?

Mr. Biffen: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, sitting at my left elbow, will have heard every word of that powerful tirade. Doubtless he will react appropriately.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the concern expressed by Tories about the upholding of the law for miners and other working-class people, will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a list to be placed in the Library of all Tory Members and any others who hold directorships and consultancies associated with firms trading on Sundays? To avoid the charge of hypocrisy, would not that be a good idea? Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Prime Minister to have a word with her husband, who has a long-standing connection with Halfords, to find out whether he approves of that firm breaking the law?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot arrange for such a list to be made available. However, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to say that I deplore the breaking of the law on Sunday trading.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Is the Leader of the House aware that the rules of engagement for soldiers at military installations are issued on so-called pink cards? Is he further aware that the rules of engagement have recently been changed to allow soldiers to shoot unarmed civilians and, to go even further than that, to shoot dead an unarmed civilian in the back as he runs away from the establishment? Is it not worrying and outrageous that the Secretary of State for Defence has not been to the House to explain this matter?

Mr. Biffen: I shall most certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the points raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): In the light of the publication this week of the report on Stansted, because of the great anxiety in the north of England about that development and because the Secretary of State for Transport has promised a debate on the matter, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us when there will be such a debate so that we can, we hope, allay the fears of those who want to see the development of regional airports?

Mr. Biffen: Obviously the debate should take place reasonably soon. A number of hon. Members have spoken of their anxiety that a reasonable amount of time should be allowed to cope with the massive amount of reading implicit in the report.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does not the Leader of the House think that there should be an urgent and early debate on foreign affairs, considering the tense position in central America, the current position in South Africa and the troubles in Sri Lanka, with which the Government have close links? Should not these matters be debated in the House so that we can find out the Government's attitude towards the peace process in central America and other areas?

Mr. Biffen: I understand the importance that many hon. Members attach to those aspects of foreign affairs. I confess that there is no early prospect of a full debate on foreign affairs in Government time. Other opportunities are available to the hon. Gentleman, especially at this time of year, and I suggest that he tries his luck with them.

Consolidated Fund Bill

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund Bill on Wednesday 19 December.

Hon. Members should submit their subjects to my office not later than 9 am. on Tuesday 18 December. A list showing the subjects and times will be published later that day. Normally the time allotted will not exceed one and a half hours, but I propose to exercise a discretion to allow one or two debates to continue for rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours.

Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different hon. Members whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will be shown on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of hon. Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

I remind hon. Members that on the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Friday 21 December up to eight hon. Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their own choice. Applications should reach my office by 10 pm. on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning and the result made known as soon as possible thereafter.

Public Expenditure and Rate Support Grant (Scotland)

4.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Younger): With permission, Mr. Speaker. I should like to make a statement about public expenditure allocations and the rate support grant settlement for Scotland for 1985-86.

Total expenditure on the programmes within my responsibility for 1985-86 will be £7,158 million. The figure is broadly the same as that published in the 1984 public expenditure White Paper earlier this year and shows that the Government remain determined to keep public expenditure within planned limits. An annotated table giving the allocations for each service is available in the Vote Office and I am arranging for it to be published in the *Official Report*.

In allocating my total sum I have continued to give priority to spending on the Health Service. I plan to increase cash provision for the NHS in Scotland by £94 million more than the expected level of expenditure on the service this year. Of this, some £75 million will go to the health boards' hospital and community health services programme and associated centrally managed services, where cash provision will be increased by 5·5 per cent. more than expected expenditure this year and 1 per cent. more than the forecast level of inflation. That should enable boards to find the resources that they need for pay and price increases and for the expansion of services to meet demand from demographic change.

Law and order provision will be sufficient to meet the cost of the police service with a modest increase in manpower to meet priority requirements and to allow for a further 150 prison officers by 1 April 1986.

For housing I have increased total net provision by £5 million over the White Paper level to £598 million. This allows for gross capital spending of £568 million when estimated capital receipts are added to net capital provision of £392 million. To ensure that new investment is not, as this year, sacrificed to subsidise current expenditure, I am proposing to use my new power to limit rate fund contributions to require local authorities to reduce these contributions to £90 million. This enables me to increase capital spending on authorities' own stock to facilitate action on problems such as dampness, condensation and defective housing. I am also making additional resources available for tackling those problems. The combined increase in local authorities' HRA block allocations is £43 million.

The provision which I have made for education takes account of the changes I announced last week on student awards and includes £2·1 million as the first element of the recently announced increased expenditure on the central institutions. Improved academic staffing and a reinforcement of non-academic staffing and equipment resources should result in a significant increase in the output by the central institutions sector of engineering and technology graduates.

I can also announce that I have completed my consultations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about the rate support grant settlement and I shall lay before the House in due course the relevant rate support grant order. This will provide for a total relevant

[Mr. George Younger]

expenditure figure of £3,399·3 million and aggregate Exchequer grant of £1,924 million. Taking into account adjustments consequent upon the transfer of colleges, this is an increase of £19 million on the figure I announced in August.

The provision for relevent expenditure is, excluding loans charges and interest receipts, 5 per cent. above the figure for 1984-85 and £98 million above the provision in the White Paper, Cmnd. 9143.

In 1985-86 the needs element which accounts for 87 per cent. of rate support grant, will, as in 1984-85, be distributed on the basis of client group assessments. Grant changes between one year and another will again be limited, but good progress will be made towards the full implementation on the client group method.

As a result of the revaluation of property which takes effect from 1 April 1985, the share of the rating burden borne by industry will be reduced. I have therefore decided to reduce from 1 April 1985 the level of industrial derating from its present 50 per cent. to 40 per cent. This will still leave industry as the sector which gains most from revaluation. The revaluation will increase considerably the domestic ratepayer's share of the rate burden. I have therefore increased the domestic element of rate support grant from 1p to 5p in post-revaluation terms. This will reduce by half the effect of revaluation on the domestic ratepayer. I now look to local authorities to bring their expenditure down to the realistic guidelines which they have been given.

The decisions which I have announced today reflect the priority which the Government attach to keeping public expenditure on course, while recognising the need to make adequate resources available for important services. The flexibility in the Scottish block arrangements has again enabled me to ensure that Scotland's needs and circumstances are taken properly into account.

Following is the table:

Programmes (details as appropriate in notes below)	*1984-85 White Paper (Cmnd. 9143) with Budget and other pre-Survey changes*	*1985-86 White Paper (Cmnd. 9143) with Budget and other pre-Survey changes*	*1985-86 Revised* £ million*
Agriculture, fisheries and food	188	195	176
Industry, energy, trade and employment	169	171	†275
Tourism	11	12	12
Transport	492	514	530
Housing	650	593	598
Other environmental services	541	554	556
Law, order and protective services	489	506	511
Education	1,612	1,657	1,695
Arts and Libraries	59	62	67
Health and social work	2,164	2,280	2,307
Other public services	101	104	104
Nationalised Industries‡	309	251	246
Local authority current expenditure not allocated	75	52	81
	6,860	6,950	7,158

* Some figures may be subject to detailed technical amendment before publication of the 1985 Public Expenditure White Paper.

† Includes Regional Development Grants.

‡ Treated on GB basis in Autumn Statement.

Note:

Owing to rounding individual figures may not sum to totals.

Agriculture: Changes in capital grants announced on 11 December will lead to a reduction of some £5 million in grant payments in Scotland in 1985-86. Support for hill farmers will be maintained through hill livestock compensatory allowances and in some cases improved.

Industry: Changes in regional industrial policy (including transfer of responsibility for regional development grants in Scotland) were announced on 28 November. Provision for selective financial assistance has been increased by £10 million to reflect its increased importance. Cash provision for grant-in-aid to the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board has been increased over the underlying 1984-85 level.

Roads and Transport: Provision will be about £37 million more than was planned for the current year. This will maintain the momentum of the motorway and trunk roads programme enabling further significant progress with important bypasses, dual carriageways and other improvements. The Government will continue to honour its commitment to subsidise certain shipping and civil aviation services. Local authority investment in roads and public transport will also be maintained.

Housing: The reduction in housing provision mainly reflects lower capital expenditure on private sector improvement and repair grants following termination of higher rates of grant at March 1984.

Other Environmental Services: The urban programme will receive over £30 million compared with £26 million in the current year. Capital provision for water and sewerage will remain a priority with provision of £95 million compared to £92 million in 1984-85.

Law, Order and Protective Services: Provision should meet police service costs including some increased manpower; allow for a further 150 prison officers; support continued improvement in upgrading of prison buildings including work on two major projects at Greenock and Shotts; enable fire cover to be provided at minimum standards; carry forward civil defence planning and meet the cost of expected growth in demand for legal aid services.

Education: Provision reflects decisions already announced on student awards and central institutions expenditure. It takes account of the transfer to the central institutions sector of Napier college and Glasgow college of technology in September 1985. Increased local authority capital expenditure should enable faster progress on building improvement and rationalisation of schools.

Arts and Libraries: Provision has been increased to allow improvements in the staffing of national institutions and an expanded programme of repairs and maintenance. A modest increase in grants to the Scottish Museums Council and Scottish Film Council should also be possible.

Health and Social Work: The provision made for this programme allows for a cash increase for the hospitals and community health services programme of about 5·5 per cent. to enable health boards to meet the pay and price rises and also new demands for health care arising from demographic change. There are also sufficient additional resources to enable expenditure on the family practitioner services programme to match rising public demand, after account is taken of the effects of measures introduced or planned to control the cost of drug supplies and to contain the cost to the NHS of prescriptions. Government assistance to voluntary social work bodies, including community care and projects related to drug abuse, will also be increased.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I start with the public expenditure figures. Does the Secretary of State accept that it is clear that today's announcement means a cut in real terms as against the 1984-85 figures, even though the cash figures have been increased by the inclusion, for the first time, of regional development grant? If the Secretary of State had not had the benefit of comparing unlike with like, we would almost certainly have had a cut in real terms of nearly 3 per cent. Is it not true that his complacency is staggering, given the mean and inadequate provisions that existed in 1984-85 and the fact that only a blinkered loyalty to the Treasury makes the right hon. Gentleman look for further cuts on top of last year's cut of almost £200 million in real terms?

The right hon. Gentleman gave a remarkable performance, particularly in dealing with housing. He gave the impression that his statement was full of good news and festive cheer. In fact, housing has been sandbagged again. I estimate that the cut in real terms this year compared with last year is about 14 per cent. Housing support grant will be cut to £48 million. Towards the beginning of the Conervative party's period in power the housing support grant was more than £220 million. The right hon. Gentleman boasts of increases in the HRA capital allowance, but he fails to say that that increase has been more than offset by massive cuts in the non-HRA programme and that there has been an overall reduction. The right hon. Gentleman's gift for citing a nice selection of statistics calculated to give an impression which bears no relationship to reality is becoming tiresome.

Will the NHS allocation fully cover demographic changes and improved techniques? The right hon. Gentleman referred to an increase of 1 per cent. above the inflation rate, but, as I understand it, that is not sufficient to cover the agreed figure, which requires an increase of about 1·2 per cent. to stand still. Would there still be a sufficient increase to cover those improvements and demographic changes if the NHS pay and price deflator were applied to the figures?

The right hon. Gentleman gave the impression that the £3 million that he has to find for his budget because of the student grant debacle is coming from the education budget and not from some other part of the Scottish Office budget. Will the right hon. Gentleman make clear to the House what has gone to make room for this additional cut?

The House will note with dismay that the rate support grant has fallen from 62·2 to 56·5 per cent. I believe that it has been cut every year since the Conservative party came to power. It is extraordinary that the right hon. Gentleman did not see fit to mention the grant rate. I accept that the relevant expenditure has increased by 4·9 per cent., but will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the combined effect is a £6 million reduction in the grant payable? That is a significant reduction in real terms.

I ask the Secretary of State to deal more fully with the effect of revaluation. Is it not a disgrace that the £50 million which must be found to meet partially the impact of revaluation on the domestic ratepayer is to come from the needs element, particularly the needs element of district councils, to which the Secretary of State has contributed only £19 million?

There was a deafening silence about the likely rate increase as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's decision. I suggest that the inevitable victim will be the ratepayer. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, on a standstill budget for local authorities in 1985-86, the ratepayer will have to find another £194 million for the increase in relevant expenditure, that the local authorities will receive £6 million less in grant and that the £50 million will have to come from the needs element and, therfore, at the expense of services? That money will have to be found by the ratepayer. It looks like an increase of about 16 per cent. on a standstill budget.

Even if local authorities lowered their figures, cutting services by £100 million to meet the guidelines, the increase would still be almost 10 per cent. across the board, before taking into acount the impact of revaluation on the domestic ratepayer, which I would put — I understand that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities agrees—at about 8 per cent. Depending on whether it is a standstill budget, with no question of growth, or whether it is a budget for local authorities which come down to guidelines, the range of rate increases will be between 17 and 25 per cent. I ask the Secretary of State to comment on that aspect of the matter.

What will be the position—this will be of particular interest to Conservative Back Benchers — of those authorities which are below or at the guidelines? If they remain at the guidelines set by the Government, they will have to bear, through their rates, the entire burden of increases in relevant expenditure, the entire cut in the grant allocated to them and the entire strain on services of the switch from the needs to the domestic element. Those local authorities will be looking at 24 or 25 per cent. rate increases, with not even the option of cutting to come down to the guidelines, because they are already at those guidelines. The local authorities will be able to mitigate the impact only by spending well below the guidelines set by the Secretary of State. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that is a fair analysis? If so, is that the reward for the loyalty that he has demanded from those local authorities?

Is it not typical of the whole fraudulent approach that —*[Interruption.]* I am coming to the end. This is an important statement. Normally, we would have had two separate statements. We are considering the whole rate support grant and the whole of the public expenditure figures rolled into one, and that explains why so many points must be raised. It is typical of this fraudulent approach that the industrial ratepayer, who might have been expected to benefit from the revaluation, has largely

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

had the benefit promptly taken away from him with a reduction in industrial de-rating from 50 to 40 per cent. The gain has been offset, and the Secretary of State has taken with one hand what the assessor has given at the other end of the equation. This is a miserable outlook. It will cost jobs and will mean deteriorating services in the public sector. That is exactly what we would expect from the wretched but predictable petty prejudices which now dominate the Scottish Office.

Mr. Younger: I know that it was a long and difficult statement, but I am flabbergasted at how much the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) managed to get wrong. He said that we should have had two separate statements. He has a cheek to say that. No Labour Secretary of State has ever made a statement in the House on this part of the rate support grant. No Labour Secretary of State has ever made a statement in the House on the Scottish block. The hon. Gentleman should have the grace to admit that since taking office I have adopted the practice of making these statements, and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be grateful for that.

The hon. Member for Garscadden described the cut in overall expenditure as a cut of 3 per cent. in real terms. He made a completely misleading comparison, because the programme includes the electricity board's external financing limits, which, as he well knows, are declining because the construction work at Torness, which took a large proportion of the finance, is tailing off. If we exclude the EFLs and the change in regional development grant, which is an exceptional item, the cash increase is about 4 per cent. of the total figures that I mentioned. In real terms, this is a decrease of about £30 million on a total budget of more than £6 billion. The year-on-year increase in the Scottish block is close to the forecast rate of inflation.

The hon. Gentleman said that the housing measures involved a cut of 14 per cent. The housing cut, such as it is—today's announcement showed an increase over the White Paper figure to which we are referring — is accounted for almost entirely by the change in improvement grant from 90 to 50 per cent. The hon. Gentleman was trying to cut out completely from his consideration the extra money that I have allocated towards the alleviation of dampness and condensation, which the hon. Gentleman has always made out he is tremendously keen to mitigate.

With regard to the National Health Service, we calculated that the demographic changes would require an increase of just under 1 per cent. for them to be covered fully. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the amount is well over the increase in inflation—without allowing for any savings that health boards can make—and will allow for those changes and other matters.

On the question of student grants, with respect to the hon. Gentleman, I did not say or imply—it is not the case—that any of these measures had resulted from the announcement that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State made 10 days ago about extra money for science and technology. As I told the hon. Gentleman the other day, the figures for the Scottish block were not worked out when that happened. We have, therefore, been able to incorporate our calculations within the normal considerations of the Scottish block, which, at over £6 billion, has not had great difficulty in absorbing £3 million of extra expenditure resulting from the changes in student grants. The announcement that my hon. Friend made about extra money is unchanged. It will still amount in total to £14 million and there will be a first component of it, as I mentioned today.

Understandably, the hon. Gentleman made a small error when he talked about the rate support grant. It is not a £6 million cut, because he has failed to take into account the transfer of two colleges—two central institutions—from local authorities. That is a £10 million difference. If hon. Members wish to make a comparison, that is a £4 million increase rather than a £6 million decrease.

I made it clear that I have provided from Government sources £19 million extra to help local authorities to bridge the gap resulting from revaluation. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is making history. I agree with one of his figures. The effect of revaluation changes on the domestic ratepayers, without taking anything else into account, is about 8 per cent. the figures that I have announced, it is calculated that if local authorities were to spend in line with the provision that I have suggested there would probably be an increase in rates of no more than the rate of inflation above the 8 per cent. resulting from the revaluation. The effect on domestic ratepayers will be only 8 per cent. because I have provided extra money to reduce by approximately half the effect that the revaluation would otherwise have had.

The hon. Gentleman was remarkably churlish about industrial ratepayers. Opposition Members are supposed to be interested in and keen and worried about jobs. Industrial ratepayers will have an average rate reduction of about 7 per cent. I can imagine the fuss that there would be if they had to face a 7 per cent. increase. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be decent enough to welcome what has been done.

The hon. Gentleman raised a point about those local authorities which are below the guidelines. When they are on the guidelines they will have a problem with the effect of their expenditure on rates from now on, but ratepayers in those authorities already have the greatest and most coveted advantage, because they have had prudent authorities which have kept within spending limits for many years. On the whole, their rate levels are much lower than those of the mostly Labour-dominated authorities which have been extravagantly overspending for years. I hope that on reflection the hon. Gentleman will give a much warmer welcome to the statement than he did.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I welcome the fact that authorities such as Dumfries and Galloway, which keep within guidelines, will receive an increase in their budgets? Will he accept that I welcome also the fact that he is increasing expenditure on the Health Service? Can he confirm that, in real terms, overall local government expenditure is far above the levels of 1979?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I, too, greatly appreciate the splendid efforts that various local authorities, including Dumfries and Galloway, have made to keep expenditure down to the levels of the provision. I am sure that that is much welcomed by their ratepayers. I can confirm that, despite all that has happened in recent years, local authorities are

still spending over 2 per cent. more than they were in 1979. That gives the lie to all the cries abou the terrible slashing of services. That has not happened yet.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): In view of the rigt hon. Gentleman's remarkable statement about looking to local authorities to bring their expenditure down to realistic levels, may I ask whether he has taken into account anything inside or outside the confines of the statement that could be done to ease the problem of the Western Isles islands council, which, with the highest domestic rate in Scotland, cannot spend up to its own mean guidelines? What is the reason for the delay in implementing the client-group method, which was expected to be introduced during 1985-86?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's anxiety about the Western Isles. He and I have discussed this subject on several occasions. I have been able to give what I hope will be seen as considerable help to the Western Isles, through the distribution of the rate support grant. I hope that that will be of some help. As regards the client-group method, the settlement makes a large stride towards getting most authorities much nearer to their client-group assessments, and that will be generally welcomed.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Can my right hon. Friend give any informtion on progress in reducing of overmanning by some local authorities? When Opposition Members and some high-spending local authorities huff and puff about his statement, will he bear in mind that some Labour-controlled local authorities seem to have no difficulty in finding unlimited funds to support the miners' strike?

It is difficult to evaluate a local authority's rate record over a run of years when a revaluation has occurred during the period. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend could do anything, such as producing a ready reckoner, to enable people more readily to establish the rate record after revaluation, because there should not be any increase in expenditure as a result?

Mr. Younger: On the latter point, I appreciate my hon. Friend's wishes. I shall consider issuing a ready reckoner or some other easy means to make comparisons. That is an interesting suggestion.

As my hon. Friend probably knows, there has unfortunately been a considerable increase in manpower since 1979. I calculate that the non-manual increase has been about 10 per cent. since then. There again, the story of vast redundancies in local authorities in Scotland does not bear analysis. I fully appreciate my hon. Friend's feelings about local authorities' donations to some of the miners on strike. Without going into the legalities of that, I find it astonishing that the authorities which dish out that sort of money can still complain that they do not have enough money for their ordinary and proper services.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Why does the Secretary of State, who is a member of a Government who boast about cutting public expenditure, try to pretend that he is not cutting public expenditure when he comes to the House and makes the statement that we have just heard? His statement on housing is typical. He makes £589 million sound like an increase. This year's figure is £650 million. The real reduction next year is therefore—as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said—14 per cent. Why does the Secretary of State not admit that? He is now trying to exclude nationalised industries in his figures for total public expenditure. He did not, of course, exclude them when the figures doubled between 1982-83 and the current year.

There is a 2 per cent. reduction in total expenditure in Scotland on a like-by-like comparison between this year and next. In real terms, this represents substantially more than £100 million. That is what is being cut from public expenditure in Scotland next year. Why does the Secretary of State not admit his responsibility for that and for the poorer services and increased unemployment that will result from his announcement?

Mr. Younger: I feel that I should sympathise with the right hon. Gentleman on his sudden attack of deafness. He accused me of trying to pretend that there was a vast increase in public spending. I remind him that in my statement I said that this

"shows that the Government remain determined to keep public expenditure within planned limits."

I cannot be much clearer than that. I have explained that the reductions in the housing figures which he mentioned are due almost entirely to the reduction in the non-HRA portion, which is reflected in the reduction in improvement grants from 90 to 50 per cent.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman—I hope that it will not embarrass him too much—that the resulting level of improvement grants is miles ahead of anything that he ever achieved in any year, or even after adding all his years together. He mentioned a reduction in real terms. Unfortunately, it must be a question of deafness, because I explained in my first answer that that is largely accounted for by the change in the Torness EFL, which is an understandable and correct procedure.

Mr. John Corrie (Cunninghame, North): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will continue to support ferry services to the islands as generously in the future as he has in the past? Is he aware of how important these ferry services are to the people in the island communities?

Mr. Younger: I confirm to my hon. Friend that I have written into the figures further provision for assisting with those services.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Is it not the case that the £75 million cash increase to be allocated to the hospital boards assumes a wage increase for nurses of not more than 3 per cent? Since they would need at least 20 per cent. to get back in real terms to what they were earning 10 years ago, does it not mean that if there is any improvement at all in the Health Service it will be at the expense of people who are already grossly exploited within it?

With regard to housing, is it not the case that more than 12 months ago one district council alone, Kirkcaldy, estimated that to bring its non-traditional houses into habitable condition it would need to spend at least £50 million?

Will the Secretary of State read the recent report of the National Economic Development Council, on which the Government are represented, which says that billions of pounds will have to be spent on the infrastructure—roads, the transport system, education, hospitals and so on—and that these services are being ruined by the Government's gross neglect of them?

Mr. Younger: I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will think that he is overstating his point very seriously. The nurses have had from this Government what they have never had from any other Government—a proper review body for their pay system. I think that they are very grateful for that. There are now far more nurses than there were under the last Labour Government, as the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to recall.

Health authorities are expected to find the cost of pay and price increases in 1985-86 from within the general increase of 5·5 per cent. made available for this programme. The Government consider that a pay increase of 3 per cent. would be reasonable, and at that level hospital and community health services would have resources to expand by about 2 per cent. It is entirely up to those concerned with negotiations to decide what level of pay settlements there should be, although it follows that if pay settlements are higher there will be less money for expansion and development.

With regard to housing, I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have found an extra £16 million to go specifically towards dealing with dampness and condensation. I should have thought that that would be welcome to the hon. Gentleman, particularly as the rest of the allocations to local authorities include money for maintaining their houses, and it can be used for helping with the dampness problem if they give it a high enough priority.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Edinburgh, West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that £43 million extra is being provided for housing and that this will mean increased provision for the housing associations, through the Housing Corporation? Not only will there be a special allocation for housing affected by dampness and condensation; ill there not also be an allocation for defective housing, such as Orlit housing?

Mr. Younger: I confirm that there is £43 million extra on the housing revenue account.

I am glad that, taking into the account the local authority component, the housing associations will once more be able to look for a total expenditure of about £100 million this year—a figure miles higher than anything remotely achieved by previous Governments. I hope that Opposition Members will welcome that, as they are supposed to be in favour of the housing association movement.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement will do nothing but exacerbate the very difficult circumstances that exist between central and local government in Scotland?

With regard to the provision of the relevant expenditure, will the Secretary of State confirm that the increase of 5 per cent. to £98 million coincides with a reduction in the grant from 60·2 to 56·6 per cent., and that that difference will have to be found by the ratepayers?

With the Secretary of State also confirm, with regard to the revaluation, that although he has made a welcome increase of £19 million, that will leave £34 million—the 8 per cent. that he talked about—to be found by the ratepayers?

How long will it take the Secretary of State to implement fully the client-group approach? Will it take two, 10, or 20 years?

Mr. Younger: With regard to the hon. Gentleman's last point, I cannot give a precise number of years, but on this occasion there has been a major step in that direction. I accept the hon. Gentleman's wish that we should get to full implementation as soon as possible.

As for exacerbating local authority and central government relations, if that were to happen anywhere, I am sure it would not be in the hon. Gentleman's part of the world, because the Borders regional council has not only done extremely well in keeping expenditure down to a reasonable level, but it has been particularly helped by this settlement, as have several other authorities. I hope the hon. Gentleman will find that that is helpful to him and his constituents.

With regard to the reduction in grant, of course it is the case that the Government have been trying to reduce the percentage of rate support grant. There is ample evidence to show that whenever that has not been done — for three years running it was not done — the local authorities have simply put up their spending in order to spend the difference that they could afford and put it on to their ratepayers.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming the extra amount provided for housing. I hope that that will be generally welcomed, although the Opposition Front Bench have not felt able to say anything good about it.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the increase of £38 million in expenditure on education and the £27 million extra expenditure on health and social work, but I am deeply disturbed and disappointed by the £19 million cut in agricultural support. Will he bear in mind that there has been no increase in capital grant since 1981? This morning I received a telex from the Banffshire NFU, which said:

"Shocked by cuts in capital grant. Disastrous for the future of the hills and the uplands."

As there is a £5 million reduction in the capital grant that my right hon. Friend is suggesting in his statement, I should like him to have another look at it and find a bit more money for farmers.

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said about the increase in expenditure on education. It is of the greatest importance that we have found a considerable sum to increase the amount of technical education and scientific research.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern about agriculture, but, when he has time to look at the figures more closely, I think he will find that the decrease shown there still indicates a strong commitment to agriculture. The main reductions are in the spending on schemes which are pre-funded by the European Community. The difference amounts to £17 million. Capital grant reductions amount to about £5 million. The main increases result from the enhancement of the suckler cow premium and payments of £1 million under the milk outgoers scheme. Both schemes were announced earlier this year. We remain strongly committed to firm support for agriculture, and the increased rates of hill livestock compensatory amounts recently announced have been widely welcomed by the industry.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that his statement will be met with dismay in Scotland, that he has a responsibility to reduce unemployment, and that the cuts

that he has announced today, taken with the cuts in regional aid, will mean that 1985 will be a record year for unemployment in Scotland? Would he care to predict what the unemployment figure will be for 1985? Will he accept that responsibility for that tragedy lies firmly with him?

Mr. Younger: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is on a bad point. His right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) will remind him that, as Secretary of State, he did not make forecasts about unemployment. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, as a result of revaluation, if local authorities have any reasonable reduction in their spending, industry will have a reduction in rates of about 7 per cent. on average. Anyone who is worried about jobs must surely welcome that. The hon. Gentleman might also like to note that within those figures there are increased provisions for regional development grants, which have now been transferred to the Scottish Office. They, too, will help to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the changes that have been made in the rating to affect industrial users will benefit coal mines which are working, because they will be paying rates? Is there not scope here for miners to set up co-operatives in the mines that are scheduled for closure, so that they can invest in their own future and take advantage of those rates?

Will my right hon. Friend look at the way in which the support measures are produced for road networks? He will be aware that Tayside supplies the two main roads going north in Scotland. I believe that there is scope for looking at how the roads are funded, particularly with the heavy traffic that is flowing through.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the present manning levels in local government in Scotland are above those for 1977, which was the year before the Labour Government introduced the real cuts in manning levels in Scotland?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend's final point. That was the biggest reduction in manpower that the right hon. Member for Govan ever achieved, a fact of which I am sure he is extremely proud.

My hon. Friend referred to the possibility of miners wishing to make use of the grants and so on that are available. I agree that that would be useful. I should make it clear that the extra provision is for selective assistance. There is a greater emphasis on that now. The regional development grants are, of course, non-cash limited, so they will be provided at whatever level they have to come — I correct what I said previously about that. The figures announced today allow another satisfactory increase in the roads programme money in Scotland, which will enable the programme to carry on as planned, and there is also somewhat of an increase for local authority roads, which again I think will be welcomed by them.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Behind all the weasel words, is there not a real and desperate cut? Is it not the case that every piece of economic advice that the Secretary of State is getting is that tax cuts will not produce jobs, but investment will? Further, is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman's boast about the increase in regional development grants is phoney? He referred to a transfer payment, but in reality there is a cut, which has already been announced.

Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman's figures on housing will again mean a cut and unemployment in the construction industry? Will he admit the fact enunciated by my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton), which is that the figures for the National Health Service mean an effective pay award of 3 per cent. for nurses, which is below the rate of inflation — yet another deplorable and appalling cut?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman's rhetoric depends entirely on there being cuts all over the shop, because that is all that he really understands. However, he has not appreciated that it is no part of my or the Government's case to try to increase public expenditure — quite the reverse. The hon. Gentleman has not appreciated that the Government's objective is to try to keep public expenditure under control, and that is perfectly clearly and openly stated. What we are trying to do, and what the figures demonstrate can be done, is to maintain a good level of services by good housekeeping and savings, while not putting extra strain on public expenditure, which would result in a mad increase in spending, which is all that the hon. Gentleman ever wants. Of course investment is important, and we do all that we can with the money available to keep investment up. The construction industry's component from the public sector in Scotland in the year ahead will broadly remain level in real terms, as it has done over the past few years. That is another example of what good housekeeping can produce, even at a time when we are trying to keep down the overall levels of public expenditure.

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South): I share my right hon. Friend's justified objective to contain public expenditure, but would he care for a moment to bask in the glory of the Opposition's philosophy and bear in mind the fact that expenditure on local authorities is, in real terms, above what it was in 1979?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is quite right and is helping to explain to Opposition Members the realities of the situation, which they are criticising from all the wrong angles. It is true that local authorities are still spending more in real terms than in 1979. It is against that background that the terrible doleful cries of the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) have to be seen. More manpower is being employed and more money is being spent in real terms. What the hon. Member for Paisley, South said bears no relation to reality.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Does the Secretary of State admit that it is politically unacceptable and socially disgraceful that he has allocated only £16 million towards dealing with dampness in housing in Scotland when the Scottish Select Committee report estimated that £500 million was needed to tackle the problem?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is a disgrace, when parents throughout Scotland are becoming increasingly worried about drug abuse by young people, particularly in the central belt and elsewhere, that insufficient funds are being given to the Scottish NHS, beyond the 1 per cent. which the Treasury reckons it needs to stand still and keep pace with demographic changes, to provide specific thrust to deal with the problem?

Mr. Younger: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has the housing figure wrong. Perhaps the way in which it has been expressed is wrong. The £16 million is not what I have allocated for dealing with dampness and condensation. It is a specific extra amount over and above the allocation that is given normally to cover that and other associated services. The hon. Gentleman may remember that when I met the Select Committee about the matter we went into it in some detail, and it was made clear that if local authorities regard it as a high priority, as I do, to deal with dampness and condensation, large sums of money are allocated to them—much more than £16 million—from which they can find quite a lot to deal with the dampness problems in their areas. The local authorities' own checklist of the amount of money needed to put those difficulties right is £190 million. That is their calculation. If one takes what is allocated generally for housing maintenance and repair and the £16 million extra, one sees that that represents a major gesture towards dealing with the problem. I hope that on reflection the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Mr. James Hamilton (Motherwell, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman recognise once and for all that one of the heaviest burdens for local authorities in Scotland is the high incidence of unemployment? Does he agree that because of his statement, with the inevitable cuts in education, social services, home helps and fire services, there will be a further increase in unemployment? Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the 7 per cent. figure that he mentioned as being beneficial to industrialists is one that he has plucked out of a hat, and will aggravate the situation?

Mr. Younger: I do not recognise the terrible headings under which the hon. Gentleman listed cuts and so on. I do not know about cuts in the fire service. I have not announced any. With regard to unemployment, the hon. Gentleman's area is in the largest top-tier authority in Britain and has the best attractions compared with other areas in any part of Britain. I should have thought that he would be glad about that. There are several features which directly help to tackle unemployment, including the lower rates for industry and the money which is not cash limited for assistance to industry, which I mentioned.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Is the Secretary of State aware that just over an hour ago the Prime Minister admitted that she was not an expert in accountancy and that his statement shows that he joins that select group of self-confessed illiterates in accountancy? Who does he think he is kidding when he tries to pretend to the Scottish population that he is not savagely cutting the housing budget? It is pure fiction to pretend that he is finding new money, when all that he is doing is finding it at the expense of other programmes at a time when Scottish housing need is at its greatest and when the Scottish building industry is in crisis.

Mr. Younger: I do not pretend to be an accountant, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman does either. Whether either of us is an accountant, perhaps the hon. Gentleman is good enough at arithmetic to tell me whether an extra £43 million on housing means a cut or an increase.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Secretary of State admit that his statement confirms that he has reneged on promises given to the ratepayers of Ayr, Prestwick and Troon on revaluation, which he gave in a desperate bid for re-election? As the Secretary of State is so confident that there are no cuts, and as he is so enthusiastic about law and order, will he indemnify any local authority for legal action taken against it because it cannot fulfil its statutory and legal responsibilities in education, social work or any other service because of what are clearly cuts? I ask that because I calculate that the per capita expenditure in Scotland is less than 1 per cent. of the per capita expenditure by this Government, by our taxpayers, on the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Younger: I confirm that I have reneged on no undertakings to any ratepayers in Ayr or any other part of Scotland.

Mr. Foulkes: In the right hon. Gentleman's election address——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Younger: As for legal responsibilities, I cannot see how local authorities spending over 2 per cent. more in real terms than they were five years ago can have difficulty in keeping up their legal obligations. I think that the hon. Gentleman has been reading too many Hans Andersen fairy tales.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): It has taken the right hon. Gentleman half an hour to admit that he has done a "star chamber" job on his Department. On the question of funding for the National Health Service, the right hon. Gentleman has made it clear that the Government are providing for a 3 per cent. increase in nurses' pay. Is he aware that in real terms that is a cut and that nurses' pay has fallen about 20 per cent. below where the last independent review said it should be, and that nurses are now on the breadline? What have Scotland's nurses done to deserve that?

Mr. Younger: As the hon. Gentleman knows, a pay review body has been set up to consider nurses' pay.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Secretary of State suggested that the increased cash provision for the NHS would result in expanded services. As part of that expansion, will there be increased geriatric provision and better, more comprehensive hospital facilities for the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped?

Mr. Younger: The figures that I have announced provide for an increase of 5·5 per cent. over the previous provision, which allows the NHS at least 1 per cent. more than the expected rate of inflation to cover extra demands on services, and so on. I agree that the priorities set out by the hon. Gentleman are very important, as do the health boards. Under the share arrangements, it is up to the health boards to use the money available to them within the figures that I have announced to deal with those very high priorities.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): Adding all the Secretary of State's years of office together, why is he so blindly indifferent to housing investment and unemployment in Scotland, as shown by the halving of housing investment in cost terms since he came to office in 1979? Why is he short changing Scotland's domestic ratepayers on revaluation by giving only £19 million to local authorities for domestic relief and leaving them to pick up

the tab for the other £51 million? Finally, what will be the average weekly increase in rates and in rents as a result of the Government's revaluation and housing policies? Will he produce figures on those two matters?

Mr. Younger: I shall try to give the hon. Gentleman as many figures as possible. His comments about housing suggest that he prepared them before hearing my statement. Nothing that he says alters the fact that, on the housing revenue account, which he should regard as important, this year's provision is £227 million and next year's provision will be £270 million. To everyone but the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), that is an increase of £43 million.

On revaluation, my calculation is that after the extra help that I have given—the £19 million and the increase from 1p to 5p domestic rate relief — the effect of revaluation alone on the domestic ratepayer will be an increase of about 8 per cent. For the industrial ratepayer it is minus 7 per cent. I have approximately halved the adverse effect on domestic ratepayers which would otherwise have occurred. A proportion rightly remains to be paid for by the domestic ratepayer, but it would have been double that amount if I had not taken my action.

As for rents, on my calculation the average rent increase in Scotland will be £1 per week. That must be set against the fact that Scottish rent levels are very substantially lower than those south of the border, while average earnings are now higher than those south of the border.

Local Government Bill (Standing Committee)

4.55 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order concerns the composition of the Standing Committee to consider the Local Government Bill. Earlier this morning the Government suffered a major political setback with the most humiliating vote of this Parliament when little more than half—58 per cent.—of Conservative Members voted for the centrepiece of the Government's legislative programme, cutting the Government's overall majority from 150 to 23.

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State said on the radio today that he would be prepared to listen to further argument, but he will not have that opportunity as he has not been included in the membership of the Standing Committee to consider the Bill. I understand that membership of Standing Committees is in the hands of the Committee of Selection. But is it in order for the House to express a view about this, and, if so, how can that be done?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has answered his own question. It is entirely a matter for the Committee of Selection. The hon. Gentleman can certainly express a view at Question Time, or in any other way, but there is no formal way of raising the matter on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not wish to labour the point or to stray out of order, but the practice in the House has been for Secretaries of State to serve on the Standing Committee when they introduce major Bills which have constitutional implications, as the Local Government Bill has. Is the Select Committee not accountable to the House in any way? Can we not do something about the fact that the Secretary of State seems to be ignoring precedent by declining to take part in rather than being excluded from the Standing Committee on this very important measure?

Mr. Speaker: That is entirely a matter for the Selection Committee. The hon. Gentleman, however, is not entirely correct. There have been many cases in which this has not happened.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As my hon. Friend has said, there is an important constitutional point involved, because this is a reform of local government without a Royal Commission or any public and objective inquiry. May I remind you that in the local government reform of 1962 the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Sir K. Joseph), served on the Standing Committee? Would it not be of benefit to the whole House if we had the experience, wit and wisdom of the present Secretary of State on the Standing Committee to consider the present Bill? I look to you, Mr. Speaker, as the Secretary of State's hon. Friends look to him, for guidance on these matters. Is there any way in which we can bring the matter to the attention of the House so that we may discuss this important constitutional issue?

Mr. Speaker: It would be more effective for the hon. Gentleman to look to the Chairman of the Selection Committee than to me.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If it is not possible for the Secretary of State to find his way on to the Committee, will it be possible for you, in selecting amendments for Report, to take into account the fact that we shall not have had the opportunity to obtain answers from the Secretary of State in Committee? Will you therefore look sympathetically at the matters that we raise so that the Secretary of State can make his views clear on Report?

Mr. Speaker: That is ingenious. Like the hon. Gentleman, however, I have as yet no idea what amendments will be put down on Report.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): As it seems to be unprecedented for a senior Minister not to serve on the Committee in these circumstances, can you, Mr. Speaker, advise us as to what will happen if the other Ministers are not available? Who will represent the views of the Cabinet and the Government in those important discussions?

Mr. Speaker: I never give replies to hypothetical questions.

STANDING CHARGES (ABOLITION)

Mr. Christopher Murphy presented a Bill to abolish public utility standing charges: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 42.]

ESTIMATES

Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Report [11th December] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill (Clause 1)

Considered in Committee. [Progress 12 December]

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

ABOLITION OF GLC AND METROPOLITAN COUNTY COUNCILS

5.1 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 1, line 10, leave out from 'Council' to end of line 11.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 15, in page 1, line 11, at end insert 'except the Greater Manchester County Council.'.

Mr. Hughes: The effect of the amendment would be to delete the metropolitan counties from the provisions of the Bill, with the result that, for the time being, only the Government's proposal to abolish the Greater London council would remain. That proposal succeeded in gaining a tenuous level of support from the Committee early this morning, but it may of course be subject to further consideration later.

This part of our debate will be solely about the metropolitan counties. I hope that it will provide an opportunity for the Committee to talk about six counties which, because their future is dealt with in the same piece of legislation as the future of the GLC, appear to be playing second fiddle to London. Clearly, that impression is misleading. Proper consideration should be given to those areas, too.

We should not underrate the importance of the amendment and of the parts of the Bill that relate to the metropolitan counties—especially clause 1. We should remember that the population of six metropolitan counties amounts to 24 per cent. of the population of England, or 11·2 million people. The West Midlands has a population of just over 2·5 million people. Greater Manchester is very nearly the same size. West Yorkshire has a population of 2 million, Merseyside a population of 1·5 million and South Yorkshire 1·3 million. Tyne and Wear is the smallest of the counties, with a population of 1·1 million. The metropolitan counties cover substantial areas of industrial and metropolitan England, and the future of each of those counties should be considered as comprehensively as possible.

Our main objection to the inclusion of the six counties is that, if they are treated in the manner proposed, it will not be possible to consider their individual and differing circumstances, sizes, areas and needs with the necessary attention. The effect of considering them all together will be to impose on all of them a structure devised by the present Government. Our first proposition is that such treatment is in any event inappropriate, because the six counties are substantially different. Arguments about levels of services in Greater Manchester, and whether or

not they should be retained at district or higher than district level, may not apply equally to Tyne and Wear, for example.

It is interesting that we are now considering only metropolitan government. We are considering only the six MCCs, but four non-metropolitan councils—Hampshire, Kent, Essex and Lancashire—have larger populations than Tyne and Wear.

When considering the future of government outside London, there is a strong argument for looking at the whole matter entirely afresh. That was the proposition that resulted in the setting up of the Royal Commission—the Redcliffe-Maud commission—which took three years to debate the matter and form its conclusions. It took the commission three years to decide what should be the next step in the reorganisation of what was generally agreed to be a muddled system of local government that had grown up over the previous 100 years.

We are considering not just the creations of an Act passed some 12 years ago, but the government of the premier cities of England, apart from London. We are considering the future of Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, Bradford, Manchester, Coventry and Wakefield. Many places such as those deserve to have individual and proper consideration, because of their different and varying circumstances.

If it is necessary to add one further point to make clear how substantially the six counties differ from each other, one has to consider not just the population, but the fact that the sizes of the counties and the numbers of districts included in them vary widely. Greater Manchester covers 10 districts — by far the largest number — with Manchester in the centre and a radial structure of districts. There are seven districts in the West Midlands, and Merseyside, West Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear each includes five districts. The smallest metropolitan county in terms of the numbers of second tier authorities within it is South Yorkshire, with four districts. If we consider Greater Manchester and the neighbouring county of South Yorkshire in the same way, we shall not accord proper respect to their different sizes and make-up on local government terms.

On every objective argument, it would be proper for there to be separate considerations for each of the areas. At the same time—the point has already been made—it might be appropriate to give separate consideration to the other counties in England. There may well be an argument for reconsidering the provision and level of services in the shire counties at the same time as we consider the counties set up in 1972.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's line of argument. His amendment would not abolish any of the metropolitan counties, but it would allow the abolition of the GLC. Many alliance Members have expressed the opposite view. They are in favour of the abolition of the MCCs and the retention of the GLC. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us how the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) will vote on his strange and curious amendment?

Mr. Hughes: I am glad that the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) has raised that point. He has given us an opportunity to clarify our position and the position of the Labour party in relation to these proposals. There were attempts yesterday to remove the GLC from the provisions of the Bill. An amendment to that effect was proposed by my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself. Interestingly, our proposal to remove the GLC from the Bill was not supported by the Labour party.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Labour Members abstained on the fundamental point about which they have been arguing so vociferously for months. It is telling that, at the time of trial last May on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 and last night on the abolition Bill, they were found lacking. I only hope that the Labour party's friends in county hall in London will be satisfied with the abstention of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on the amendment which would have allowed the GLC to continue.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall in a moment.

We have never said that the GLC does not need reform. That has been the Labour party's view. However, it did not stand by that last night.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin) *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way soon.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I see that Labour Members want to rescue themselves.

Mr. Corbyn: These are devastating attacks.

Mr. Hughes: They are self-inflicted. The Labour party scored another own goal last night by not voting for what it has campaigned for so expensively during the past several years.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way shortly.

When the Conservative Government established the metropolitan councils, their proposals were opposed by the Labour party and the Liberal party. We opposed them because we believed that there should be proper regional government, not a half-way house. That was also the Labour party's argument. We have maintained that view. We did not want and are not keen on the metropolitan counties. The question is whether it is better for the time being to keep the metropolitan counties, with all their faults, until we can get what we want—a system of regional government—or whether we should abolish the metropolitan counties and have what my right hon. and hon. Friends and I believe to be a much worse arrangement. My hon. Friends the Members for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) and for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) have always made it clear that they do not like the metropolitan counties. We have to judge whether preserving the metropolitan counties is better than what the Government propose. With the exception of my hon. Friends the Members for Rochdale and for Mossley Hill, the parliamentary Liberal party believes that it is better to keep the metropolitan counties until the system can be improved.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn) *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way in a moment.

We believe that the metropolitan counties should remain until we have a proper examination of local government functions and can establish an improved structure. We have held that view ever since the original proposals were made 14 years ago, unlike the Labour party which has changed its views.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

The Chairman: Order. Has the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) concluded his speech, or is he giving way?

Mr. Hughes: I am giving way.

5.15 pm

Mr. Straw: In case you failed to notice it, Mr. Walker, that was merely a parenthetical interjection in anticipation of the question that I am about to ask the hon. Gentleman. He has made it clear that the alliance's stance on abolition of the metropolitan counties and the GLC is as confused and inconsistent as its stance on, for example, trade union legislation. There are as many alliance views as there are alliance Members. Perhaps I might put the hon. Gentleman out of his misery. He has done sterling stuff in trying to plait sawdust. We refused to vote for the alliance amendment last year—[HON. MEMBERS: "Last night."] It just seems like last year, as I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees—because it was ill drafted, ill thought out and reflected the confusion of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. Amendment No. 13 will save the metropolitan counties and abolish the GLC. The Liberal party amendment last night proposed the reverse. Our stance is clear. We want to save the GLC and the metropolitan counties. That is why we shall vote against clause stand part.

Mr. Hughes: I note, as no doubt do others, that the Labour party must justify its abstention. Matters are taken in sequence. Today we are debating whether to retain the met counties, all of which are Labour-controlled, yet the Labour party intends to abstain again. That is a most amazingly inconsistent and unprincipled attitude.

Mr. Allan Roberts: The Liberal party amendment which we considered last night would have abolished the met counties but not the GLC, and it was defeated. The sequence that the hon. Gentleman has described now means that we are discussing another alliance amendment which proposes the abolition of the GLC but not of the met counties. The sequence does not continue, however, with a third alliance amendment which will save the GLC, as such an amendment has already been defeated. On that basis, will the hon. Gentleman not press the amendment to a Division?

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Member for Bootle, who has been here somewhat longer than I, does not yet understand the procedures of this place, I am disappointed. He knows that we debate issues in sequence. Last night we debated whether the GLC should continue, and the Labour party decided to abstain. Another amendment, which proposed saving the GLC, was defeated by only 23 votes. Ours would have been defeated by a similar margin if the Labour party had voted for it. The idea of keeping the GLC has therefore been lost, so we move on. If amendment No. 13 is successful, the met counties will be taken out of the Bill and only the battle about abolition of the GLC will continue.

Mr. Tony Banks: When the Secretary of State came to the Dispatch box for the third time last night, he claimed that the Labour party's abstention was a vote against the GLC. His argument was almost as intriguing as watching the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) disappearing up his own Division Lobby trying to explain what happened. My colleagues in county hall had decided that the Labour party at county hall did not want to be split from the met counties, as the Liberal party tried to do. The campaign has always been united. That is why we abstained on a typically splitting Liberal party amendment.

Mr. Hughes: There are many factual inaccuracies in what the hon. Gentleman has said. Two campaigns are being run—one by the met counties and another by the GLC. If he does not believe that, he should examine some of the documents that I have with me which set out the case for the met counties. They clearly come from a separate office in London. Apart from that sort of inaccuracy, the hon. Gentleman may choose not to support amendments moved by parties other than his own. However, that is an unprincipled stand, based purely on politics rather than on the issue. If he and his colleagues choose to make that decision, that is their affair and they must accept the political responsibility.

Mr. Harry Cowans (Tyne Bridge): While the hon. Gentleman is lecturing the Committee on how our procedures work, he might reflect on the fact that by separating the two issues there was a distinct possibility of one being carried while the other was defeated. That would have destroyed the case he is now making. In order to avoid that possibility, the Labour party has chosen to link the two issues. Therefore, instead of lecturing us, the hon. Gentleman should perhaps learn.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans), who is considerably more experienced in parliamentary procedure than I, does not seem to realise that there has always been an opportunity to do better on one of the proposals than on the other, simply because the GLC case is stronger than the case for the metropolitan counties. For evidence of that, one only needs to look at the Labour party's manifesto and, subsequently, at the answers given and speeches made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who refused to say that the Labour party would reinstate the metropolitan counties. If that is not clear, I am not surprised that Labour Members remain confused.

The Liberal party belief, which is historically, chronologically and factually true, is that the case for the retention of the GLC is stronger than the case for retaining the metropolitan counties, but that does not mean that the Government's proposals for the replacement of either are acceptable.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The hon. Gentleman feels that the case for the retention of the GLC is stronger than the case for the retention of the met counties. Does he recall his comment on Second Reading, when he told me that he felt that Liberal councillors in the metropolitan areas should resist the abolition of those county councils with all the power at their disposal, which frankly is not a great deal? In view of the comments that he has just made, will not the morale of those Liberal councillors be weakened?

Mr. Hughes: I have no difficulty about that. Indeed, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Liberal councillors in the met counties, all of whom I visited and spoke to during the summer and subsequently, are much more united and clear about this issue than any group of Labour councillors in any of the metropolitan counties. The Labour district councils would be quite happy to get their hands on the powers of the metropolitan authorities, and they have said so until recently, whereas their friends in the metropolitan counties in large measure want to hold on to their powers. I do not detract from what I said on Second Reading. The view of the 250 or more Liberal councillors in the metropolitan counties is that they should not assist the Government in passing bad legislation and that only when and if the Bill becomes law should they be obliged to follow it. That they will do, but not until then.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in Greater Manchester there is a fairly substantial library of Liberal pledges? Only two years ago the Liberals there were petitioning to abolish the GLC, but they are now defending the GLC. I assure the hon. Gentleman that by Friday there will be an addition to that library, because *Hansard* will show that the hon. Gentleman has sold those people right down the river.

Mr. Hughes: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we shall not be happy until in each region of England there is proper regional government, with the powers that Whitehall should have devolved to those regions and with the powers that are at present in the hands of the quangos, such as the water and health authorities, also devolved to such democratic regional authorities. We have never departed from our view that where power can be exercised more locally it should be done so at every available opportunity. There has never been any alteration to that view. Indeed, last night the Secretary of State was kind enough to say that on this issue the Liberal party has been principled and consistent throughout this century. Although other hon. Members may wish to disagree, we are happy to bring that consistency to the attention of the Committee. We shall continue to argue for proper regional and democratic local government until we achieve it, and that may be sooner than many hon. Members think.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): As we are discussing election pledges, will my hon. Friend consider the Labour party's 1983 election commitment to introduce unitary authorities? How is it possible to have unitary authorities in the metropolitan areas while retaining metropolitan districts and counties?

Mr. Hughes: I shall reaffirm that point and then proceed because I am sure, Mr. Walker, that you would wish me to conclude — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Apparently, the unanimous view of the rest of the Committee is that I should continue. However, I shall not do so, because I respect the desire of the Chair to allow the debate to proceed.

The more one exposed the changing values and principles of the Labour party, the more interesting this debate would become. Since the interim provisions legislation was introduced in the last Session of Parliament, the Labour party's policy has been ambiguous about what would happen, except to say that it hopes to introduce unitary local government throughout England. If that does not mean merging the county and district councils, I do not know what it means. If I do not know what it means, no one else will be able to interpret the ambiguity in that manifesto document. The Labour party is still using that ambiguity, because it has not sorted out its policy on local government. It is simply on the defensive, and it will continue to be for a considerable time to come.

Mr. Allan Roberts: I have always been a keen supporter of regional government. The hon. Gentleman has said that on his trips around the country he met many Liberals. Did he find that the Liberal party on Merseyside is campaigning for abolition while the Liberal party in Greater Manchester is campaigning against it? Is that what he means by unity?

Mr. Hughes: I began by saying that if the metropolitan counties could be taken out of the Bill, we could argue on the merits for the form and structure of local government appropriate in each of the areas presently governed by the metropolitan county councils. It was clear that part of that argument was that there would be different solutions in different areas simply because the counties are of a different size and shape and have different characteristics and histories. I accept that in some of those areas there is a necessity for county-wide services.

I shall give one practical example. In a county such as Greater Manchester, as the hon. Member for Bootle pointed out, there has been considerable support for attention at higher than district level to many of the services — transport, waste disposal and technical services. Clearly it would be seen to be a disadvantage if they were split up between the joint boards, quangos and other Government concoctions. There should be a simple, clearly intelligible, local government regional structure.

5.30 pm

The hon. Member for Bootle knows that the same arguments may not apply to the Wirral, which is a district council in Merseyside, as to Sefton, which is the authority in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, because it is on the edge of Merseyside. Some authorities have expressed a wish to run their own police, fire, and transport services, as many of them did previously. Many of them ran their own police forces and bus services—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) says that boundaries have changed. He is right. The districts, boroughs and county boroughs ran their own services, and many of them wish to do so again.

I now press on to the other substantive reason why the Government's proposal to replace the county authorities with an amalgamation of different bodies is unacceptable to us and, I hope, to the Committee. Implicit in the proposals is an enormous degree of intervention by central Government, which is unparalleled in areas of local government activity. The proposals present a prospect for change, not only this year but again in a few years' time. There is an opt-out procedure. That will allow, in West Yorkshire, for example, a county-wide joint board to be set up to run the police force, from which a district may later opt out. It would be cheaper and better, if a district wished to opt out, for it to do so at the beginning. When there are joint boards, appointed bodies and residual bodies it will not be clear who is running which service.

People will not be able to vote, either often or in some cases at all, for those who will run the local services. Democracy is about the population understanding who run

[Mr. Hughes]

their services and being able to vote for them. It is not about having an indirect and unsatisfactory form of accountability, such as that of joint boards which do not work well, or about having a set of appointees over whom the electors have no control.

There is no evidence that the Government's requirement that districts should co-operate with each other will be met. Over the years many of the districts have not co-operated with each other. That has often been the recipe for duplication, waste and bad local services. That is why it would be better to take out the proposal as it stands, which is to abolish the metropolitan counties, as it were, by summary trial by the Government on the basis of a last-minute election pledge. No independent analysis has been commissioned in the proper way, and there is overwhelming evidence from chartered accountants, such as Coopers and Lybrand, other management consultants, bodies and people concerned, that the proposals will not work and will lead to the entire system having to be reorganised in a few years' time.

Our amendment seeks to prevent the Committee from following that road to chaos and to allow us to reconsider the metropolitan counties and their government in a way that will result in a better, not a worse, service for people in those areas.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) started on a good point, but, sadly, proceeded to destroy it. Had he argued that at this stage we should probe the Government's intentions to see whether they are prepared to be sympathetic to the view that we should treat each of the different English regions separately, it would have been useful. It would have put down a marker on a subject which we want to develop in Committee.

The hon. Gentleman developed the point effectively by pointing out the considerable differences in size and geography between the metropolitan counties. However, he then more or less said, "The Liberal party's policy is to impose regional government on all regions in the same way." That defeats his argument. It would have been better if he had suggested that he was probing the Government's intentions to find out whether they would give each area the option of a different form of local government. Some hon. Members will wish to return to that point in Committee. It is illogical to insist that all areas should be treated in the same way.

The hon. Gentleman also made the mistake of assuming that people are greatly interested in the minutiae of the tactics of the Liberal party. It is important that we show united opposition to the abolition of the GLC and the six metropolitan councils by maximising our votes. It would have been logical to ensure, therefore, that we get a maximum number of votes on clause stand part.

I wish to draw attention to the strong opposition in Greater Manchester especially to the abolition of the Greater Manchester authority, but also to that of the other metropolitan counties, and to make it clear to the Government that they must consider the specific local traditions of the six metropolitan counties. I hope that my hon. Friends will develop the argument equally well for the other five authorities. We have an opportunity to deploy their case.

I make no apology for concentrating on Greater Manchester. My constituency lies in its area, and I was brought up and have lived there for a long time. I am worried that, although many Tories were prepared last night to support the Greater London council, fewer are prepared to support the other six counties, especially Greater Manchester council. We must, however, bear in mind that there are fewer Conservative Members who represent the Greater Manchester area.

The Minister should consider the traditional approach of the people of Manchester. Although the great demonstration at Peterloo took place in the centre of Manchester, the surrounding towns, most of which are now included within Greater Manchester, sent substantial numbers of people to it. Since then, Manchester has been the natural focus for most of those towns. That was demonstrated when the old royal exchange functioned as the cotton exchange. People came from Oldham, Rochdale, Bolton and Stockport regularly and consistently to trade.

The old royal exchange is an attractive reminder of the history and unity of the region, although it is now used as the arts centre. Every time I go there to enjoy a play, it reminds me of the time when I was a small child and was allowed to peek into the exchange when it was the centre of the cotton trade.

The area has a fine railway and communications network and there has been much development of municipal enterprise. The geography of the area reinforces that. There is a semi-circle of hills and a set of rivers which flow towards the centre of Manchester. The entire area has achieved considerable unity as a result of the way in which the Government have attacked it by destroying jobs and failing to meet its needs.

There are problems of dereliction throughout the 10 authorities within Greater Manchester. Unemployment varies considerably from one ward to another, but there is a general dearth of jobs and a general lack of Government effort to create jobs throughout the area. There are many problems with infrastructure, and many houses must be replaced. All these problems are common to the area, and all the authorities have a common desire to solve them.

In 1900 the Conservative Government organised a referendum on local government boundary changes in Greater Manchester. Parts of my constituency opted to come within Stockport. It is odd that, at the turn of the century, a Conservative Government believed it sufficiently worthwhile to consult the people of Greater Manchester, yet this Government have rejected any possibility of a referendum to consider their proposals. We know why they are unwilling to consult the people about their proposals. If they did so, the people of Greater Manchester would reject them decisively. It is worth remembering that the Conservative party was decisively defeated in the elections to the Greater Manchester council, and at the general election, when the Conservative party produced a manifesto calling for the abolition of Greater Manchester council, few Conservative Members were returned in that area.

On all those counts, and including opinion poll results, the proposal to abolish Greater Manchester council has been rejected decisively by the people of that area. It is ridiculous for the Government to insist on imposing on those people a form of government which they do not wish.

How will the Secretary of State ensure that Greater Manchester has a voice to express the views of the entire conurbation, which until now have been expressed effectively by the council? How will he deal with strategic planning for the area? My constituents are worried about the way in which the shopping patterns of Greater Manchester are changing. Many people may feel nostalgia for the corner shop, but many others—the elderly, the handicapped and those who must have weekly tick—depend upon it completely. The most disadvantaged in the community are now the only users of the corner shop, yet they must pay the highest prices, whereas those who are fortunate enough to have cars can use large supermarkets. It has been extremely difficult for Greater Manchester council to maintain a policy for shopping because of the continual pressure from supermarket chains to establish out-of-town shopping centres. The latter are fine for those who have cars, but they destroy corner shops and the traditional shopping centres such as those of Manchester, Stockport, Tameside, Oldham and Bolton.

Someone must rationalise the overall shopping pattern in Greater Manchester, otherwise we shall return to rivalry among districts. Traditional shopping areas will be destroyed by the creation of out-of-town supermarkets and the reduction of competition in those areas. With traditional shopping centres people have the choice of a series of shops, whereas in almost all the out-of-town shopping centres large chain stores operate what are almost monopolies.

I should be grateful if the Minister would explain how the legislation will provide a better shopping pattern for Greater Manchester, as I see nothing in the Bill that deals with that.

5.45 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Although I understand how strongly my hon. Friend feels about Greater Manchester and the way in which it has served him and his constituents in the past, does he agree that his analysis could apply equally to Tyne and Wear council and to the other metropolitan authorities?

Mr. Bennett: I accept that, and I hope that my hon. Friends will develop those arguments. I am referring to Manchester because I understand its circumstances. I am not pleading a special case for Manchester, but simply putting it forward as an illustration of the general case.

Will the Secretary of State consider the overall transport pattern for Greater Manchester? The area will have a new transport body, but transport is not simply a matter of moving people from one point to another. We must ensure that the transport policy is co-ordinated with the shopping policy and with the development of industry. We hope that the rapid transport system will be introduced in Manchester, but we must ensure that the transport routes take people from where they live to where they work and to places where they can shop. The Bill does not tell us how the Government will achieve integration of the transport strategy and all the other policies.

Greater Manchester council has been extremely effective in generating jobs, and its efforts would have been greatly enhanced by some support from the Government. We heard the Secretary of State's announcement about intermediate status. This is an extremely divisive policy, in that it has included parts of Greater Manchester with the highest unemployment, but has excluded the land on which jobs could be created for those who live in areas of high unemployment. Above all, we do not want increased competition among the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester, with each bidding to attract firms that will bring jobs to their areas rather than trying to impose an overall strategy to ensure that jobs are created where they are most needed. It would be better if the Government left Greater Manchester council as it is so that it can continue its co-ordinating role in the creation of new jobs.

Most people believe that a large urban area such as Greater Manchester has little countryside, but the council has regenerated the river valleys as lungs for the community. I developed that point on Second Reading, so I shall not say much about it now. I hope that the Minister will give us a categorical assurance that under the new proposals we can maintain and expand the leisure use of the river valleys in Greater Manchester. At present, the council employs about six people to look after footpaths. I do not know how one could divide six people between 10 authorities and retain an effective service. It seems to me that it is virtually impossible to make economies.

I could argue the case that the police and the fire service should remain under local democratic control, but that point has already been covered. Instead, I shall deal with a matter which has not received sufficient attention—consumer protection. I believe that Greater Manchester has been extremely effective in dealing with consumer protection. For example, one officer in Greater Manchester has the expertise to deal with the carcases of animals which die as a result of anthrax. I am not sure whether a system could be established to deal with such diseases throughout Greater Manchester.

An attractive feature of the Greater Manchester conurbation is its open markets. The vast majority of the traders in the open markets set very high standards for the goods that they sell. However, a small minority of traders do not conform to the trading standards. One of the attractions of the Greater Manchester consumer protection service is that it provides an opportunity to catch up with the small number of unscrupulous traders who move from one market to another. If those duties are handed back to the districts, it will be very difficult for them to chase after a market trader who is at Denton on one day of the week, at Hyde the next day and at Oldham the following week. It would be far more efficient if trading standards could be dealt with by one authority which would be able to test a sample for safety and examine whether it conformed to trading standards. If necessary, it could enforce its decision throughout the district.

The Government's argument is that Greater Manchester and the other metropolitan counties do not have sufficient work to do. I could give the Secretary of State a very long list of services—in particular the health services—which an authority like Greater Manchester could co-ordinate and for which it would be accountable to local people.

I have, I hope, made the point that the Government ought to look separately at each district. When they are able to put forward proposals which are relevant to the problems of each district, they can begin to think about evolution and something better. The metropolitan counties ought not to be abolished. We need a structure which takes into account the local needs of each of the six districts. The Government should take the Bill away and not inflict it upon the electorate of the six metropolitan counties.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I have listened to the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that the metropolitan county councils should not be abolished. His argument is that a further period of investigation is needed. The hon. Member believes that there should possibly be a Royal Commission to carry out an in-depth investigation into the advantages or disadvantages of abolishing the metropolitan county councils. The hon. Member couples that argument with the view that progress towards a regional authority is the way forward.

There may be merit in re-examining the case for direct democratic involvement on a regional scale in water authorities and health services. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's argument that the metropolitan county councils, together with the Greater London council, should not be abolished is valid. We argued at length about the proposals contained in the Redcliffe-Maud report. At that time I resided in the royal county borough of Solihull. My opinion then is, I am sure, the opinion which is held today in Solihull—that having struggled for many years to become an independent, self-governing local authority the prospect of a second-tier authority acting like a great grey blanket over it is not viewed with enthusiasm. On the contrary, they look forward to more, not less authority.

I need hardly add that the view of neighbouring Birmingham is exactly the same — but more so. Birmingham is the second city of this country. Over scores of years it has developed into the powerhouse of the nation and has taken on major local government roles in the conduct of its affairs. For many years the city fathers of the council were able to govern the city with a degree of independence which they relished and cherished. Every citizen of Birmingham looked to Birmingham for the maintenance of local amenities. There was no question of looking anywhere else. The citizens of Birmingham looked to the town hall from which emanated every local by-law and regulation. When one voted for a councillor, one voted for a person, of whichever political party, who had complete power. He did not carry out half a job. That is what we now elect councillors to do. There is a conflict in terms of local government interest. When a road development scheme is announced local people do not know who is responsible for it. Some people believe that they should approach their district council member. Others believe that they should approach their county council member.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: It is the Secretary of State who is responsible for major road schemes.

Mr. King: Indeed. When local people object to a road scheme, they have to go to their elected members, but they do not know to which elected member they should go. There are at least three elected members, including their Member of Parliament, whom they might approach. I do not believe that that is a very good form of democratic control.

Mr. Allan Roberts: To which elected member will the hon. Member's constituents go when they have points to raise about the services provided by the quangos which are to be created by the Bill? And to which elected member will the hon. Member's constituents go when they want to ask a question about their water authority?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Member for mentioning that matter. I acknowledge that there are difficulties over local water authorities. The answer to the other point is very simple: local people can go to their elected members in the normal way.

I come to the point about the abolition of the metropolitan counties being a last-minute addition to the Conservative party manifesto. Many local authorities, including Birmingham, said that they ought to be abolished a decade or so ago—almost the day after the metropolitan counties came into being. The late Sir Frank Griffin, a notable city leader, said at countless numbers of Conservative party conferences and local authority meetings that the new system of local government was suspect and had been found wanting and that the city of Birmingham must get back the authority which it had lost. To our great regret, we were unable, despite a great deal of pressure, to have such a commitment included in the Conservative party's general election manifesto. However, since then we have been fortunate enough to obtain its inclusion. It was not a last-minute addition to the Conservative party manifesto. Anybody who has taken the time to study the discussions at Conservative party conferences and the innumerable pamphlets issued by the Conservative party would realise that our intention to abolish the metropolitan counties was a major commitment. Local government reform in the early 1970s never got it right. It was a very poor alternative. The present form of local government leads to more delay instead of more control.

Decision-making over planning, roads and other matters always seems to result in conflict between the county council and district authorities. For example, the West Midlands county council is responsible for gritting major trunk roads, but the district authorities are responsible for the side roads. There has been a failure to compromise, which has led to extra costs.

6 pm

Even the Labour party, certainly in the west midlands, did not want the metropolitan counties. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said that he would not raise a single digit to save the west midlands authority. I suspect that many of his hon. Friends, certainly from Birmingham, are probably ready to follow his example.

The arrangements in the Bill for district authorities to regain powers may leave something to be desired, but the Bill is only a first step. If district authorities feel that they could take on extra powers within a year or so, they will be free to ask the Government for those powers.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that similar statements were made by the Minister for Local Government about Coventry city council and that the Minister has had to apologise and withdraw his statements because they were erroneous?

Mr. King: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the fact that Coventry wants the West Midlands county council to remain in existence.

Mr. Park: The hon. Gentleman should not make any assumptions; he should study his brief.

Mr. King: Much reference has been made to the proposed joint boards being quangos. In fact, they will be made up of elected members of constituent authorities. There is a precedent for that, because, even before the setting up of the met counties, the passenger transport

authorities were established. They seem to work well and there seems to be no danger in going back to a similar system.

If a member of the public has a complaint about the West Midlands passenger transport authority when it is controlled by a joint board, he will go to his local councillor who will make representations to the constituent authority's representative on the board. There will be no major change in the operation of the system. There will be the same accountability.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): If a person wishes to approach his councillor, he can usually find out who he is from the local library. The councillor will be directly accountable to his constituent through the ballot box. However, if the councillor representing the district council on the joint board comes from a ward that is several miles away, there will be little relationship between him and a constituent in another ward. The councillor will have no reason to care whether that voter supports him or opposes him on an issue.

Mr. King: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but if there is the correct dialogue running between a community and its elected members there should be no difficulty in ensuring that all points of view are put across in the running of organisations that will be controlled by joint boards.

Mr. Cowans: How will we operate the system with residuary bodies?

Mr. King: Did the hon. Gentleman say "residuary bodies"?

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman should read the Bill before he comes here.

Mr. King: I have read the Bill carefully. I am explaining how the joint boards will operate.

There are clear indications that the passenger transport undertakings will be subject to a further review. A Bill to be introduced soon will reorganise those undertakings, many of which are run on a countrywide basis. They may be returned to more local control and we may have smaller undertakings. That would be a satisfactory arrangement.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman spoke with some feeling about the water authorities and the difficulties involved in making representations to them. Clause 54 provides that each of the residuary bodies

"shall consist of not less than five and not more than ten members appointed by the Secretary of State".

That reminds me a little of a water authority. If the hon. Gentleman had looked at clause 54, would he not have some hesitation about approving of residuary bodies?

Mr. King: The abolition of the met counties will involve a substantial period of change and the arrangements for handing back responsibilities to district authorities are not as satisfactory as I should like. I hope that eventually the district authorities will be given a lot more control.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: No. Other hon. Members wish to speak. I have already given way several times.

Responsibility for the police, consumer protection and waste disposal has been the subject of joint community agreement in the past and there is no reason why that should not happen again. However, local authorities will be able to make representations to the Government if they wish to take over responsibility for the police and perhaps for the fire service.

The new arrangements will present an opportunity of which Birmingham city council would like to take advantage. The seven authorities that will take over the responsibilities of the met county will work with the west midlands county police and generally disapprove of the existing police set-up because it is big and unwieldy, stretching, as it does, from Wolverhampton to Coventry.

In theory, it would be possible for all seven authorities to make representations to be given individual police forces, but such an arrangement would not be practical. The chief constable has already worked out a satisfactory arrangement that might be concluded quickly. Birmingham city council would take responsibility for its local police, Coventry and Solihull would go back into the Warwickshire county police area and the rest of the black country area would form a separate police authority. There would be much more local control over the police force. That is what the Bill is all about. We shall not get that arrangement straightaway, but we look forward to having such a scheme implemented in due course.

Mr. Boyes: That is not in the Bill.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Government have taken delivery of the case that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) is making and it will no doubt come forward in due course. Provision is made in the Bill, subject to the conditions that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has repeated on many occasions. It would be open to the local authorities concerned to put forward such a redistribution proposal to the Government, and we would be bound to consider it. When the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) says that it is not in the Bill, he is wrong.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I recall that yesterday my right hon. Friend made that point when he was challenged about failing to discuss the Bill in its preparatory stages. The city of Birmingham and some of the constituent authorities in the west midlands made representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asking whether this could be considered at the same time as abolition. Such was my right hon. Friend's willingness to consult and discuss that the concession was put into the Bill for which we are extremely grateful.

The ironic thing about the city of Birmingham is that we are not abolishing a Labour authority so that control can pass to a city authority under Conservative control. Instead, we shall be abolishing a Labour-controlled metropolitan county to give great authority to a Labour-controlled city council. Notwithstanding the perils that that might mean for those of us who live in the area, we prefer to pass authority back to one elected authority, because then we shall know who to hold to account for future legislation, costs and development in the area. In the history of Birmingham, the creation of the West Midlands county council cannot be looked on with a great deal of enthusiasm. About a year ago, the citizens of the area, over 1 million of whom reside in Birmingham, were enthusiastically in favour of abolition of the county council. Since then, a campaign, set up by the county councils in legion with the GLC, has been pouring out

[Mr. King]

disinformation, at great cost to the local ratepayer. It has been saying that the Government are seeking to run local authorities from Whitehall, and that the city of Birmingham will have existing powers taken from it rather than having powers returned to it. A basic reading of the proposals shows that this is blatantly untrue. Local democracy will be better served by the implementation of the Bill.

Mr. Boyes: I have asked the Secretary of State about 50 times what his view on this matter is, and he has never given me a straightforward answer. Therefore, it is interesting to note that when I just whispered to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), the Secretary of State heard what I said, and jumped up to reply. I was trying to say to my hon. Friend that what is not in the Bill is that the functions that will be handed over to quangos should be given back to local authorities. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) seems to be arguing as though local authorities will take over the functions of the quangos, but if the Government have their way these powers will be with quangos until the Labour party gets back into power in the next two or three years and destroys the quangos.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening to what I have been saying. Let us take the example of passenger transport authorities. It may be that the Bill does not categorically say that control of them will be handed back to the local authorities, but there will soon be a Bill which will give local authorities the right to run their own transport authorities if they want to—the decision will be theirs. I cannot imagine anything more democratic than giving local authorities the right to run local transport if they so wish. They may not want to, but the choice is theirs. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) must not run away with the idea that the Bill is the be-all and end-all. It has to be looked at in conjunction with other pending legislation, which will continue to give more democratic control back to the local authorities if they wish it.

There is no doubt that the people of the city of Birmingham, Solihull and, I suspect, the people of Coventry, who are brave and courageous, as their history has shown, have litle in common with the people of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall, whatever the geography of or the borders of the counties say. They will welcome the return to their town halls of as much local authority control over their affairs as possible. They look forward over the years to having more authority passed over to them through our policy of decentralisation. To ask, as this amendment does, for yet further investigations and delay before this process can be put into practice is a betrayal of our citizens.

6.15 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): The remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) about giving the control of transport back to local authorities are extraordinary for a Member who spent much of the last Session of Parliament voting to take control of the Greater London transport system away from the GLC and to give it to a Government-appointed body. That is an extraordinary inconsistency, but this is a debate for those who wish to be inconsistent, as it started with a muddled amendment moved by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). The Opposition intend to abstain on this amendment because we are opposed to the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils and we can express that easily by voting against the abolition of all those authorities in the course of the debates on clause 1.

When it was pointed out to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that this is a muddled amendment, he took some of my hon. Friends to task by trying to give them a lecture on procedure, so I shall reciprocate. I have spent three mornings sitting in the Committee on the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill. It was a Committee to which the hon. Gentleman had been appointed, as he has an urban development corporation on the edge of his constituency. It is a pity that, during the three Committee sittings, he was not able to get to the Committee room. Three reasons why he could not get there have been suggested. One is that he cannot get a taxi, but I do not know whether there is any truth in that suggestion. The second is that the cards telling hon. Members to go on the Committee have no street names on them. They say, "House of Commons, Room No. 11", and not "Parliament Street" or "Parliament Square", so perhaps he has not been able to find his way. The third is that, as there were two hon. Members with the name of Hughes on the Committee, he was a little confused.

I point out to the hon. Gentleman, as he gave us a lesson in procedure, that this is not the end of the Committee stage. After this there will be a Committee stage upstairs. When the hon. Gentleman gets the card appointing him to be a member of that Committee, will he please go along and help in the preservation of the GLC, for which he was arguing yesterday? Last night, he was arguing against the abolition of the GLC, and he moved amendments to that effect. However, the effect of the amendment that he has moved today is to allow the abolition of the GLC and the preservation of the metropolitan counties. I quote what he said last night from a photocopy of *Hansard*, as that part of it has not been printed. He said:

> "The amendment would delete the GLC from the list of councils that the Government propose to abolish. The effect of all the amendments would be to ensure the continuance of directly-elected government for London across London. We seek to do no less than to take the heart out of the Bill."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 1153.]

Last night, the burden of the hon. Gentleman's remarks was that he intended to save the GLC. Today, the burden of his amendment is that he is in favour of the abolition of the GLC but of the preservation of the metropolitan counties. His arguments remind me of the sweet counters at Woolworths called "pick and choose". One can pick what one likes, chew it and if one does not like it spit it out again. It is not that the hon. Gentleman is deliberately confused. He wants a range of options that will be suitable for the alliance of the Liberal party and the SDP. This will enable its members to take their choice, and will please all people. It will allow for those who argue that instead of abolition there should be a form of evolution. It will allow for dissent by the hon. Members for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) who are in favour of the abolition of the metropolitan counties, and it will enable the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey to make out a different case. Despite the fact

that before the general election his party was arguing for the abolition of the GLC, to be replaced by a regional authority, last night he was putting the opposite case.

Will the abolition of the metropolitan counties bring about a form of unitary government in the metropolitan areas? That seemed to be the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Northfield. He seemed to think that there would be a return to some form of unitary local government in his part of the country, but of course no such thing will happen. The effect of the Bill will not be to have a single tier of functions, performed by one authority. The effect of abolishing the metropolitan counties will be to have one set of functions carried out by a directly elected district authority and another set of functions that runs across the areas of the metropolitan counties.

There will be two-tier government, but it will not be two-tier democratic government as between the two sets of functions — [*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State mutters. I know that he has told the House before that the joint boards will be composed of elected members of the district authorities. I know that that is his argument. He apparently argues that there is a sort of secondary democracy, in that the representatives will be chosen by the district councils. But that is not in the Bill.

Those representatives will not be chosen in the sense that they will be elected by the district councils. Clause 22 says that they will be appointed by the district councils. There is a great difference there. I am against secondary democracy, but regardless of that there is a great difference between people being elected from among district councillors and people being appointed by them.

There may be parts of the country in which the task of making the appointment to the joint board, the other tier, will be left in the hands of a leader of a political party. That would not be unknown. In some cases that duty may even be delegated to the chief whip. He might be the chief whip of the Labour or Tory party, or—although it is a bit far-fetched—of the Liberal party. But there might be times when the appointment — I stress "appointment" — was made by the chief whip.

Even if the person is elected, there is such a thing as a consolation election. Anyone who has been a member of a Labour or Tory group will know that the important positions are filled by members of the district council. They choose who will be chairman of this and that, and then a few consolation prizes have to be handed out. In some circumstances, the consolation prizes may be given to those who fail to obtain positions on their own district councils.

There is also the removal technique. In order to get rid of, for example, the chairman of the housing committee, one makes sure that he is appointed to the second-tier authority not because he is particularly good at running refuse disposal or the fire brigade, but because that will remove him from competition for jobs at the district council level. There are many other options, but the point is that clause 22 deals with appointments and not elections. There can be no doubt that when second-tier authorities are appointed in this way they bear comparison with an arranged marriage. One gets someone whom one did not choose for oneself and who is chosen for one. In Hamlet's words, that is not

"a consummation Devoutly to be wish'd".

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that certainly among the Asian community many arranged marriages turn out to be highly successful and very happy? Perhaps that will be the case in this instance.

Mr. Fraser: I hope that the hon. Gentleman tells that to the Home Secretary, who prevents parties to arranged marriages from coming into the country. Let the hon. Gentleman make that point elsewhere.

The sort of arranged appointment that does not involve the electorate is to be opposed. We oppose it by being against all abolition in clause 1. That is why we shall not pick and choose as the Liberals do, and why we shall abstain on this amendment, just as we abstained last night on the GLC amendment, which was utterly contradictory.

Mr. Hind: The amendment will raise many eyebrows. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that the Liberal party was not keen, and never had been keen, on the metropolitan counties. Thus, we must ask ourselves why, in those circumstances, this amendment has been introduced.

Let us have recourse to the manifesto that was put forward in 1983 by the alliance party. The manifesto spoke about local government and said that the party planned to

"revitalise local government, restoring its independence and its accountability to the local electorate by . . . simplifying the structure of local government to make it more effective by abolishing one of the existing tiers of Government. This will be done by stages against the background of our proposals for the development of regional government. It would inevitably involve the eventual abolition of the MCCs and the GLC (not ILEA) and would also allow for the restoration of powers to some of the former county boroughs."

That is just what the Bill does. The alliance seems to have done a complete about face. Consequently, we wonder whether it might not have pushed the amendment if it did not think that there were votes to be had in clinging on to some of those dinosaurs of local government.

The Liberals and the SDP cannot agree between themselves. In *The Social Democrat* of 28 January 1983 the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) said:

"The present two-tier system of local government is costly, wasteful and bureaucratic. Social Democrats should be campaigning for a simplification of local government bringing the control of key services closer to the people. That means moving towards a single tier structure which everyone can understand."

Then comes the most important statement:

"The first step should be the scrapping of the GLC and the metropolitan counties."

I shall be interested to see which Lobby the hon. Member for Woolwich goes into tonight.

During the general election the hon. Member for Woolwich said:

"As regional government grows, one of the existing tiers of local government will be abolished; the GLC and the metropolitan counties will disappear but local communities will have statutory parish or neighbourhood councils."

Those words appeared in the *Estates Gazette* of 21 May. It was the same theme right the way through, and it was not until after the election that the alliance turned towards saying that we should hang on to those authorities. It is arrant hypocrisy to turn round when it is politically expedient to bring forward such an amendment and say that perhaps we should all change our minds and go into the Lobby to try to keep the metropolitan county councils.

Today, the Labour party advocates support of the metropolitan county councils. It at least has the

[Mr. Hind]

consistency on this matter to abstain. I unerstand that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is a member of the Labour party's Front Bench team. After the election, and after this Government had clearly stated their intention to abolish the metropolitan county councils, he said:

"I do not intend to lift one legislative finger to stop the return of single-tier government to Birmingham. That was the view of all the City councillors and it was clearly the view of all West Midland MPs before the election."

Those words come from the *Sutton Coldfield News* of 23 September 1983.

When concluding the recent Second Reading debate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the Labour party's spokesman, at least three times to say whether a Labour Government would reintroduce the metropolitan counties. The answer must be no, because the hon. Gentleman refused to answer the question. Perhaps I can refer Labour Members to their manifesto of 1983, which stated:

"We aim to end if we can the confusing division of services between two tiers of authority. Unitary district authorities in England and Wales could be responsible for all the functions in this area that they could sensibly undertake."

The Labour party's policy was clearly to have one unitary system of local government and not to preserve the two-tier system. Perhaps the Labour party falls into the same category as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey—if there were no votes in it, they would not oppose the Bill.

6.30 pm

In 1972, when the present system was set up, it was noticeable that the Labour party fought against the proposals. The Bill provides for a return of functions to authorities which are sufficiently large to deal with the problems of all local government matters, including strategic planning. Those who have lived in large county boroughs know that they can deal with all the major functions of local government, and should be allowed to do so. They are closer to the electorate. There are many more district councillors than county councillors. To much of the public, councils with headquarters 15 or 20 miles away are irrelevant.

I was born and bred a Lancastrian. In 1972 someone told me, "I am sorry, you are not a Lancastrian any more; you belong to the county of Greater Manchester." I am sure that that gladdened the hearts of citizens of Bury, Salford, Bolton and other such areas. Likewise, the Wirral, Birkenhead and Southport became part of Merseyside. Most of the metropolitan counties geographically identify with no one. The general public have no empathy with them. They are distant and irrelevant.

Little of the government of London is carried out by the GLC. Assuming that most of the transport functions—especially buses—are taken away from the metropolitan counties, what will be left for them? They do not have the major functions of education, social services and transport — other than a responsibility for major roads and strategic planning. The district boroughs that carry out planning functions can easily extend them to strategic planning. They are quite capable of handling structure plans, because that is what they do on a day-to-day basis. They can carry on precisely where the metropolitan counties leave off.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) referred to the boards. A district council has eight or 10 committees, so, inevitably, a councillor will serve on only two or three of them. If he receives a complaint about waste disposal, but he serves on the planning committee, he will approach a colleague on the relevant committee. Now, district councils will take up such matters with their colleagues who sit on the boards. Democracy will work in that way. The district councillors will be closer to the public. They will be more numerous, more approachable and will identify with the interests of their constituents far better than the metropolitan county councillor, who might represent 12,000 or 15,000 people spread over an often indefinable area.

I am astounded by the hypocrisy that I have heard in the debate. The Opposition are facing in every direction at the same time, in the hope that they will see someone with a different point of view with whom they can identify. The Government consulted the electorate in June 1983. Our proposals were clearly set out in the manifesto. We have been consistent in our approach — we have not faced in different directions. We are doing what we were elected to do. We are not saying one thing and doing another. Perhaps the Opposition will learn from our consistency. Perhaps that is why we are sitting here and they are sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I very much enjoyed the fully-fledged concept of parliamentary democracy outlined by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), especially the idea that debate is irrelevant. He therefore chose not to make a speech of any importance, and I understand why. If he believes that the only principle that matters is that of the manifesto commitment, the process in which we are engaged becomes a waste of time. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that Conservative Members who rebelled last night are lesser Conservatives who should be cast out into the everlasting wilderness?

I want to deal with the serious subject of the county of Greater Manchester. We have the opportunity to develop a case that the Secretary of State must answer. We must know the specific reasons for the proposed abolition of the Greater Manchester county council. London hon. Members have spoken as though there were a great difference between Greater Manchester and Greater London, but they are very similar. There is a whole to the Manchester region — so much so that the Government recognised that, for example, when drawing up their recent travel-to-work areas. They overrode the district boundaries and recognised that people operate in considerably larger economic, social and planning units than those provided by the district councils.

The city of Manchester occupies an unfortunate role in the Manchester conurbation. It is virtually confined to the inner city area, so that it does not have access to the resource base which depends upon the conurbation. Those who have fled from the city base to areas such as Trafford should, according to the Government, not have to accept any responsibility for the city centre, upon which their very existence depends. That has a direct repercussion on

conurbation services, such as the arts and the cultural activities that depend critically upon the centre of the conurbation.

Conservative Members say that we can go back to something which, in fact, never existed. When the county of Greater Manchester was formed, the highway programme would have taken more than £2,000 million to bring into practice and 150 years to bring into being—such was the confusion among the small local authorities. I believe that hon. Members would accept the fact that the necessary functions should be performed by country-wide structures, and that is why the Secretary of State accepts the existence of joint boards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said that we are specifically discussing the representation of the joint boards. He took some time to explain the inherent difficulties involved with secondary elections. My hon. Friend touched on, but did not develop, the issue of the balance of parties. Although clause 32 provides for representation on the joint boards of minority parties from each district, it does not give control of the membership to those minority parties. The legislation allows the controlling group — for example, in the borough of Trafford — to decide the Labour members chosen to represent the Labour group and Labour voters. The legislation effectively sabotages the effectiveness of those joint boards. It is the spirit not of democracy but of the denial of democracy and denial of access of the public to its elected representatives — those who claim to make decisions in the name of the public. It is the spirit of patronage at large.

Like most hon. Members representing Greater Manchester constituencies, I have received no correspondence in favour of the Government's proposals. No Conservative Member from a Greater Manchester constituency has taken the trouble to put the case for the GMC's abolition. The nearest we come to a Conservative Member from that area is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science—the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn)—who, I understand, comes from Eccles. That is much to his credit. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is not in a position to talk about the merits or demerits of the case, because his brief is to stick rigidly to the issue of ILEA.

It is significant to note the strength of feeling among voluntary bodies and other organisations that have had access to the county councils. Those bodies are exclusively condemnatory of the proposals put forward by the Secretary of State. In recognising the conurbation of Greater Manchester, it is important that we provide a structure that allows for integrated planning and services. That integration allowed the city to produce projects such as the Manchester ship canal, which was designed 100 years ago with joint efforts by the various Manchester areas. No Mancunian—I was born technically in the former borough of Stretford—would consider himself to be other than a Mancunian. No Manchester United supporter, whose ground is outside the city of Manchester in Stretford in the borough of Trafford, would think of Manchester United as other than a Manchester football team. No Mancunian, whether from Bolton, Bury, or the other parts that make up Manchester, would consider the idea of breaking up Manchester to have any sense, especially when it will mean worse, not better services.

It was instructive to hear the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) say that he was unhappy about some of the joint boards. The structure of the joint boards has been criticised by the borough of Trafford, which the Secretary of State prays in aid of his proposal. The bodies that will be set up if the Bill is unamended have been criticised. People may favour the general principle of abolition, but they do not favour what the Secretary of State will put in place of the Greater Manchester council. That is why we deserve a more realistic debate about Greater Manchester.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Those hon. Members who were present when the debate was opened were treated to a vintage example of what I might call the "Lib labyrinth". The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), when seeking to prove that the Labour party was hopelessly inconsistent, divided and confused about its attitude to the abolition of the upper-tier authorities, was interrupted repeatedly by one Labour Member after another seeking to prove that the Liberal party was every bit as confused, contradictory and divided. For those hon. Members watching and listening, it was a remarkable performance.

There are two perfectly clear facts about the amendments moved last night and this afternoon by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. It is clear that, if last night's amendment had been carried, the GLC would have been taken out of clause 1, and thereafter in Committee the Bill would have been only about the abolition of the metropolitan county councils. The amendment moved this afternoon would have taken the metropolitan county councils out of the Bill, so that for the rest of the Committee stage the Bill would have been only about the GLC.

6.45 pm

The amendments were clear. There was nothing strange or convoluted about them. The astonishing fact is that, considering the campaign that the Labour party has been waging in every one of these seven authorities at the ratepayers' expense, it has chosen to abstain on each of the amendments in turn. I cannot read it from here, but I think that the message on the badge worn by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) says "Keep the GLC working for London". Last night, the hon. Gentleman had a chance to go into the Lobby to vote for that slogan. It might have been called the "Keep the GLC working for London" amendment. The hon. Gentleman chose to sit where he was. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), who represents a Merseyside constituency, and other hon. Members who represent constituencies in the met counties will have an opportunity to go through the Lobby in support of the amendment to take the proposal to abolish the met county councils from the Bill. They will do precisely what they did last night—they will stick where they are and not vote.

Mr. Robert M. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I shall just finish my sentence. I should be delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman's argument because I shall refer to it in a moment.

The message that is going out from this Committee is that when it comes to the crunch, to the most important clause of the Bill which we are taking on the Floor of the

[Mr. Jenkin]

House and the amendments that go right to the heart of the Bill, the Labour party cannot make up its mind whether it will vote for the amendment.

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. John Fraser *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I shall give way to the hon. Member for West Derby.

Mr. Wareing: Which of the major political parties in this Chamber has voted solidly the same way on every issue and has determined its policy the same way on every issue? I suggest that it is the party to which I belong.

Mr. Jenkin: I shall be interested to see whether the hon. Gentleman votes solidly in favour of the amendment removing the Merseyside county council from the Bill.

Even more interesting is the fact that, during the speech by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, three entirely different and inconsistent arguments were made about why the Labour party was abstaining. First, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is not in his place, said that the Labour party did not vote for the amendment because it was ill drafted. What absolute poppycock. The entire line was to be taken out. The meaning was crystal clear, and any parliamentary draftsman would have been proud of the amendment.

We then heard a totally different answer from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West when he intervened. He said that the Labour party did not vote because the GLC did not want to be split from the metropolitan county councils. This is purely a matter of Labour party tactics. The local government campaign committee is trying to stick together. Hon. Members on both sides of the Committee know perfectly well that the arguments about the GLC and the metropolitan county councils are very different. The arguments of many metropolitan district Labour councillors differ totally from the arguments of councillors in the inner London boroughs. I acknowledge that fact.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South) *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: On a point of order, Mr. Dean. The Secretary of State has made what could be seen as a damaging statement about elected Labour representatives on district councils in metropolitan county areas. He should justify that.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Member is on a point of argument, not a point of order.

Mr. Jenkin: We have had three arguments. The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said that the Labour party was not voting against these crucial amendments which go to the heart of the Bill because the two amendments were contradictory. What rubbish. I think that the hon. Gentleman and I came into the House on the same day. We have been here now for 20 years. He knows that it is entirely in order for any hon. Member to table in succession a series of amendments. Each one is then voted on. The argument that the amendments might be inconsistent has never carried any weight. It is a good argument to say, "That amendment was defeated, so I shall now move this amendment."

It was an entirely legitimate tactic for the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey to have moved an amendment last night to take the GLC out of the Bill and then, when it was defeated, this afternoon to move an amendment to take out the metropolitan counties. The Labour party has sat tight on both. When it came to the crucial issue in the Bill, the Labour party did not put its votes where its mouth is and where the ratepayers' money has gone.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman's speech. He made a good, closely argued speech. I shall be brief because I sense that the Committee wishes to reach a decision fairly soon.

We all know that the Liberal party is divided on this issue. The hon. Members for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) have made it clear that they are in favour of abolishing the metropolitan county councils. The hon. Members for Southwark and Bermondsey and for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) have made it clear that they wish to keep those authorities. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said that there was nothing inconsistent about that. They want to keep them until they can put something better in their place, so therefore two vote to keep them and two vote to get rid of them. As an example of tortuous logic, that just about takes the biscuit.

We are aware of the view of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). He was asked a clear question by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey)—whether the hon. Member for Copeland would give a pledge to restore the metropolitan counties. The hon. Member for Copeland said:

"Let me say absolutely unequivocally,"——

we waited——

"as was made clear at the Labour party conference a few weeks ago, that the Labour party is committed to preserving under democratic control the achievements and strategic functions in the management of local government services. That is quite specific—".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 40.]

I have read those words up and down and I can make neither head nor tail of them.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: It is clear that the Labour party has consistently refused in the past few months to give any commitment to restore the metropolitan county councils.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made an important and interesting speech. He made a number of points. He and the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) talked about unity of the Greater Manchester area which somehow justified this complicated and unconvincing system of two-tier government. With the benefit of experience, we believe that it is unconvincing. They said that Manchester is the focus for the towns around, and I do not doubt that. They mentioned the exchange, the arts and the railways. Are they seriously saying that those proud authorities—Bury, Rochdale, Oldham, Bolton and all the rest—are not conscious of being strong, all-purpose urban areas, many of which were previously county boroughs, which are anxious to have their powers back?

If hon. Members go round, as I have, and talk to the people in the town halls in those areas — not just members of the Conservative party—they will find that they cannot wait to get rid of the Greater Manchester council. The hon. Gentleman said that the public passionately wished to keep the Greater Manchester council. I do not know whether he is a keen reader of the *Manchester Evening News*. If he is, he would have seen on 1 December this year this article:

"A public debate on Government plans to scrap the Greater Manchester council with other metropolitan authorities was cancelled today through lack of interest. The all day event at Manchester University was to have featured leading politicians from GMC, Merseyside and the Greater London Council. Only seventeen people enrolled."

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that last Friday night in Stockport town hall over 200 people turned up at a meeting organised by the Stockport council to hear hon. Members? About 90 per cent. of those people were appalled by what they heard about the Government's proposals.

Mr. Jenkin: The meeting that was organised to cover the whole subject attracted no attention. Those who are involved with local government services in those areas know, as my hon. Friends the Members for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) — the authentic voice of the west midlands — know, that those metropolitan counties have never caught on. They have never caught the public's imagination. The public do not understand the councils. They become confused by the division of functions, which are contradictory, confusing and give rise to conflict and delay.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northfield was asked, in an intervention, about the water authorities. I have news for the Committee. The Bill does not set up one authority that bears any resemblance to a water authority. There are only two new permanent boards. One is the London Planning Commission which is purely advisory and has no executive function. The other board that the Bill envisages is the trustee of the Merseyside museums. There is no other quango such as the water board. *[Interruption.]* I support the existence of the water boards. They are making themselves more efficient. However, I shall not listen to any view that suggests that the Bill is setting up any such authority.

A lot of nonsense has been talked about quangos and centralisation. This Bill deals with the devolution of power to the boroughs. The districts will have 100 per cent. of the service expenditure from the metropolitan county councils to run themselves or for joint expenditure and it will be under the control of elected borough councillors. That is the truth, and the argument from the Labour Benches that somehow we are creating a remote and unaccountable form of government is so much nonsense.

We have heard from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish the argument for retention. From my hon. Friends the Members for Northfield and for Lancashire, West we have heard the argument for abolition. They spelt out the case very clearly, and there is not the slightest doubt that my hon. Friends had a considerable edge in that argument.

I urge the Committee to reject the amendment of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. We shall watch with fascinated interest. Whether the amendment is obscure, badly drafted, contradictory or anything else, Labour Members will sit tight and abstain. It makes their position wholly incredible.

7 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not often find myself in substantial agreement with the Secretary of State, but I agree with him on one fundamental point. There is no inconsistency, no ambiguity, no lack of clarity and no complexity in the amendment. It would take out of the Bill the provision to abolish the metropolitan county councils.

The Government's proposals do not merely hand some power down to the districts; they take much power away from democratically elected bodies. That proposal is unacceptable and we shall vote against it.

If the Labour party chooses to make a decision today —as it did in the early hours of this morning on the GLC—to abstain, it will be abstaining on the simplest and most clearly stated proposal to remove the metropolitan counties from the Government's grasp in regard to abolition. The Labour party must take responsibility for that decision.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), whose amendment is part of the group that we are discussing, made a speech which, in its substance, was seeking to do what he accepts we are seeking to do—to make it clear that one cannot generalise, that there should be options, and that those options should be decided within the regions by the people concerned and not imposed.

As evidence of the fact that that has always been our approach, the hon. Gentleman will, I hope, recollect that yesterday we moved and debated amendment No. 35, which will be voted upon later tonight. That amendment would provide for local public inquiries to be held in each of the seven county areas producing impartial reports to be laid before Parliament, which would allow a better form of government to be implemented in each of the areas. It would be not a matter of imposition, but of proper consultation leading to proper and well-informed decisions.

As the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) rightly said, if this is not the place where we should debate issues on the basis of good information and accurate facts, and if we are here simply to rubber-stamp manifesto promises, that is a substantial change in the constitutional role of this place. I think that almost every hon. Member would find that change unacceptable.

Mr. Hind: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he has changed his mind fundamentally from the statement in his party's manifesto, and that during the course of the debate he has not given us one solid or good reason why he and his party should have done so?

Mr. Hughes: I shall come in a moment to the speech of the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

The amendment of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish is specifically related to the Greater Manchester council. I argued—and I stand by it—that the arguments in favour of the Greater London council being retained are stronger than those for the retention of the metropolitan counties, not least because the London county council came into existence in 1889, whereas the metropolitan councils came into existence only in 1974.

The arguments for retaining a metropolitan county in Greater Manchester are stronger than those in regard to

[Mr. Hughes]

some of the other metropolitan counties. To that extent also I may find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish. Clearly, that was the view of the Redcliffe-Maud commission, which reported to a Labour Government. It said that there should be three metropolitan counties—Merseyside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester. It said that Tyneside and West Yorkshire were, for differenct reasons, not appropriately metropolitan authorities—Tyneside because it was more suitable to be a unitary authority, and West Yorkshire because it could be satisfactorily divided between its five component authorities. We share that view. The Labour Government added West Yorkshire and South Hampshire to make five proposed metropolitan authorities. The Conservative Government were then elected into office, they produced a White Paper, they proposed having six counties, and they implemented that proposal.

That was the judgment of the Conservative party. It differed from that of the Labour party, which wanted five authorities, and from the Redcliffe-Maud commission, which wanted three. We say that each must be judged on its merits and that they should not be grouped together.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) I think misunderstands the nature of our proposal. We say that in general terms there is far too much government in Whitehall and that it should be devolved to the regions. There was some sympathy in the hon. Gentleman's remarks for that view, where we are talking about properly defined local government—and there is always a difficulty of definition—that should be at the lowest possible level. It does not exclude—a quotation was made from a speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright)—parish or community councils, because they deal with very local matters and are not at the same tier of local government. There is no inconsistency in saying that central Government should be reduced and shorn of many of their inappropriate responsibilities, and that there should be regional government and unitary local government at a lower level. That is the proposal behind all the amendments to the Bill that we shall be moving.

We do not find any problems with those parts of the Bill which properly take powers away from a metropolitan county where they can properly go to a district. That is appropriate, and we have always supported that concept.

The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) made two points to which I should like to refer, although one of them is peripheral to the debate. He knows that my two colleagues and I will be regular attenders when the Bill is in Committee upstairs. We shall be supporting the continuation of the GLC, just as we sought to retain it in the early hours of this morning. At the same time, we shall be fighting for better proposals for the metropolitan counties.

There were three sittings of the Committee dealing with the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill. We supported the Government on the Second Reading of that Bill, and therefore did not have a great deal of criticism of it. I apologise to any hon. Members who feel aggrieved that because of previous commitments I was not able to be present at the sittings. One of those commitments was a meeting with the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. The appointment was made long before the date of the Committee was fixed. That was why I was not able to be present. When there is the possibility of more hon. Members from the alliance parties being on a Committee, the problem will not arise.

A proposal to get rid of the metropolitan counties and replace them by indirectly elected or non-elected authorities would lead to the fragmentation of local government. We shall fight as hard for a decent local government service for people in the metropolitan counties as we shall for those in London. Regional argument will be heard. That is why we shall move to a vote now. The Government's proposals for abolishing the metropolitan counties without proper consideration of their differences and problems should not be approved by this Committee or by the Committee upstairs.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 14, Noes 268.

Division No. 51] **[7.12 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Freud, Clement
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Russell
Kirkwood, Archy
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Penhaligon, David
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Wainwright, R.

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cartwright and
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian

Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Grylls, Michael
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Fergus
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archie Hamilton and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Cowans: I beg to move amendment No. 29, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such date as the Secretary of State shall by order appoint not being before 1st April 1986, such order to be laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

It seems that the fighting Liberals could not muster as much support for their amendment as the Conservatives mustered against their own Bill, and proportionately that is a very good thing.

The amendment seeks to bring some sense to the Bill by deleting 1 April 1986 and making the Minister come back to the House to lay an order so that Parliament will be able to debate the matter. There are several fundamental issues underlying the amendment.

In far too much legislation powers are given to Secretaries of State who do not have to return to Parliament, so hon. Members have no opportunity to debate the matter. This Bill must be one of the worst as it gives the Secretary of State 40 or more powers to do things by order without any redress for Parliament.

I shall begin with the non-political aspect. Members of Parliament should not be persuaded to vote for a Bill which hands over the powers of the House of Commons to a Secretary of State, whoever he may be, because to do so would be to betray the people who sent us here. Every issue should be debatable. Jurisdiction should not be handed over to the Secretary of State. Unless the amendment is passed, we shall be creating exactly that situation.

This is a highly controversial Bill, even among Conservative Members, as yesterday's events showed. By a stroke of luck, the Government managed to get a majority of 23, but if they had been at all backward in certain other places they might well have lost by 23 votes. Either way, that proves how controversial the measure is. The Bill will be going into Standing Committee, but it is not only the Standing Committee that matters. When we have finished debating this nonsense, people outside in the real world will have to operate it. Therefore, it is essential that the widest possible consultation be undertaken. When that consultation has taken place, it is equally essential that the Minister should satisfy the House of Commons that that consultation was properly carried out.

When we debated the amendment calling for a Royal Commission the Government offered the farcical argument that everything had already been said and that there was no need for a Royal Commission. That flies in the face of the evidence, not just from the Opposition but from bodies such as the National Farmers Union, which I do not believe is closely associated with the Labour party. The NFU is extremely concerned.

Mr. Bermingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that many of the bodies to be abolished own considerable farming tracts and that tenants are extremely worried about the

[Mr. Bermingham]

possibility of their farms being divided up between a number of authorities and the consequent danger to their livelihood?

Mr. Cowans: That is indeed one of the arguments for the amendment. So far, there has been no consultation. Unlike the Government, the NFU says:

"Many of the functions currently performed by the GLC and MCCs are of significance to the well being of agriculture within the metropolitan areas, and indeed in parts of the surrounding shire counties (notably strategic planning, mineral planning, land reclamation . . .) and to varying degrees the role of these authorities as agricultural landlords."

Unlike the Government, the NFU states that its job is to look after the people concerned and that the only way to protect the interests of its members is through the democratic processes of local government. The Bill removes those processes, so a little more muscle from the NFU might have changed yesterday's vote. The Government may care to consider that.

Mr. Boyes: It is interesting to note that our views have the support of many bodies that do not generally support the Labour party. In Newcastle, Mr. John Hunter, chief executive of the Tyne and Wear chamber of commerce, stated yesterday in *The Journal*:

"We feel particularly that economic development, which the County Council has always treated sympathetically, has not really been looked at in the Bill."

That is further damning evidence against the Government for bringing forward this shoddy Bill.

Mr. Cowans: I shall be coming to that. This is not a private debate. Anyone may join in. My hon. Friend may feel strongly enough about this to wish to go into the matter further later in the debate.

The Guardian also supports the need for consultation and for the Minister to come back to Parliament on this. On 23 November it said:

"It is impossible to read yesterday's local government bill"——

if it had gone no further than that, I should certainly have agreed entirely—

"which abolishes the GLC and its regional counterparts — without asking one question: What on earth is the point of it all?"

The Opposition would agree unanimously with that. It continues:

"The Government claims duplication will be avoided and a whole layer of local government will be removed and not replaced. Yet nearly all of the present activities—particularly at the GLC, the most publicised case—are not being removed, but merely dispersed: to central Government, to local authorities and to a Baker's dozen of quangos."

Those are not my remarks, but they are very true.

As has already been said, the National Consumer Council is also very concerned. Many words have flowed from the Secretary of State, but he has not convinced the National Consumer Council. The council states:

"This Council is, therefore, deeply concerned to note the fears being expressed by advice and information services in the Greater London and Metropolitan County areas over funding arrangements after the abolition of the second tier authorities in these areas. We are also perplexed"—

they can join the club; we are all perplexed—

"because the government has indicated, on numerous occasions, that it is not its intention to damage the voluntary sector through its abolition proposals."

Even the voluntary sector does not believe that. I begin to wonder whether anyone believes the Government when they talk about the Bill. All those examples point to the need for consideration by Parliament.

7.30 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) raised an important point. This afternoon we received another grocery lesson on unemployment. The Government tell us vehemently—and I believe it — that they do not want to create unemployment. Yet here is a group of agencies that has done very well. Despite that, the Government are going to abolish the metropolitan counties with their job-creating functions.

A document prepared by Tyne and Wear points out that since the MCCs were formed in 1974 they have

"helped to save or create at least 46,000 jobs, built hundreds of factory units and attracted millions of pounds of investment."

For their pains, the counties are to be abolished. Let there be no more crocodile tears about unemployment while the Government abolish a layer of government that has created 46,000 jobs.

There is another matter raised by Tyne and Wear which is also important to other areas. It is a matter to which little thought has been given. It has certainly not been discussed with the district councils that the Secretary of State claims are in favour of his proposals. Incidentally, it is remarkable that the Secretary of State cannot put a name to even one of those councils.

Section 137 of the Local Government Act gives power to raise a tuppeny rate and to spend it.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw): And waste it.

Mr. Cowans: Waste it? I shall talk about waste in a moment. We will consider what the Government regard as waste.

The point is that £37 million a year is to be taken away from job-creating agencies. Consultation, as suggested in the amendment, is vital because no consideration has been given to the question of the district councils' money, while £37 million is to be taken away from the creation of employment.

We hear again and again that the Government are concerned about unemployment, but the Bill suggests to me that they are concerned more with creating rather than solving unemployment.

Mr. Park: On the question of consultation, is my hon. Friend aware that the first demands by the Government for staffing and financial information were issued to the county councils on 7 November, with a return date of 30 November? The Bill and the financial memorandum were published on 22 November. It is clear that the Government intended to go ahead, irrespective of what the county councils said.

Mr. Cowans: My hon. Friend strengthens the case for the amendment. The Government are trying to take a controversial Bill through the House at the speed of light without any consultation or consideration of either the services or the staff involved.

The Minister of State made a comment about waste. In Greater Manchester, 34,551 youngsters are on the dole. On Merseyside, 21,172 youngsters are on the dole. In South Yorkshire the figure is 22,199 and in Tyne and Wear, 40,000.

Mr. Boyes: And more every minute.

Mr. Cowans: Yes, indeed.

In Tyne and Wear, 20,000 jobs have been saved since 1974. That may not be many. However, when one considers how many jobs are lost every day because of the Government's policies, the removal of another job-creating function is nonsense and should be opposed.

We know that these measures are nonsense. We are trying to make the Secretary of State accountable to Parliament. We can do that only by carrying the amendment and preventing the Secretary of State from setting a date for abolition before we have looked at a single dot or comma of any of the clauses in the Bill. We want to oblige the Secretary of State to come back to the House of Commons and to lay before us an order that we can debate, so that we can at least satisfy ourselves that consultation has taken place.

There are any number of arguments that I could raise, but I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. However, I want to mention the fact that a considerable number of co-operatives in the metropolitan county council areas are funded by the county councils. There has been no consultation with those co-operatives. I have a letter from the co-operatives which draws attention to the fact that if the metropolitan counties are abolished they will have no funding at all. Another job-creating agency will be lost.

If there were no other arguments for the amendment, I could still refer to the derisory vote that the Government received last night, because they could not even convince their own colleagues that the Bill is a good thing. The Government may resist the amendment. If they do, it will be because they are frightened to bring their proposals back to the Floor of democracy in case, in the clear light of day, the 23 hon. Members who comprised their majority last night realise what is going on and change their minds.

The Opposition are not frightened of democracy. We want a debate on the Floor of the House of Commons. If the amendment is defeated, we shall conclude that the Government are frightened of democracy and increasingly frightened of their own Back Benchers, who know in their heart of hearts that the Bill is nonsense because it will destroy the Government and democracy.

Mr. Cartwright: I wish to support the amendment.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): The hon. Gentleman has not been here. He has only just arrived.

Mr. Cartwright: I have been in my place for the greater part of the debate. In view of the comment made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland), I wish to put that on the record.

I support the amendment, but for reasons slightly different from those advanced by the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans). I support it because it removes the deadline of 1 April 1986, which is one of the problems involved in the Bill in its present form. The removal of that deadline would allow some sensible planning in connection with the changes that would be necessary if the Government got their way. More time would enable the Government to deal with some of the gaps that have already been identified in the provision for effective functions after abolition.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge drew attention to the anxieties of the NFU. Other organisations are also worried. On 6 December the Greater London Playing Fields Association set out its anxieties in a letter to several hon. Members. The association's committee consists of representatives of all Greater London boroughs and of sport and recreation in London, so it is a broadly-based body.

In its resolution the committee expressed

"very serious concern at the most damaging consequences to London sport and recreation, which will be caused if the Greater London Council, in its present form, is abolished without an effective alternative structure for sports management and finance being instituted."

The committee continued by urging the Secretary of State

"to establish a Committee of Enquiry with Terms of Reference which will allow a thorough process of consultation and examination to take place in the hope of safeguarding sport and recreation for the citizens of London."

More time is needed to tackle the problems of transition which will flow from the Bill—if it reaches the statute book. The Government have not seriously taken on board the complexities of setting up the joint boards to which they are so firmly committed. They will have to find offices for each of the joint boards and they will have to find chief officers. Staff will have to be assembled, and management systems will have to be introduced. In these days of reliance on computers, new computer systems will have to be brought in and made compatible with all of the organisations with which the joint boards will have to operate. Moreover, the joint boards, which will be composed of representatives of different local authorities, with different attitudes and political views, will have to produce a joint policy.

Under the Government's timetable, functions will stay with the abolished authorities until 31 March 1986, but the joint boards are to be set up on 1 September 1985. That implies a period of co-working. The joint boards and the soon-to-be-abolished authorities will be like a pantomine horse, and I cannot believe that there will be friendly and pleasant co-operation.

There will also be a problem of co-operation from the metropolitan districts and the London boroughs. Some have made it clear that they do not intend to co-operate. For example, the Association of London Authorities said firmly in a press statement of 22 November:

"We will not step in and take over from the GLC."

No doubt the Minister will say that the Association of London Authorities is not entirely impartial.

There might be something in that, so I was interested to see what the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives had to say on the matter, as that is an impartial body which has the type of expertise that will be needed to set up the joint boards and make them work. It said:

"This timetable seems over-ambitious even if the Bill receives Royal Assent in July, 1985 and whether or not the GLC and Metropolitan County Councils continue to refuse to have dealings with any matters which may contribute to implementing the Abolition Bill."

The society clearly envisages considerable difficulties. It summed up its views thus:

"It is highly unlikely in the light of the complicated functions which the joint boards are to be required to administer that they can be set up in such a short time to operate efficiently."

That is a strong argument for more time and for the Government to move away from the magic date of 1 April 1986.

7.45 pm

Much the same problem was foreseen by P. A. Management Consultants when it examined the

[Mr. Cartwright]

metropolitan counties. It compared the change which the Government are now proposing with what happened between 1972 and 1974. Its report said that

"there is now considerably less time than in 1972-74 to prepare for this reorganisation, and the problems inherent in fragmenting existing services are potentially greater than those involved in merging smaller units as happened in 1974 . . . our survey has shown that most Districts are unprepared to take on their new responsibilities."

That is another sound reason for not pressing ahead with this magic date.

Mr. Park: The hon. Gentleman will know from his experience of local government that the making of a rate is not treated lightly. Would he care to comment on the fact that there will be at least seven bodies with precepting powers and that, unless there is the prior consultation and agreement of which he has spoken, it would be quite easy for a local authority to have carefully arrived at a rate, only to have it knocked sideways by the seven precepts coming in at different times?

Mr. Cartwright: That is an important point. My experience is that it is sometimes difficult to deal with one precept coming from just one authority which might be controlled by colleagues of the same political party. Having several precepts coming from several directions from joint boards which might have quite different political make-ups is a recipe for considerable difficulties for local authority treasurers and chairmen of finance committees.

I was involved to some extent in the reorganisation of London's government 20-odd years ago. I recall our having a great deal more time to make the transition. The Bill was enacted in 1963, we had the first elections for the new authorities in the spring of 1964, the old and new authorities operated side-by-side for almost a year and the new authorities took over in the spring of 1965. That was a much simpler operation, as the London county council was transferring functions straight to the GLC, which covered a much wider area and had different functions, but at least had some basis on which to receive those responsibilities. Similarly, we had several metropolitan London authorities which were able to transfer their responsibilities and functions to the London borough councils. That was much simpler than what is proposed. A whole tier of elected government is to be scrapped and its powers are to be distributed among a complex spider's web of new bodies.

Part of this case has been accepted by the Government, because they might be preparing for the eventuality that they cannot abolish all these authorities or have new bodies in place by 1 April 1986. I notice that in clause 59 they take powers under which the Secretary of State may make an order giving the residuary bodies any of the functions which were previously performed by the GLC or the metropolitan counties. That seems to be a fail-safe device. If abolition is not completely achieved and the joint boards are not entirely in place, the residuary bodies will have to take over some of those responsibilities. The great flaw in that is that the residuary bodies will not be elected, but will be appointed by the Secretary of State and will therefore be subject to his detailed direction. If there is to be any delay, it would be far better to leave the existing elected authorities in place to carry out their responsibilities until replacement arrangements are established.

This rush is a recipe for high costs, chaos and confusion. It must have an impact on the services received by ordinary people. In its detailed discussions the Committee seems sometimes to forget that we are discussing not just distribution of responsibilities and the allocation of functions but the provision of important services on which many of our constituents depend. The rush to meet the target date poses grave risks to the quality of those services. That is another reason why I support the amendment.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) made two strong and principled points. He said that it was wrong for the Government to fix a date before we looked at the detail of the Bill. That is manifestly correct. He also said that the House, at a later stage, should have the right to look at and approve the powers delegated to the Secretary of State. That was also right.

I wish to concentrate on a point that is peculiar to west Yorkshire and on a general point about the cost of the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the GLC. In the amendments that we discussed last night, we asked specifically for an inquiry into the cost. At that stage the Government found a sufficient number of supporters to go through the Lobby with some enthusiasm to defeat that batch of amendments.

I asked the Minister for Local Government to detail the savings, and wanted to know what proportion came from administration and what proportion arose from policy changes. I asked that because at one stage I suspect that he tried to obscure the issue. He pointed out that the metropolitan councils and the GLC were £432 million a year above target and £600 million a year above their grant-related expenditure assessments. Anyone who has taken any interest in local government finance will realise that those are not objective categories. They seem to have emerged from somewhere in the Department of the Environment and have eventually been produced in a form which only a few people can understand. However, they have no bearing on local circumstances and are of no relevance to local democracy.

Those were figures for what the Minister alleged to be the overspend in terms of the metropolitan counties and the GLC. However, he did not give the savings figure, and at this stage I wish to place on record my view that the Minister can no longer use the argument that the overspend will be the savings figure in relation to abolition—

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the terms of the amendment, which questions whether a date should be specified in the Bill or introduced following a resolution of the House.

Mr. Fatchett: I make this point, Mr. Armstrong, because I believe that a resolution of the House is absolutely necessary. Were we to approve such a resolution, we would expect the Minister to produce accurate figures on which a judgment could be made rather than to advance the arguments that we heard last night, because those arguments obscured the issue by talking about overspend rather than potential savings.

I hope, Mr. Armstrong, that you will allow me to develop this point. I appreciate that your patience may well be tested. I would not wish to do that, because your reputation is that of a patient man and it would be wrong to push the point to any great extent. Last night the Minister said:

"There are substantial savings to be made from efficiencies, changes and the elimination of duplication and from the removal of a tier of unnecessary, costly and remote government".—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 1147.]

My point is that, even after the opportunity provided by last night's debate, the Minister did not spell out the figures. On that and on other occasions the Government have tried to accuse the metropolitan counties and the GLC of overspend and have then equated overspend with savings. Perhaps the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will take this further opportunity—which, Mr. Armstrong, you have provided by your chairmanship—to set out the details of the potential savings resulting from the abolition of the met counties and the GLC.

There is some doubt about what will happen to the functions currently performed by the West Yorkshire enterprise board. That board has been successful in its activities, it has saved jobs in both the short and the longer terms, and as a result of the section 137 2p rate it has spent about £6 million a year in the west Yorkshire economy. What will happen to that £6 million? Do the Government intend to reallocate the 2p rate to the districts? If so, the districts can perform those functions. If not, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge said earlier, we have reason to doubt the Government's sincerity about job creation and preservation. What will happen to this section 137 money? Do the Government intend to transfer it to the district councils? The Government, with eminent good sense, have just approved a scheme under which £770,000 will be provided for the small firms fund in west Yorkshire in 1985-86. Will they approve future expenditure, and how will that be made? Is it not indicative of the Government's inability to think ahead that they approve a small firms fund for 1985-86 but do not think about what will happen in 1986-87? It could be that future planning for those small firms will mean the difference between economic life and death.

I hope that the Minister will answer those detailed points and take this opportunity to outline the cost savings which the Government claim will flow from the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I apologise to the Committee for having missed the speech of the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) and part of the speech of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright). I also apologise if other pressing engagements mean that I shall not be present for part of the Minister's reply. I shall, however, read his comments carefully and perhaps follow up in the normal way. Given what I have just said, it would be wrong to test the patience of the Committee by making too long a contribution, and I shall therefore be as brief as possible.

There is a great attraction in the idea of not having the rigid date of 1 April 1986 for the abolition of the GLC. If hon. Members will permit me, I shall again refer to GLC matters which are of immediate concern to London Members rather than to wider issues affecting the existing authorities. Of equal attraction is the idea that an order should be laid before the House proposing a date no sooner than that fixed in the Bill. It could, of course, be later. That would give everyone, irrespective of one's view about what should succeed the GLC as the elected authority, the opportunity, at the same time as an appropriate inquiry into the functions of local government, of carrying through the process of dismantling the GLC.

I agree with the forceful arguments deployed by other hon. Members that more time is needed and that there is the danger of serious discontinuity, disruption and disorganisation if such a request is not conceded by the Government.

8 pm

An interesting study was undertaken by the Institute of Local Government Studies at the University of Birmingham, and a study by Flynn and Leach produced a short summary of the conclusions. Paragraph 4 of that report stated:

"Then we tackled the other major problem: would the Government's proposals actually work? Because if they won't there is no case for them. And there are grave risks in the 'wait and see, trust us' approach of the Government—there is too much at stake for that!"

The institute was commissioned

"to produce an independent research paper which could answer the fundamental question:—

> Can Joint Boards, Joint Committees and other joint arrangements provide an efficient and democratic local government service?"

Admittedly, this was before the Government's proposals, but the fear of "The shambles of 1986", as the report describes it, still remains.

I shall highlight some areas where there will be acute difficulties and disorganisation if there is too short a time period. There is great pressure for and common sense in having a longer period for these extremely complicated processes. The processes will cause unhappiness. A lot will depend on how long the Committee stage takes—that is the parliamentary factor.

The GLC employs 22,000 people. Incidentally, that is fewer than the Inner London education authority, which is often regarded as the smaller body. What will happen about the transfer of those people and the redundancy provisions? The Bill does not answer that clearly, but causes confusion. I see a tremendous minefield and an enormous area of potential chaos in the potential legal disputes which could arise from the distribution of property, assets, land and title deeds. There are miles and miles of files about those matters and, probably, about the existing semi-residual housing functions of the GLC, at county hall. There will be tremendous problems in dealing with them in a short time. There will be only a few months to get through the awkward, ragged transitional period when the new joint unelected institutions will take over those matters.

In a number of policy areas the Government have not yet concluded what should be done. In a broadcast at lunchtime today my right hon. Friend said that he was open to ideas and suggestions. That is encouraging in one way, but it reveals the degree of confusion in the minds of Ministers. What will happen if their Lordships decide to exercise their legitimate constitutional functions—at least, Conservative Members regard them as legitimate—and take much more time than my right hon. Friend expects them to take? There are many experts on local government organisation and structure in the other place, and they will need a great deal of time to consider the matter. It would not be right for the Government on a

[Mr. Hugh Dykes]

constitutional measure, which is also a conventional local government, so-called, reform measure, to hasten the other place, let alone hon. Members in Committee.

There are many other areas of potentially deep chaos among the boroughs, the Department of the Environment and the outgoing GLC structure when the GLC's functions are dispersed and, in some cases, devolved to local boroughs, although not most of them. There would be chaos in traffic management transitional provisions and in transitional provisions for detailed planning decisions. Most important in human terms, there would be long delay and chaos in the conveyancing of private properties, especially on the cancellation date of 1 April 1986. That would be a nightmare for people who try to convey private properties in London. That is a simple example, but it would affect millions of people.

Mr. Tony Banks: In support of the hon. Gentleman's case, may I say that he may be interested to know that there are still outstanding legal cases regarding property titles from the 1963 reorganisation.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge about that is greater than that of many hon. Members. He may have had experience on relevant GLC committees. That is a nerve-wracking element for the officials at county hall. They are not party political. Some officials have a political axe to grind, but if they are good they keep it to themselves. Officials are not merely worried but are genuinely anxious and almost verging on panic about that on behalf of the public they are supposed to serve. No sober bureaucrat or official enjoys chaos and upheaval, especially when it cannot be intrinsically justified. If the Government do not respond to the powerful admonitions of the Committee and seek to force through the reorganisation of local government functions in a gross period of eleven months and a net period of only a few months, they will find it extremely difficult.

The financial aspect also relates directly to the need for a longer period to do the monumentally complicated task of dismantling a body which a Conservative Government set up 20 years ago. On 24 November *The Times* stated that Mr. Livingstone's provocations and behaviour had given rise to abolition, but stated:

"The government's replies are equally unconvincing because they glibly assume the cost cutting enthusiasm of all borough and district politicians to be that of the Tory loyalists of Bromley and Trafford. The sums cannot indeed be done until the 1st April 1987 when the ratepayers of the conurbations first receive their bills under the new scheme. Even that will allow no full audit."

Can hon. Members imagine the chaos that would ensue? The article continues:

"it will take forensic accounting skill of the highest quality to trace through many Public Expenditure Survey lines the on-costs of the central government's own expanded responsibilities."

Since when have Conservative Administrations been in the business of wilfully causing so much confusion about matters which are already difficult to grasp, let alone in a period of total upheaval and disruption? The article continues:

"The system will be more opaque. For accountability we will have to trust not the untrustworthy, but easily identifiable, Mr. Livingstone but anonymous officials."

These anxieties are serious. They transcend the more superficial party political considerations and are the legitimate preoccupation of hon. Members during this political week. My hon. Friend the Minister is a serious and distinguished member of the Government. I hope that he will respond to the genuine anxieties that are being expressed here and elsewhere. More time is needed. More time would produce a much more rational solution, if only the Government would exercise more patience.

Mr. Tony Banks: Once again it falls to me to follow an excellent speech made by the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). I only wish that more Conservative Members were present in the Chamber to hear him. Anything that Labour Members say about the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan counties——

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): There are no Conservative Members on the Back Benches, and only three on the Treasury Bench. The Chamber is empty on the Conservative side, except for the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

Mr. Banks: I was giving Conservative Members on the Front Bench the distinction of being described as hon. Members of the Conservative party. Indeed, the Back Benches are empty. That is symptomatic of the way in which the proposal is being taken through the Committee. Conservative Members have become so dispirited by Ministers, and by the lack of argument advanced by the thinness of the Government's case, that they prefer to seek refuge in the Tea Room to sitting through yet another embarrassing and, perhaps for many of them, boring evening discussing the future of the GLC and metropolitan county councils.

It is a great tragedy that such important matters should be discussed with no Conservative Back-Bench Member prepared to defend the Government's proposals. Their absence is an eloquent testimony to the Government's dreadfully weak case. One hopes, even at this late hour, that sanity will prevail and that the Government will back off from what for them, I hope, will be suicide. I do not wish to prevent them from committing suicide, but I want to prevent them from inflicting the chaos that their measures will bring to local government in London and the metropolitan counties.

I say that by way of aside. I wish that the hon. Member for Harrow, East were sitting on the Government Front Bench as a main Minister at the Department of the Environment; but he knows far too much and he is far too decent to be offered the job. The Government will ask only those who are prepared to support a lousy case to sit on their Front Bench.

Amendment No. 29 has been tabled to assist the Government. Why we should want to assist this pathetic, creepish Government, I have not the faintest idea, but we should at least try to prevent them from making fundamental errors. We shall assist them by pointing out the enormous gaps in their knowledge of the functions and purposes of the GLC and metropolitan county councils. I have selected two examples that reveal the Government's ignorance.

The first is that the Government say that the GLC does very little. They say that as the ambulance service, sewage services, housing management and London Transport have been removed from the GLC, there is no need for it to continue. What they do not say is that all those services were removed by central Government. If one chops off the legs of some poor devil and then says, "You cannot walk",

it is hardly surprising. Those services were removed incorrectly , but even their removal does not make a case for abolition.

I apologise in advance to you, Mr. Armstrong, and to my colleagues, but certainly not to Conservative Members, for reading something into the record. I am sick and tired of listening to incoherent, incomprehensible and ill-informed speeches from Conservative Members, when they deign to be here, about the GLC not retaining enough functions to justify its continued existence. The GLC currently provides on a London-wide basis the following services: waste disposal; fire brigade; emergency planning; minerals policy; industry and employment; provision of services for the disabled; grant aid to the voluntary sector, including women's housing, ethnic, arts, transport, community and pension organisations; housing, including new build, mobility for tenants round London, hostels for the single homeless, improvements to rundown housing estates, help for housing associations and the creation of housing improvement areas. The GLC is the largest housing authority in the country, although one would not guess that from listening to Ministers.

The GLC also provides a London-wide arts and recreation policy, including the ownership and management of the south bank complex; judicial services; the strategic planning of London; traffic management; funding of advice services and the running of the welfare benefits campaign to help the poorest people of London; policies for women and ethnic minorities to counter discrimination against them; the protection of historic buildings and monuments; archaeology; the protection of the green belt; pollution control; building control; industrial training; provision of information technology for Londoners; the collection of London-wide statistics and intelligence; conservation and recycling; metropolitan roads; roads maintenance; the provision of facilities for pedestrians and cyclists; the provision of Thames piers, ferries, tunnels and bridges; and the London Record Office. They are GLC-provided, London wide services. Who says that the GLC retains no useful functions?

8.15 pm

Mr. Bermingham: To pick just one example from my hon. Friend's comprehensive list, how could the judicial services be devolved? If they are fragmented, perhaps someone will explain to me and to many other lawyers how that will relieve the already appalling waiting lists of cases in the London area.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. If the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) follows that intervention, he will be getting away from the amendment, which deals with the date and whether we should have a resolution before the House of Commons.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend's intervention illustrates another gap in the Government's knowledge of the functions of the GLC, which this amendments is designed to fill by giving the Government more time to think through their proposals. My hon. Friend answered his own question. Much as I should like to be enticed down that road, I shall take your advice, Mr. Armstrong, and proceed down another.

The second area of Government ignorance relates to the services that they say will be devolved from the GLC to the boroughs. Statistics have varied, according to the Minister who has been speaking at the Dispatch Box—the quality of Ministers at the Department of the Environment varies widely — so the figure ranges between 75 per cent. and 95 per cent. No doubt before long we shall be told that the London boroughs will get 120 per cent. of the GLC's services. However, the most recently used figure was 95 per cent., which is completely wrong. The Government say that the GLC's net current expenditure for 1984-85 is £530 million. Of that, they say that £396 million—or 74 per cent.—will go to the boroughs. The Under-Secretary of State said that in reply to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 3 December 1984.

The Government's first error is to underestimate the GLC's net current expenditure, which is $950 million. Ministers have no doubt excluded debt charges of £153 million — *[Interruption.]* I did not catch what the Minister said, but if he said that they should not be included he should bear in mind the fact that debt charges must be met from rates and block grant and, therefore, must be included in current expenditure. It would appear from my calculations that the Government have also excluded contributions to the housing revenue account of £114 million, and they have undoubtedly excluded the GLC's current revenue support to London Regional Transport of £177 million.

The Government's figure of £396 million undoubtedly includes many items of expenditure that will not go to the boroughs. Expenditure on roads will go to the Department of Transport. They have not yet decided what to do with Thamesmead. The provision for historic buildings will not go to the boroughs. The facilities of the Sports Council will go elsewhere. The expenditure for the Arts Council will not go to the boroughs—and we should not forget the expenditure on the shire counties. Those items represent about £60 million of the GLC's net current expenditure, and the Government have included them in the sum that they say will go to the boroughs. It is just not true. I know that I am taxing the patience of my colleagues with these figures, but I do so because we can use them again during the latter stages of the Committee. Unless the Government refute those figures one by one, we can only claim that they are accurate.

I have asked the Greater London council for an analysis of the 1984-85 net expenditure by the proposed successor authority. I should like to read this into the record. The Secretary of State is to receive £3·3 million of the GLC's net current expenditure. That represents 0·3 per cent. London Regional Transport is to receive £177·6 million, which is 18·7 per cent. The fire services board is to receive £143·3 million, which is 15·1 per cent. The waste disposal board will receive £65·8 million, which represents 6·9 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The Thames water authority will receive £31·8 million, which is 3·3 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The London Planning Commission will receive £1·3 million, which is 0·1 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The Thamesmead trust will receive £16 million, which is 1·7 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The Historic Buildings Commission is to receive £4·6 million, which is 0·5 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The Lea Valley regional park authority will receive £4·5 million, which is 0·5 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The residuary body will receive £174 million, which is 17·9 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The Sports Council—if, indeed, it takes over the GLC's sports grants programme—will receive £8·4 million, which is 0·9 per cent. of GLC expenditure.

[Mr. Banks]

If it took over the whole of the GLC's arts expenditure, the Arts Council would be responsible for £11·1 million, which is 1·2 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The city of London, acting as agent for the boroughs, would receive £2·4 million, which is 0·3 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The ILEA, taking over former GLC services, would receive £1·4 million, which is 0·1 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The shire counties and shire districts together would be responsible for £4·7 million, which is 0·5 per cent. of GLC expenditure.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is anxious to get his remarks written into the record, but I find great difficulty in relating them to the amendment. The hon. Gentleman must come back to the amendment.

Mr. Banks: I tried to make the point at the beginning that the Government are clearly misleading the country and Parliament. The Government have great gaps in their knowledge. If they were to accept the amendment, we should be given a sufficient opportunity to consider the Government's case. We should have before us facts which will enable both Houses of Parliament to come to a proper and fit conclusion, I realise that this is tedious, particularly for the Government, because they are being given statistics which are truthful as opposed to statistics which they have manipulated.

You will be delighted to know, Mr. Armstrong, that if I am allowed another two or three minutes, I shall conclude my contribution. The boroughs will receive £293·8 million, which is 30·9 per cent. of GLC expenditure. The successor authority, undecided, will receive £10·3 million, which is 1·1 per cent. of GLC expenditure. That makes GLC net current expenditure a grand total of £950 million. It means that the boroughs would not receive 75 per cent., or 95 per cent., or whatever other figure the Government claim of the GLC's net current expenditure. The boroughs would receive 30·9 per cent. of the GLC's net current expenditure.

If the Government were to accept the offer to submit all their figures to an independent audit, the GLC would fully co-operate in making sure that the people of this country and Members of Parliament know who really is speaking the truth. The House of Commons and the other place would then be able to make a decision based upon true facts. I have read them into the record. I shall refer to them again during later stages of our proceedings. Unless the Government refute those figures, they will stand as the case put forward by the Labour party. They show that we have nothing to hide and that the abolition of the GLC will be to the detriment of London government. It will cost London ratepayers a great deal of money, about which, as yet, they know nothing. At least I have now put the record straight.

Mr. Stuart Holland: It is probably known to everybody in the Chamber, apart from the Secretary of State, that the target date for abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan councils is April Fool's Day 1986. Whether the Secretary of State cares to make a fool of himself in public is his business. Whether or not he cares to make a fool of the House is our business. We need amendment No. 29, which obliges the Secretary of State to bring an order back to the House for approval, since 1 April 1986 is far too early to deal with the range of unresolved contradictions in the Government's proposal.

I appreciate that the analysis of PA Management Consultants has been cited extensively, but we have not yet had the response of the Government to the main points that it makes. On the multiplicity of joint bodies rather than a unitary authority, the Government claim that they will "co-operate closely". PA Management Consultants say that this is an

"unsound basis for an effective, lasting structure"

and that it fails in particular to take account of the current political and financial circumstances of local government. That has been well illustrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who cited in detail the costs which are likely to be incurred by the abolition of the GLC.

Turning to the conflict between services, the Government claim that

"abolition will remove a source of conflict and tension."

By contrast, PA Management Consultants claim:

"The existing structure provides for the resolution of the inevitable conflicts"—

it is important to stress this—

"between different services and between different areas of the metropolitan county".

That is quite apart from the uncertainty of the proposals to which I shall refer later.

A further reason for the amendment is precisely to resolve the cost issues. The Coopers and Lybrand report stresses the kinds of differences which are likely to occur from a high level of co-operation with the Government's proposals and from limited co-operation with them. We are talking about disparities of between £100 million and £150 million on the transitional costs and, on jobs and job savings, of between 1,000 and 1,500 jobs potentially at risk. Until recently the Secretary of State provided no figures, even at this stage of the Bill, other than the citing of something which was produced recently by certain London boroughs. In Committee upstairs, I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the Committee will wish to scrutinise those figures.

On the present basis, the Government appear to be thinking of a number, doubling it for Labour administrations, subtracting the number one first thought of if it is a Tory council and exiting with a self-fulfilling prophecy. These are the kinds of mathematics which not only would not convince the House, but would hardly convince any candidate who was trying for CSE mathematics. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West has already made that point in detail and substance. The House deserves a reply to these questions.

There is the further matter of the unresolved problems which will be caused for voluntary organisations. The Prime Minister has said many times in the House that she lauds and supports voluntary initiative, yet in areas which are directly relevant to a constituency such as mine and also of general relevance to other constituencies the Government have brought forward no adequate proposals —the single homeless, a problem which the House will consider tomorrow in more detail, problems such as drug abuse, alcohol misuse, ethnic minorities and their special problems, disability, advice and counselling services, the elderly, young people, women, community work, environment, special needs. We are talking of tens of millions of pounds. Because of the manner in which the Government have sought to introduce a major piece of

legislation, it does not appear that the House can be assured that if the Bill is guillotined—and there is every indication that the Government will seek to guillotine it — these questions will be answered. Therefore, the amendment is essential to ensure that the House has a proper chance to express its views and to scrutinise the expenditure implications of the Bill and the wider implications for local and central democracy.

The Government choose to say that the GLC's housing responsibilities have been transferred to the local boroughs and that the GLC will shortly have no housing responsibilities whatsoever. I regard that as tragic. So do many of my constituents. It means the end of a strategic housing role for London. The example provided by the ending of the strategic housing role will be repeated in the other areas of expenditure and in other GLC functions to which my hon. Friends have referred. The abolition of the GLC's strategic housing role has slammed the door on many people in the inner city, who realise that inter-borough nominations are a farce. When they come to our advice surgeries, we cannot guarantee that they will have any chance of moving to other areas of London.

8.30 pm

As for the proposed transport quango, Lord Denning, a judge and not an economist, is able to comment on what is a profitable operation for London Transport. It is not clear that a judge, any more than any of the quangos which the Government seek to introduce by the Bill, is qualified to assess the externalities or cost benefits of a low-fares policy. If local people cannot vote for a cheap fares policy, that is a derogation of the democratic principle. It is crucial that, in seeking to render public spending accountable, the House should be able to press for the cost savings that occur when lower fares result in more use of public transport and more revenue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) referred to the employment implications of abolishing the role of enterprise boards, such as the West Midlands and Greater London enterprise boards. Uncertainty introduced by the Bill over the future of those boards will be critical for companies' economic prosperity. We have known for decades of the impending euthanasia of the entrepreneur. Now we are to see the execution of the employment prospects in many small firms because of the unqualified nature of the Bill. Unless the amendment is accepted, so that the matter can be seriously reviewed, there will be no chance of the future of those firms being ascertained.

The Bill is not simply seeking to amend recent legislation. The fact that it is a fundamental Bill is not illustrated only by the fact that the GLC and its forebears have been in existence for nearly a century. The underlying reality is that every Administration — Conservative, Liberal and Labour—for more than 100 years have sought to govern, in essence, by consensus and by gaining support. They have sought to gain that support by debate, discussion and argument and by motions and orders in the House.

It is striking that, in seeking to end argument and opposition from the metropolitan authorities and the GLC, the Government are spinning back the wheel, not merely past Labour Administrations and the Labour GLC, but beyond Joseph Chamberlain and the commitment to municipal government, municipal public works, municipal and civic pride and the right to local democracy, which was one of the bases of the rise and extension of popular support for the Conservative party.

Those facts will gradually be realised by the country, and they will certainly be realised if the amendment is not accepted. Without the amendment, there will be no way of avoiding the arbitrary ending of the public right to choice and the public right both to agree and disagree with central Government. There will be an end to the mechanism of consent on which democracy itself has been based for so long.

Mr. Bermingham: I shall be brief, because I wish to save most of my comments for the next group of amendments.

Let me ask the Government one simple question: When will they ever learn? The London county council was abolished in 1964 and we are still trying to sort out the legal problems that were caused because the then Conservative Government did not give the matter proper thought. When we transferred to the present system of local government in 1973, a number of problems arose over farmland. I shall give the Secretary of State a simple example. Farms often cross the boundaries of district councils which may be in the political control of different parties with different agricultural policies. What happens to the tenant farmer when he has two landlords with different policies? Disputes can end up at the Lands Tribunal and elsewhere.

If the Government are not prepared to learn from the mistakes made in the 1960s and 1970s and are not willing to give the proposals in the Bill time to work or to come back to the House and explain how matters have been sorted out, they are even more foolish and stupid than I thought.

The amendment gives the Secretary of State the chance to do it properly. We do not like what he is doing, but if he insists on doing it he should at least try to get it right. As I shall point out on the next set of amendments, the Government are setting a minefield of legal problems for themselves, for local government and for electors. That need not happen. All that is required is some constructive thought by the Government instead of an arrogant, doctrinal insistence on pushing through the proposals as quickly as possible because they believe that they have a divine right to do that.

The amendment is sensible and attempts to prevent some of the potential damage that the Government seem set on causing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): One of the main criticisms of the Bill on Second Reading was that it gave too much power to Ministers to do things by order. It was implied that more detail should be written into the Bill to remove that discretion. Therefore, I am surprised to see that one of the first amendments proposed by the Opposition seeks to do exactly what they have criticised us for doing. It will take something specific out of the Bill and give the Secretary of State power to lay an order to vary the date. I see some inconsistency in the Opposition's approach.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) said that there was a need for consultation. I agree with him, although there is nothing in the amendment about consultation. We should like there to be consultation, and

[Sir George Young]

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will use his influence with his colleagues on the councils concerned to ensure that they start consulting and end their ridiculous boycott against the Government and the successor bodies. We could then get the details that we need and ensure that the transition is a smooth one. I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the need for consultation and co-operation.

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) implied that there would not be enough time for the joint authorities to be established before they took over responsibilities in 1986. The new joint authorities will formally be in place from September 1985 if, as we hope, we get the consent of Parliament. They will have adequate time to prepare their budgets for 1986. There is nothing to prevent the borough and district members who make up those authorities from meeting earlier to give preliminary thought to their needs.

The executive parts of the new authorities will not be radically altered at the moment of transfer. The services will be provided over the same geographical area as at present and there should be no difficulty in ensuring the continuity of operation of those services.

The hon. Member for Woolwich, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and other hon. Members claimed that there would be chaos. I should like to quote the chief executive of one of the district councils involved in abolition, Mr. Gordon Moore, chief executive of Bradford metropolitan district council. An article in *Municipal Journal* on 7 December stated:

"'I have no fear there is going to be total chaos', said Mr. Moore. The one thing about the Bradford style of management was that a freedom would be given to its officers, when the chips were down, to get on and do the best they could.

'The prime concern of mine is for the community I serve; they will not tolerate a mess-up on 1 April 1986, if that is the great day, and nor should they.

'They are not interested in all this non-talking, non co-operation at all . . . I know who is going to be blamed if things go wrong; the politicians will have a very short memory about instructing their officers not to co-operate—it will be muggins and his colleagues who get their backsides kicked for not getting it organised'."

It is the Gordon Moores who will have to operate the policy. They are the chief executives of the successor bodies, and I am confident that once the Bill is on the statute book they will make the policies work.

Mr. Stuart Holland: The hon. Gentleman can hardly claim to be making an argument from one unrepresentative sample. However, if that is the view of the kind of person who may well be on the unelected authority, how are they to be made accountable? Politicians are made accountable by the vote and can have their backsides kicked, but that will not be the case with the quango substitute.

Sir George Young: I was quoting not from a councillor but from one of the chief executives of a successor body. This person makes the point that it is the senseless attitude of a number of Labour councillors in not talking that has made them the culprits, and not the Government, who are giving adequate time to get the policy through.

The hon. Member for Woolwich then made a comparison with 1963-65, and I beg to disagree with what he said. He states that this reorganisation will be more complex than that of the early 1960s, but he is wrong. In the early 1960s, we were establishing the GLC from the LCC and some of the home counties and at the same time establishing the London boroughs. We were setting up two new tiers. This reorganisation is different. We are eliminating a tier and passing the bulk of responsibilities down to existing successor bodies. This will be a more simple reorganisation than the ones to which the hon. Gentleman referred. For that reason, we do not need the same amount of time as may have been necessary in the early 1960s. I think that the hon. Member will discover when we reach clause 59 that the residuary bodies cannot be used in the way that he anticipates, as a sort of legislative long stop if by any chance it is not possible to implement in 1986. We shall deal with that point later.

In an intervention, it was implied that there would be seven precepts in the metropolitan counties. That is not the case. There will be three new precepts—police, fire and public transport. I do not see any difficulty in the districts handling these precepts as they handle the existing precepts in their rates.

The hon. Members for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) spoke at some length about costs, but I do not propose to go into great detail about costs, because you said, Mr. Armstrong, that this was not the appropriate amendment on which to talk about costs. However, I noted that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West included, as part of the responsibility of the GLC, expenditure on London transport when the GLC no longer has responsibility for London transport. If this is the sort of statistic that he proposes to use, he will come unstuck. I am grateful to him for putting on the record his perception of the costs. When we reach part VIII, which deals with the financial considerations, that will be the time for a sensible debate about the financial consequences and where responsibility for the various policies will lie.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am as acutely aware as the hon. Gentleman—perhaps even more so—that the GLC no longer has the responsibility for London transport. That responsibility was taken away from the GLC to make the Government's weak case a little better. We know the political reasons, but the Minister cannot avoid the fact that the GLC has to give about £177 million this year in support of London transport. What will happen to the £177 million? Who will be responsible for it?

Sir George Young: The debate is on what percentage of the GLC's service will devolve to the boroughs in 1986. By then the GLC will have no responsibility for London transport. It will not be paying any money towards it at all. It is a red herring for the hon. Member to produce in the context of this debate a figure that includes the costs of London transport.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central raised a number of questions. I shall deal with the position of voluntary organisations when we reach clause 46. He asked about applications for expenditure by the existing metropolitan counties that will take place in 1985-86. If the applications are sent to the Department, we shall process them in the normal way.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West also weakened his case by referring to housing, and said that the GLC is the largest housing authority in the country. He knows that in July of next year, before abolition, most of the housing stock will pass to Tower Hamlets and that simple statistic that he is so fond of using will no longer be relevant.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) implied that the Government had relied on estimates by four London boroughs for their estimates of saving. I hope that he has seen the parliamentary question, asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), which my right hon. Friend answered some two weeks ago and which gave quantifications of the Government's estimate of savings. His speech implied that he had not seen that answer.

The transfer of functions can best take place on 1 April in any year to simplify the adjustment to the rate support grant and the budgeting of the successor authorities. We have set out, firmly and clearly, that the transition should be in 1986. We made this clear in the White Paper in 1983, two and a half years before abolition is due to take place. The whole of our preparations, including the timing and introduction of this Bill, are directed towards that date, and there is no argument for delaying the change. There will be adequate time to make all the necessary arrangements.

The amendment would inject uncertainties that would be damaging to abolition. Perhaps that is why Labour Members wish the amendment to be in the Bill. It is best that the clause should set a fixed date and thus eliminate the uncertainty that would be introduced by the amendment. That is the way in which these matters have been handled in the past. Clear dates were given in both 1963 and 1972. To say that it is unprecedented is rubbish.

We have recognised, in the interests of the staff, that they need a clear view of their place in the future structure. We have taken what steps we can by setting up a staff commission and issuing a paper on all aspects of the transfer of staff. To make the date of the transfer variable would lead to damaging uncertainty. I urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

8.45 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts: I shall be watching to see how the alliance votes on this amendment, having witnessed on the last amendment that three of its members who represent cities in the metropolitan areas failed to support the alliance amendment to exclude the metropolitan areas from abolition. We are interested to see how it will muster its troops to make effective the transition from metropolitan and GLC government to this new system.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) apologised for having to leave before the end of the debate. He referred to the Opposition's attitude to the House of Lords and intimated that the Bill might be mutilated by the other place in the way that the interim provisions Bill was mutilated. I have heard rumours that, on the advice of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, if that happens the Prime Minister will create 1,000 new peers and abolish the House of Commons. We wait to see whether that rumour will be fulfilled.

The proposal in this amendment is to stop the abolition of the county councils and the GLC being tied to a specific date. It would be sensible, in the light of everything that has happened and is happening, and in the light of criticism from Conservative Members and everybody outside who has looked objectively at these proposals, for the Government to accept an amendment that releases the abolition proposals from being tied to a specific date, and allows all the interim arrangements and provisions to be made before abolition takes place.

As many of my hon. Friends, and the hon. Member for Harrow, East, have said, the amendment will assist the Government in their aims. We wish to protect the citizens of the metropolitan areas and the GLC from the chaos that will arise as a result of this legislation being rushed through while tied to the proposed date. Despite what the Minister said, we believe that our amendment will check the powers delegated to the Secretary of State. Even though we ask that the Secretary of State be allowed to come back some time after April 1986 to present an order to implement the proposals, we are not giving the power to the Secretary of State but vesting it back in both Houses of Parliament. The amendment would kill the enabling nature of the legislation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) said, it is amazing how often the Bill delegates power to the Secretary of State. We want to ensure that the House of Commons and the other place have a say in what happens, and that is the purpose of the amendment.

The amendment also ensures that all the difficulties and doubts about the administration and handover — which we believe will result in chaos—can be dealt with. The Minister talked about co-operation and consensus. But there has not been any co-operation, and there will not be any as far as this Bill's proposals are concerned. That is the making not of the Labour-controlled authorities involved but of the Government, because there was no inquiry, investigation or adequate public debate before the proposals were announced. That prevented consensus in the first place. We are trying to rescue the Government from a situation of their own making by allowing a period of time to elapse after the passing of the Bill so that that consensus can be created through consultation and, perhaps, amendments to the proposals that might make them acceptable.

I must repeat something that I said yesterday. Ministers, and the few supporters that they have mustered on their Back Benches for this provision, keep talking as though they are abolishing two-tier local government and handing power back to the London boroughs and metropolitan districts. But they are doing nothing of the kind. They are setting up quangos and joint boards and producing arrangements, with statutory backing, that require action in co-operation across local authority boundaries. We shall have Conservative and Labour-controlled local authorities, and—heaven forbid—one where the Liberals hold the balance of power, being forced by statute to co-operate. If that is not a recipe for disaster, I do not know what is. The amendment would allow time for that to be thought out.

The Minister weeps crocodile tears about the problems of the staff working for the metropolitan counties and the GLC, but they are in favour of the amendment and have been advising us and the Tory rebels in support of this amendment. They want this leeway so that their problems can be taken care of. They are not asking for a fixed date. They want time for things to be worked out properly on their behalf, as well as on behalf of the people in their areas whom they are employed to serve.

The amendment will enable the Government to kill the accusation that savings will not come from changes in policy and cuts in services by proving—in the interim, and before the order is laid before Parliament for final

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

abolition—that they have made savings in administration. If their case is justifiable, they will accept the amendment and demonstrate that point before they abolish the metropolitan counties and the GLC.

The amendment will allow Parliament to remain sacrosanct in the light of inadequate inquiry. It will also help to settle the anxieties of the voluntary organisations prior to abolition. Whatever the Minister may say about clause 46 and the discussions that will take place, and whatever the Secretary of State said yesterday about the voluntary sector being satisfied, the opposite is true. The Government have not satisfied the voluntary movement in the GLC and metropolitan areas that they will safeguard voluntary services after abolition.

The Government are looking to individual borough and district councils to fund directly grants to voluntary organisations. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has already been in touch with borough and district councils in the areas threatened with abolition, but only one in eight has been able to predict with any confidence that it will be able to fulfil the majority of its new responsibilities towards local voluntary organisations.

Furthermore, the Government suggest that £5 million a year for four years after 1986-87 is sufficient to ease transitional problems following abolition. Of that total, 75 per cent., or £3·75 million, will be directly funded by the Government. So far, that is the only central Government money being made available to replace the £60 million now being spent by the GLC and the metropolitan councils. The Government have said that they want borough and district councils in the metropolitan and GLC areas to take part in collective funding schemes to cope with projects that operate across several borough and district areas. Under those proposed collective arrangements, the councils would have to reach a two thirds majority before agreeing to approve funding of voluntary organisations.

If the Minister and his friends want to allay fears of voluntary organisations, they will need an interim period in which to prove that the funding will be there and in which the anxieties of many of the voluntary groups, which now fear that they will not be funded, are satisfied. If the Government vote down the amendment, they will rue the day they did. The amendment will save them from the chaos that they will otherwise create. Incidentally, I know Mr. Gordon Moore of Bradford, but he is not a chief executive of all the successor authorities and I do not think that he is qualified to say that there will not be any chaos. There will be other successor authorities in his area, and not all of them will be democratically elected. However, the Government will rue the day that they vote down this amendment, because their proposals are a recipe for chaos and disaster. They are also a recipe for Tory unpopularity throughout the metropolitan and GLC areas. It is with altruism that we commend the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 156, Noes 257.

Division No. 52] **[8.57 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael

Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Grylls, Michael
Glummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Straf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 35, in page 1, line 15 leave out '1st April 1986' and add

'such dates as the Secretary of State shall by order appoint, after he has laid before each House of Parliament reports of independent local inquiries setting out proposals and recommendations for the future administration of local government in the Greater London Council and each of the metropolitan counties, such order to be laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'. — *[Mr. Simon Hughes.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes, 156, Noes, 254.

Division No. 53] **[9.7 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Butcher, John
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis

Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt.Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cartwright and
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir R.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Fergus
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim

Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Ms Jo
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archie Hamilton and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Straw: I beg to move amendment No. 36, in page 1, line 15, leave out '1986' and add '1987'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 38, in page 1, line 15, at end add

'or such later date as is provided for by sub-section (3) below.

(3) The abolition date shall be such date as the Secretary of State may by order appoint after he has received from each authority or body established under this Act a report upon their capacity to carry out functions of the Greater London Council or of a metropolitan county council which it is proposed to transfer to them under this Act and he has published such reports.'

Mr. Straw: A few minutes ago my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was commenting on something that I have observed—that the parade of the Tellers tells us something about the social composition of Britain. Conservative Tellers are always taller than Labour Tellers.

Mr. Tony Banks: It was the welfare milk.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend says that it was due to welfare milk. There was milk for the Conservative Tellers even before welfare milk was available to Labour Tellers, because they could afford it. That sociological fact—the linking of social class to height—was confirmed by a recent report from the Department of Health and Social Security. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) says that he is only 5 ft 5 in. That proves the point that there are some odd genetic groups, such as that to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West belongs. I was saying that the report published earlier this week by the Department of Health and Social Security shows the direct correlation between social class and height.

Amendment No. 36 extends by one year the abolition date referred to in the Bill. Amendment No. 38, an alternative amendment, states:

"The abolition date shall be such date as the Secretary of State may by order appoint after he has received from each authority or body established under this Act a report upon their capacity to carry out functions of the Greater London Council or of a metropolitan county council which it is proposed to transfer to them under this Act and he has published such reports."

You may confirm, Mr. Dean, that, although we discussed amendment No. 46 in a group yesterday, it will be voted upon after this group, so it may be for the convenience at least of my hon. Friends if I remind them of the content of amendment No. 46. It ensures that if the precepting authorities go ahead, there are direct elections to them rather than just indirect elections. As I fancy that there will be no clause stand part debate, I should like to make it clear beyond peradventure that we are opposed to the abolition of both the GLC and the metropolitan counties.

Last night the Government suffered a serious setback. They have a majority over the Labour party of 190 and over all other parties, including Irish Members, who, as far as I know, were not here to vote in great numbers, of 141. For the Government to have their majority reduced to 23 was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, a moral defeat and a major humiliation. There is no question about that. The Government have an enormous majority, with all the dangers to the future of the Conservative party that the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), so sagely warned about during the election. In any other Parliament that would have been an arithmetical defeat, and the proposal would have been abandoned.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the vote last night was not only a comment on this proposal, but perhaps was more a Conservative party comment on the present style of leadership of the party?

Mr. Straw: Of course my hon. Friend is right. I would not say that he was always right, but he is almost always right—99 per cent. of the time.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): And the headmistress has had Tory Members in since then.

Mr. Straw: Indeed. But even in the best-run schools, such as Eton and Winchester, there were riots in the last century, and what happened then can happen again.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that as one Conservative Back Bencher is in the Chamber it would be decent to mention him?

Mr. Straw: I would mention him, but I am afraid to say that, not having seen him all that often, I do not know who he is. If the Secretary of State would care to tell me his name, of course I shall mention him.

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): He is the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Whitfield).

Mr. Straw: I should like to say to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) that last night—I shall not embarrass the Minister by mentioning

[Mr. Straw]

names—when a Tory Member was speaking from the Back Benches, *The Times* guide, Vacher and Dod were all in use on the Treasury Bench as Tory Members tried to match up the photographs to the names, without success.

Mr. Flannery: Another one has come in.

Mr. Straw: Yes, indeed, and at the Bar of the House we now see the Back Bencher of the year—the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), who fully deserves that appellation for his persistent criticism of the Government. We look forward to his and his hon. Friend's support on this amendment.

Yesterday the Government suffered a major moral and near arithmetical defeat. The Secretary of State for the Environment was interviewed on the radio this morning about that defeat. My hon. Friends should savour the following extract from the Press Association tape. Under the headline,

"Jenkin's open mind on London authority",

it reads:

"Environment Secretary Patrik"—

the spelling suggests that the Press Association may think that he is a Russian—

"Jenkin said today he would keep 'an open mind' over calls by fellow Conservatives for a new directly-elected authority for London to replace the GLC."

This, however, is a bit much:

"But he told Tory critics of his abolition Bill that they must make a more 'coherent' case over what functions such a body would have.

His remarks came after the Government scraped home last night by just 23 votes to beat off an amendment to the abolition Bill tabled by ten senior Conservative backbenchers.

Speaking on BBC radio, Mr. Jenkin played down the scale of the revolt over the amendment, which called for a new London authority.

He said: 'I certainly do not agree that it was a near defeat'."

How much closer do we have to make it before he will admit a near defeat?

The one consistent feature of the Secretary of State's record in the past 15 years has been the way in which he sticks to his principles and convictions with great passion right up to the moment when he changes them. He was absolutely passionate in his defence of the abolition not only of the GLC and its elections but of the transfer of political power without elections until he was defeated, at which point he became equally passionate in defence of the present arrangement.

Seeing defeat about to hit him in the face once again, he has now said that despite all his passion he has "an open mind" about this. We shall take him at his word as he is a man of his word. I also take it that his open mind includes that of his right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government. Given that openness of mind, it must surely be sensible to delay implementation of the Bill at least until 1987 or, better still, as our alternative amendment proposes, until there has been the fullest possible consideration of a report from the metropolitan counties and the GLC.

Above all other motives, we are concerned for the political health of the Secretary of State and the Minister. I hope that they will listen to our counsel, advice and solicitation and accept the amendments in the spirit in which they have been put forward.

Mr. Boyes: It could be described as absurd, but I prefer to call it arrogant, for the Government to determine and print in the Bill a date for abolition of the metropolitan counties and the GLC before the Committee even sat. Even worse, the Bill has not yet been to the House of Lords. Important changes were made to the paving legislation when it reached the House of Lords and I am sure that there will be changes in this Bill. That does not give me any great pleasure, as I believe that changes should be made by this House, where Members are elected and accountable and the full flow of democracy can operate.

I am concerned not so much about the way in which the Government have treated the House of Commons as about the way in which they are treating the people who live in the metropolitan counties and in the GLC area. However, the Government's behaviour is not inconsistent. Earlier in the year there was the paving Bill. That was another example of unprecedented action by the present Government in passing a Bill to stop elections to a body before that body had been abolished. All that we are seeing is a continuation of the same attitude on the part of the Government to the people of Tyne and Wear, for example, and all the other areas concerned.

9.30 pm

A few moments ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) referred to the small majority that the Government had last night. I consider that last night was a resigning matter for some Ministers. However, if they will not go that far, they must recognise that the vote certainly did not give them a mandate to abolish Tyne and Wear county council on 1 April 1986.

I should also like to mention the haste with which the Bill is being passed through the House and with which the set date is being approached. I was elected to a district council in 1973. In 1973, because there was to be a local government reorganisation in 1974, there were two authorities running parallel—a shadow authority and the new authority. Coopers and Lyband, who have been studying this problem, have said that

"The problems of transition are substantial."

The problems were substantial in 1973, too. When the reorganisation finally took place, the shadow authorities had been in existence for approximately 18 months, and there had been a full year before the effective date of the reorganisation. I remember that period well. There was a great deal of confusion. There were many problems. Nevertheless, the Government believe that they can achieve a massive transformation from the elected metropolitan county councils and the GLC in not much more than six or seven months.

Furthermore, the Government have no right to carry out the abolition on the date they suggest, because they have no mandate to do so. Last night, we discussed the question of abolishing the authorities without an inquiry. In fact, there has not been——

Mr. Fatchett: There is no point in putting the case. The Minister has gone away.

Mr. Boyes: I note my hon. Friend's comments. The Government Front Bench seems to be leaving the sinking ship, as well as the Back Benchers. There does not seem to be much heart either on the Government Back Bench or on the Front Benches where the Bill is concerned. No doubt the new Minister would rather have had to deal with something more progressive.

Mr. Straw: I must explain to my hon. Friend that the Minister for Local Government was absent on my account. I asked to have a word with him at the back of the Chair.

Mr. Boyes: I understand what my hon. Friend says, but I understand that there is a big team of Ministers at the Department of the Environment. The Minister does not seem to be very well supported by his colleagues at the moment. If I was a Minister who was trying to push through a Bill such as this, I would not be sitting on the Front Bench—I would be hiding in the Tea Room.

Although there has been no official inquiry, there have been tests of whether people want abolition. First, the Government invited responses to their White Paper in a short time. It is interesting that those responses and the analysis of them have not yet been published or put in the Library for us to examine. The Government have let us know, however, that the response was approximately 10 to one against abolition. Secondly, we have the evidence of several opinion polls. They are quite independent and have not been carried out by the Labour party. I should like to remind the Government of the results. In April 1984, an opinion poll was taken in a significant constituency —that of the Prime Minister. One would imagine that if any area favours abolition, it is Finchley. However, 66 per cent. of those polled opposed abolition and only 15 per cent. favoured it. It might be argued that that result is slightly skewed so we should examine the views of those who said that they would vote Conservative. Of them, 40 per cent. opposed abolition and 35 per cent. favoured it. On that basis, the Government have no mandate to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties.

More recent opinion polls appeared in *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*. I should be ashamed to be a Minister who was pushing such an unpopular measure through. It is unpopular throughout the country, not just in metropolitan county areas or in the GLC area. Indeed, the Government are using a crushing majority to push through a measure that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said was included in the Tory manifesto without much stomach from leading members of the Conservative party.

The Sunday Times MORI poll found that 46 per cent. of those polled opposed abolition and that only 30 per cent. favoured it. A Harris poll for *The Observer* conducted in the Enfield, Southgate constituency, where there is a by-election today, found that 47 per cent. disagreed with the proposal and that only 31 per cent. approved of it. We can ask for a delay in abolition only until the Bill has been considered in Committee upstairs and by another place.

The area covered by Tyne and Wear metropolitan county council, of which I am a representative, has one of the highest levels of unemployment in Britain. The council is one of the bastions against the Government's policies and is trying to offset the terrible economic and social problems which have been caused by the Government. It is disgraceful that it is to be abolished. Do not take my word for it. I shall conclude with some quotations of people who might not be expected to take the same view as me. The Tyne and Wear Chamber of Commerce and Industry has said:

"The Tyne and Wear County Councils spent £4·6 million on economic development in 1982-83. It has had a high profile and considerable success in its activities and the Chamber has been happy to work with it in this field."

I have received several letters from companies in the Tyne and Wear area which are appalled at what the Government are proposing to do. I shall quote just one, which was sent by the chairman and managing director of Ronson (International) Limited. He wrote:

"We strongly urge the Government to reconsider their decision as it could well reverse the trend towards encouraging investment in the various development areas in England".

On any criteria, the Government have no right to abolish the county councils on the date specified in the Bill. They have an obligation to cancel that date until further and fuller consultation has been carried out. This measure does not have the support of the elected representatives in the areas affected, the people in those areas or many of the businesses in those areas. It is a disgrace and outrage that the Government are using their majority to trample on the people whom I represent.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Is is sad that the Chamber is not as packed as it was this time last night, because the amendments we are discussing are of constituency interest. As a result of the timing of the Bill, we are left with a hotchpotch. It is one of the most bungled pieces of legislation that I have ever seen. Residuary powers affecting all our constituents are to be transferred to joint arrangements between the boroughs, and support for services is to be cut. I doubt whether the Government will be able to implement their proposals in the time limit which they have set.

Most hon. Members represent inner cities, but I hope that my hon. Friends from the metropolitan county areas will forgive me if, naturally, my remarks relate mainly to my own area. In the past, the services enjoyed by my constituents have been provided by mutual arrangement. For example, racialism runs throughout the whole of the London areas, but when Brixton and Toxteth went up in flames my area did not merely because of the initiative taken by the black community to set up a co-operative project. That was successful because the GLC gave £500,000 and the Department of the Environment £600,000. Further money was provided by Europe and the local boroughs. Such projects should be a beacon for the integration of people of different coloured skins into our communities.

We do not know whether the Government will be able to sort out such a problem within the timescale they have set. I could list 44 other organisations that have benefited from urban aid, not to mention a number of other services in which the GLC has made a tremendous input. For example, the Brent Association for the Disabled and a number of other organisations have in the last year received £800,000 from the GLC. How will the necessary bridging arrangements be made if the GLC is abolished on the date specified in the Bill? The Government's timetable will make it impossible to implement such arrangements.

The Bill is a hotchpotch. It is ill-thought-out and ill-conceived. It contains no planning or strategy, makes no economic sense and will not lead to efficiency. As a result of the date specified, the muddle which will follow will be just as bad as the muddle which preceded it.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): My comments centre on amendment No. 38, which calls for the authorities which will take over the GLC's responsibilities to submit a report on their ability to do so. I also wish to highlight the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt).

Many of the projects in my area of south London have been developed to cope with the kind of social problems

[Mr. Tom Cox]

that are encountered here. We have set up advice centres for youngsters, training centres for the unemployed and drug advice centres because of the financial back-up we have received from the GLC. Only recently we debated the effects of drugs in our society, and we were told that the Government had such concern for this problem that three Government Departments would form a committee to see what Government help, along with local authority help, could be given to those areas in which drugs are now a problem.

We are entitled to told by the Minister how the services will continue to exist. The Minister has repeatedly told us that if the Bill becomes law there will be savings. No one believes that. Even allowing for possible savings, we have never been told by a Minister, who has replied to a debate or who has made a statement at a meeting about the abolition of the GLC or metropolitan authorities, that existing services will no longer exist after abolition. I have already mentioned services which exist and which are crucially important in my constituency. Many hon. Members who represent areas which will be affected by the proposals could also do so. If the Minister believes that local councils will be prepared to continue and develop such services, he is living in dreamland.

9.45 pm

Together with my hon. Friends the Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), I was a member of the Committee which dealt with the London Regional Transport Bill. We were given clear assurances that services such as the dial-a-ride service for disabled people would continue. It has brought great benefit to people in London. When we asked the Minister about it, he said, "Have no fear. We shall do everything in our power to see that these services continue and are extended". Yet Wandsworth council is doing everything it can to avoid a commitment to continue dial-a-ride services for the disabled.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Local authorities have been innovative, broken into new areas of deprivation and considered the plight of black communities. Because local authorities have been able to minimise the excesses of the Government, the Government are attacking local authorities. Is not that at the heart of the Government's proposals?

Mr. Cox: Unlike the remarks from Conservative Members, what my hon. Friend says is true. It is because of the Government's policies that the services needed—I could list any number—have not been developed. Local authorities such as mine have willingly followed Government instructions and made cuts. The services continue only where authorities are prepared to stand up to those instructions and provide them. That is at the heart of the Bill. Neither the Minister nor the Secretary of State has given a commitment that on-going services will continue and be developed.

At present the Wandsworth Disablement Association has applied for money for a survey about access for disabled people, but the local authority has rejected it. If Conservative Members believe that, under the Government or with Tory-controlleed authorities, there would be no development of the services about which we have been talking this evening—the dial-a-ride service, help for the young unemployed and help for victims of drug abuse—they should hang their heads in shame. That is what Members of Parliament were elected to fight for.

Not only Members of Parliament, but many outside organisations are saying that to the Government. Many hon. Members will have received letters from organisations such as the London Cycling Campaign, the National Consumer Council and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. Those organisations are not politically affiliated, but they know that the services that they try to provide are under threat. However, they have received no assurances from the Government as to their future.

The Secretary of State says that the Government's proposals will produce savings. We do not believe that for one moment. The Minister has an obligation to discover what will be the attitude of the local authorities which take over the services presently provided by the GLC or the metropolitan county councils. If the Minister does not do that, it will prove, as my hon. Friends have said, that this is a shoddy Bill that has not been properly thought out. If not enough Conservative Members oppose it here, let us hope that enough Conservative and other peers in another place will give the Government their just deserts and reject the Bill completely. In view of all the opinion polls and the statements of Londoners and people from other metropolitan authorities, the Government should realise that they have no mandate, as many Conservative Members have told Ministers, for the destruction of services that are vital to so many communities.

Mr. Wareing: Yesterday we talked about the need for an inquiry and covered much of the ground then. However, I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the first sign of the Bill was in the Queen's Speech on 22 June 1983. If it receives Royal Assent in mid-1985, we shall have been debating the issue for two years. The matter will have been worth two years of argument. Yet, within nine months of Royal Assent, the local authorities in the metropolitan areas must be completely reorganised. The period is insufficient, especially as there has been no inquiry.

The local authorities which will be required to take over the services have a right to tell the Government whether they can manage them. Clause 44 refers to museums being transferred to metropolitan districts, but there is no mention of art galleries. What will happen to the Walker art gallery in Liverpool, which is a national asset? What will happen to Croxteth hall in Croxteth country park? The Bill mentions the South Bank complex and museums and institutions in the London area but not in Liverpool.

If I were Liverpool city council, which will again be affected by the rate-capping diktat of the gauleiters of Marsham street, I would be inclined to say, as the council has already said about St. George's hall, that we cannot afford to keep open the Philharmonic hall, Croxteth hall or Speke hall. The Secretary of State must tell the people of Merseyside what will happen to those assets.

Tourism is hardly mentioned in the Bill, yet the Liverpool city council, under the Liberals and Sir Trevor Jones, gave up tourism. Jobs would have been lost at the Lime street tourist office, Liverpool, had it not been for the economic development committee of Merseyside county council, under my chairmanship. If Liverpool is to be asked to take over the responsibility for tourism, we can

forget about it. Liverpool does not have sufficient resources with which to deal with the vast housing and education problems and the social services difficulties.

Merseyside is proud of its record on tourism and economic development. It is proud of its record in creating jobs. Each year it sponsors the Merseyside river festival. It created the Tall Ships race which coincided with the international garden festival. Merseyside is proud of its ferry services. It has expanded all of its tourist services in order to allow the people of Liverpool and people from other parts of the world to enjoy the international garden festival. All that will go for a naught if the Government get their way and attempt precipitously to implement the Bill in 1986.

If the Government have any sense and want to make anything of the morass that they are creating, it must be an organised morass. To do that, they must take longer. Even if the Bill receives Royal Assent in June or July of 1985, it will be impracticable to implement it in detail by the spring of 1986. If the Government try to implement the Bill as rapidly as they say they wish to implement it, the municipal enterprise which areas like Merseyside and the west midlands have shown in the past five or six years will be set at naught. They will destroy the hopes of the people in those areas.

Mr. Bermingham: I ask the Secretary of State to look carefully at paragraph 15 of schedule 8, which deals with trading standards. It contains no provision to transfer the right to prosecute from the outgoing authority to the authority which is to take over responsibility for trading standards. It is very important that we should not get into the mess that we got into in the past when we created new authorities in place of the old ones.

I ask the Secretary of State to look also at a number of the legal functions of the county councils. I ask him to consider the problems involved in the transfer of property and in civil litigation involving local authorities, or on behalf of local authorities, which are to go out of existence. The morass that will be created will be colossal. It would not cost anything to devote a little time to this problem, and by doing that a great deal of expense, hardship and misery could be prevented. If the Bill is to be passed, it ought to be passed in as orderly and efficient a manner as possible. That will take time.

There is an old saying that politicians can decree, but that human beings have to undertake and carry out what has been decreed. It is imperative that the mistakes of 1964 and 1972 are not repeated. If they are repeated, they will create a great deal of work for lawyers. Lawyers welcome the creation of work, but that would not be in the interests of the electors. They are the people to whom the Government ultimately will be accountable. The electors of this country, the electors in the metropolitan areas, in the City of London and in the GLC will hold the Government accountable for the waste that they will cause by trying to hurry through an ill-conceived and ill-thought-out Bill.

Mr. Corbyn: I speak tonight on behalf of my constituency and also as an hon. Member who is sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees. I want to place on record the disgraceful way in which all the trade unions were treated over consultation. Before the Bill was introduced, no substantive replies were received to the letters which were sent to the Government about abolition.

The effects of abolishing an authority in one year will be devastating. Anyone who had anything to do with the creation of the metropolitan counties or the GLC knows that there are still staffing arguments going back to the pre-1964 period. There are still protected conditions for former employees of the Middlesex county council who now work for the GLC. The same sort of problems exist in the metropolitan counties.

If the Government are saying to an organisation that employs 21,000 people that it must cease to exist within the year, the effect of the loss of jobs on the economy of London——

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report Progress.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Local Government Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. — *[Mr. Major.]*

Again considered in Committee.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Corbyn: The effect on staff of the devastation of the GLC and the metropolitan counties will be profound. There are still problems from the 1964 reorganisation and from the transfer of housing functions in 1982.

The Government's offer of a staff commission, which will not protect the interests of the staff, but will act as an agency for the Secretary of State in destroying jobs and creating more unemployment, must be strongly opposed.

The Secretary of State has the temerity to say that he is not getting co-operation from the trade unions. I ask him to think back. There has been no consultation with the trade unions, but we have had from the Secretary of State a high-handed refusal even to offer the same sums as his predecessor offered on the transfer of housing in 1982. Yet the Secretary of State complains that the trade unions are unco-operative.

The Government just managed to win a vote yesterday. Any other Government who lost so many votes in a Division would have resigned. From now on, the abolition procedures will be met with the strongest possible resistance by those employed in the metropolitan counties who are not prepared to see jobs and services destroyed.

The Government are not even prepared to say how much abolition will cost in terms of lost services, unemployment benefit, redundancy pay and other crucial matters. Yet they have the temerity to attack people who have given their working lives to the GLC and the metropolitan counties.

Some people at county hall can remember the present Secretary of State for Education and Science visiting them in 1963 and telling them that London county council employees had nothing to fear from the establishment of the GLC and that it would provide continuity of employment. Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to talk to employees who have been at county hall for 40 years or more and say, "Your future is secure. You can pick up your redundancy cheque in six months' time?" That is all that the Government are prepared to offer to people who have given good service for so long to London and the metropolitan counties.

The Government may try to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties in six months, but I predict that they will not succeed, because of the opposition throughout London, the opposition of individual workers and trade

[Mr. Corbyn]

unions in those authorities and the opposition that will be mounted in this House and in another place. From now on, it is downhill for the Government as they try to destroy democracy and so many of the things that democracy in London and the metropolitan counties has provided.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): Only fleetingly have the amendments under discussion been touched on in the past three quarters of an hour, and I am not in the least surprised about that, because on two amendments the Labour party has not voted when opportunities have been provided for it to vote to keep the GLC and the metropolitan counties. On those two crucial amendments, they abstained.

We have made it clear from the outset that we intend the abolition of these authorities to take place on 1 April 1986. This was stated in the White Paper and the Bill has been introduced, as promised, early in this Session in line with the timetable that we proposed.

The hon. Members for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox) have argued that more time is needed to put our plans into effect, but I do not agree. The boroughs and districts are already fully functioning local authorities—this contrasts with the situation in 1963-65 and 1972-74 when all the successor bodies were new authorities created by the Bill. Thus, the bodies taking over most of the tasks of the GLC and MCCs are in place and can begin planning for the transfer from an early stage. The fact that some of them are not doing so at the moment is regrettable, but I am sure that all authorities will be able to make adequate preparations for the changeover.

The new joint authorities will be formally in place from September 1985, with adequate time to prepare their budgets for 1986. Again, there is nothing to prevent the borough and district members who make up those authorities from meeting at an earlier stage to give preliminary thought to their needs.

Labour Members are proposing amendments that would introduce unnecessary delay and increase uncertainty for the staff concerned. The GLC and the MCCs would no doubt continue their obstructionist behaviour. If they were given another year to live, we should have to submit to yet another year's advertising from Mr. Livingstone, and another £10 million or ratepayers' money being wasted. My hon. Friends would not accept that. The timetable that was set out is workable, so I ask my hon. Friends to reject these amendments.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 46, in page 1, line 15, at end add—

'(3) On the abolition date there shall be established for each metropolitan county and for Greater London a body corporate to be known by the name of that county with the addition of he words "Precepting Authority" or to be known as the Greater London Precepting Authority, as the case may be.

(4) The authorities established by subsection (3) above shall consist of members elected by the local government electors of the metropolitan county or Greater London, as the case may be, in accordance with this Act and the Representation of the People Act 1983.

(5) The authorities established by subsection (3) above may in respect of any financial year, or part year, beginning with the abolition date issue precepts to the appropriate rating authority for the levying of rates to meet, to the extent the authority considers reasonable in all the circumstances, the expenditure of the bodies or persons or joint committees (other than directly elected bodies) to whom functions are transferred by this Act.'. —*[Mr. Straw.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 157, Noes 280.

Division No. 54] **[10.08 pm**

AYES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive

Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Roland Boyes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hooson, Tom
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 277, Noes 156.

Division No. 55] **[10.20 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bendall, Vivian
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hooson, Tom
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Crowther, Stan

Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill (clause 1) reported without amendment; to lie upon the Table.

Mrs. Mundiya (Ombudsman's Report)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Lang.*]

10.32 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The report by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration — the ombudsman — into a complaint that I submitted on behalf of my constituent, Mrs. Yasmin Mundiya of Bradford, in July last year, published at the end of last month, is extremely critical of senior officers in the immigration service and senior Home Office officials. The ombudsman concluded:

> "As my investigation has shown, there were a number of deficiencies in the Home Office's handling of this affair and their overall performance fell far short of what sound administration requires. I was particularly dismayed by their evident unwillingness to acknowledge that a mistake had been made and by their apparent lack of concern for Mrs. Mundiya."

The ombudsman added:

> "I cannot of course quantify what damage has been caused to Mrs. Mundiya's reputation in the community in which she lives by the Home Office's error in wrongly stating in correspondence with a Member of Parliament that they had originally regarded her marriage as one of convenience. I am prepared to accept, however, that the reporting of this fact by the local press will have caused her and her family distress and that nothing short of an apology by the Home Office will put the record straight and remedy the injustice which she has sustained. I am glad to say that the Principal Officer of the Department, through me, offers his apologies to Mrs. Mundiya, both for the distress caused by their error and for the inordinate delay in replying to her letter of 8 October 1982."

Anyone familiar with the language normally used by the ombudsman will recognise that his strictures in this report are unusually severe, and no fair-minded person would be surprised by that, for what we are concerned with in this report is not some inconsequential clerical or administrative error. It is a case where, when the grounds on which the immigration service was proposing to deport Mrs. Mundiya's husband from the United Kingdom were crumbling, under pressure of representations from outside, senior immigration officers and Home Office officials sought to conceal and cover up their failure to sustain the grounds on which they had sought to deport him by claiming, quite wrongly, that Mrs. Mundiya's marriage was a marriage of convenience.

That deliberate falsehood was inserted in a draft letter from the then Minister of State at the Home Office to send to the then Member of Parliament for Bradford, West. Inevitably, the falsehood was publicised in the local press, causing Mrs. Mundiya deep personal embarrassment and distress following the predictable reaction of many in her own community who had been led to believe, quite deliberately, that Mrs. Mundiya had sought to have her husband removed by saying that her marriage was a marriage of convenience.

Mrs. Mundiya wrote to the Home Office asking for an explanation in October 1982. Mr. Chris Brion, an immigration officer at Hull, aware of the falsity of the claim publicised by the local media in Bradford, asked his superiors for an explanation to be given to Mrs. Mundiya. A second immigration officer, Mr. John Scott, also based in Hull, who came into contact with Mrs. Mundiya quite independently, also asked his superiors for an explanation to be given to Mrs. Mundiya. All those requests were to no avail. Mr. Brion was even told that it was inappropriate for the local newspaper reports to be corrected, and, so that

[Mr. Max Madden]

he got the message, he was firmly reminded that the immigration service rule book forbids immigration officers from talking to the media.

Mr. Brion is a very experienced immigration officer —he has been in the immigration service for 15 years. During the time he was pressing his superiors for Mrs. Mundiya to be told why her marriage had been described by a Minister as a marriage of convenience, Mr. Brion was requested to transfer from Hull to Dover, despite having serious domestic circumstances making such a transfer exceptionally unwelcome, and, despite the fact that transfer by immigration officers, unsolicited, and over such a distance, is most unusual. Prior to the requested transfer, both Mr. Brion and Mr. Scott had been removed from inquiry work, and when Mr. Brion failed to report to Dover, as instructed, he was dismissed. Mr. Scott has since resigned from the immigration service.

In a letter to me, published on the day that the ombudsman's report was made available, Mr. Brion said:

"The PCA's report shows that the official responsible for the first false statement in the Mudiya case was the Chief Inspector in charge of the Immigration Service. On receiving a forensic report he decided that the original case against Mr. Mundiya could not be maintained; but because he was conducting a political feud against the Bradford Law Centre, and did not want them to be able to claim a victory, he recommended Mr. Mundiya's removal on different and very questionable grounds. It was when this suggestion was rejected by B3 Division of the Home Office that he invented the story of a 'marriage of convenience' to rationalise Mr. Mundiya's detention.

When Mr. Scott and I pressed him to tell the truth he manufactured counter allegations to coerce us into keeping quiet and to discredit us . . .

In an interview which I tape recorded the Chief Inspector's deputy"—

Mr. Peter Saunders, now retired—

"admitted that the action taken against me was in consequence of my wanting the deception exposed. He also admitted that lying to Members of Parliament is a Home Office tactic:

'On the file it says quite clearly it was a mistake . . . now it's quite a different matter to go back to the MP and say, "Dear Mr. ——, we've made a terrible mistake, sorry." You try and fudge it a bit to get away with it. If we could get away with not admitting we'd made a mistake then so much the better.'"

The ombudsman's report reveals disturbing information about the attitudes and behaviour of senior immigration service and Home Office officials. I should like to quote from another letter that I have received since the ombudsman's report was published, from Mr. John Scott. He says:

"Finally, the Ombudsman's report indicates that there are serious things wrong with the way in which the Immigration Service is being run, by people who are prepared to subvert their powers to suppress embarrassing material, to put junior officers in fear of doing their duty, and to persuade senior ones to change their minds to suit their demands. The distress which such malpractices can cause to innocent members of the public is incalculable."

It is clear from the report, the correspondence and other information that I have received that the conduct of immigration policy is seen by senior officials of the immigration service and Home Office officials as a political battleground where those who represent and support those facing removal and deportation are seen as political enemies to be defeated.

The Home Office also receives political intelligence from the special branch. I quote from the report of a special branch sergeant, Home Office file reference M394273/2 Mundiya, to an acting inspector at Hull immigration office. It says:

"Just a few of the many cuttings that have been appearing in the Bradford Telegraph and Argus Newspapers. These have been appearing at an alarming rate in recent weeks and there is little doubt that there is a concerted effort by the Bradford Asian Youth Movement (left Wing), other left Wing Groups, Tim Whitfield (Senior Community Relations Officer) (left Winger and John Salmon (Reporter) to overthrow the Home Office's policy on Deportations and Removals.

I wouldn't be surprised if the money being used for the campaign is being given from Bradford Community Relations Council's Funds. I was in their office on Monday and the whole wall was covered in literature condemning Deportations and Removals. A lot of money is being spent on the campaign.

I was thinking of sending copies down to Peter Tompkins"— chief inspector of the immigration service—

"just for his information but you can do it if you think it advisable. I have enclosed two copies of each. There have been others, but I think these are the most significant."

As it was a Home Office Minister who claimed that the marriage of my constituent was a marriage of convenience, equity dictates that the Home Secretary and not the permanent secretary should apologise to my constituent.

The Minister should give clear assurances today that the calculated, premeditated damage done to Mrs. Mundiya will be done to no one else and that in the future when the Home Office makes mistakes senior officers will not be permitted to cover up those mistakes by deception.

The public are also entitled to expect that public servants in the Home Office, including immigration officers, will not in future be subjected to victimisation and coercion. Mr. Brion must be reinstated and allowed to put his case to an independent inquiry. Both he and Mr. Scott have been denied the opportunity to put their case at disciplinary hearings within their service. That is the minimum that is owed to Mr. Brion, and I regret that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were unable to agree to my request some time ago to defer Mr. Brion's transfer until the ombudsman's report was published, notwithstanding the statutory restrictions preventing the ombudsman from inquiring into personnel matters.

There is hardly a black or Asian family in my constituency which does not have a complaint about how it or a relative or friend has been dealt with under the United Kingdom immigration and nationality laws, which are fundamentally racist and sexist. Every family has a member who has experienced problems with the immigration laws, rules and procedures, which they know are deliberately designed to exclude as many black and Asian people from Britain as possible, whether they come for settlement, as dependent relatives, for marriage, for study or just to visit.

When the immigration service and the Home Office deceive, conceal, manipulate and cover up laws, rules and procedures which are already deliberately designed to exclude people on the basis of colour and sex, outrage is compounded. And when the immigration service and the Home Office are caught in the act of deceiving, concealing, manipulating and covering up, as the ombudsman's report makes so vividly clear, all hopes of building a multi-racial Britain with good and progressive community relations are seriously damaged.

The fears, the suspicions, and the resentment that burns in the black and Asian community in Bradford and throughout Britain about the barriers put in the way of black and Asian people coming to this country will

intensify so long as they have no reasonable expectation that the present unjust, racist and sexist immigration and nationality laws can be swept away democratically and so long as those charged with administering the present laws, rules and procedures blatantly act in a highly political way to ensure that political victories are won at whatever price against people like my constituent, Mrs. Yasmin Mundiya.

10.44 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) is absolutely right to raise on the Floor of the House the matter of the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, although his speech had, in the event, very little to do with it. Any complaint of maladministration must be taken seriously, and when a complaint is upheld by the Parliamentary Commissioner it is certainly the duty of the Department concerned to do all that it can to prevent a repetition of what occurred.

There are one or two things that must be made absolutely plain, in view of the hon. Gentleman's speech, lest anyone should be misled into believing that what happened in this case is an indictment of immigration control, let alone the control operated since the Conservative Government came into office in 1979. It should be quite apparent from the facts that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—I am glad that he is in the Chamber—was at best careless in his language, and at worst somewhat disingenuous, when, the other day, he talked of what had happened as having stemmed

"from policies laid down by Ministers—policies which many of us regard as racist." [*Official Report*, 29 November 1984; Vol. 68 c. 1118.]

The events described could not, of course, have occurred if we had had no immigration laws, but the immigration law that formed the background to the case was precisely the same law as that operated by the Labour Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member. If the policies embodied in that legislation are racist, they must have been racist when the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister. For once the right hon. Gentleman was being unfair to himself as well as others, for the rules were not racist then any more than they are racist now.

The other point that needs to be made right at the outset — I cannot say that I remember its having been mentioned by the hon. Gentleman in his speech—is that in 1979 the Home Office granted Mr. Mundiya indefinite leave to remain here. He was given leave to stay here permanently. That would have been the end of the matter so far as the Home Office was concerned, but for one thing. In December 1981 Mrs. Mundiya telephoned the immigration service in Hull, saying that her husband had left her and that he should not be allowed to stay in the country any longer.

I am somewhat surprised that the hon. Gentleman never thought fit to mention a word of that. The story starts, not with an investigation by the Home Office, but with an allegation by Mrs. Mundiya.

Let us consider what is in the Parliamentary Commissioner's report, rather than what was not in it. There are two specific criticisms in the report. The first is that the Home Office failed to appreciate that the term "marriage of convenience", which appeared in a letter written to the then hon. Member for Bradford, West, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), could cause Mrs. Mundiya and her family distress. That criticism has been accepted by the Home Office, and apologies have been offered. The other criticism is that the immigration service took too long to answer a letter which Mrs. Mundiya had written asking why it had been decided that her husband should be allowed to remain here when she clearly wanted him out of the country. That, too, has been accepted, and again apologies have been offered. However, the use of those findings by the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Gorton as the basis for a virulent attack on the immigration service, the Home Office and immigration policies generally seems to show no more than that the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Gentleman have lost all sense of proportion.

The hon. Gentleman has, of course, mentioned another rather different matter—the fact that two immigration officers involved in the Mundiya case have made allegations of victimisation by senior management. The PCA makes it clear in his report that it is no part of his function to deal with these allegations and it would be entirely wrong for me to spend over much time dealing with them tonight. All I need say is that last July—the hon. Gentleman did not mention this either, if I remember correctly—the Home Office appointed a senior official from outside the immigration and nationality department to investigate the officers' allegations, but the two men declined to meet the official or to put their case to him until the PCA's report on Mrs. Mundiya was available. Now that it is available, I hope that the investigating officer will soon be able to get on with his inquiries, that the two officers will co-operate with him, and that the hon. Gentleman will encourage them to do so.

I shall now return to the facts of Mrs. Mundiya's case, Mrs. Mundiya married her husband, a citizen of Pakistan, in this country in May 1978, but the marriage did not give him an immediate right to remain here permanently. The Labour Government of the day had introduced a one-year probationary period for foreign husbands and the rules introduced by that Government said that that time limit on a foreign husband's stay would not be removed and that leave to remain would not be granted if the Secretary of State had reason to believe that the marriage was one of convenience entered into primarily to obtain settlement here or if one of the parties no longer had any intention of living with the other.

In June 1979, however, Mr. Mundiya applied for indefinite leave to remain on the basis of his marriage. On the strength of a letter which, on the face of it, had been signed by Mrs. Mundiya, and which suggested that the parties were living together at Mrs. Mundiya's parent address, the Home Office granted the application.

Then in December 1981, came Mrs. Mundiya's telephone call. What she said must have caused great surprise to the immigration service. Here was Mrs. Mundiya asking for the conditions of her husband's stay to be curtailed when, on the face of it, she had, by a letter back in 1979, been instrumental in getting him permanent settlement. Clearly something was wrong, and there was cause for investigation. Mrs. Mundiya had to be seen, and when she was seen she said that the letter did not bear her signature and that, at the time it was written, she had not been living with her husband. In November 1978, she said, he had gone off to live with his brothers.

[Mr. David Waddington]

Mr. Mundiya was then interviewed, but he said that, although it was true he had not been living with his wife at the time, the letter was genuine. She had signed it.

The House will realise that, had it been known that Mr. and Mrs. Mundiya were no longer living together when the letter was written, Mr. Mundiya's application for indefinite leave to remain as a foreign husband would have been refused under the rules passed by the Labour Government. The letter, therefore, was seen as a deception and the leave to remain which had been granted a nullity. This led to the decision that Mr. Mundiya be detained as an illegal entrant pending his removal to Pakistan.

The circumstances surrounding Mr. Mundiya's detention as an illegal entrant and his release soon after are the subject of a separate investigation by the PCA and it would not be proper for me to comment on Mr. Mundiya's case now except in so far as is necessary to explain his wife's position. Clearly relevant to the present matter is the fact that, when representations were made on Mr. Mundiya's behalf with pleas that he should not be removed from the country, those representations included a letter from the Bradford law centre which suggested that the immigration officer who had been investigating his case had been on such good terms with Mrs. Mundiya and her father that he had found it impossible to be objective.

In the light of that, it was decided that Mr. Mundiya should be released while further inquiries were made and while the allegation was investigated by a senior officer unconnected with the case. It was decided also that the signature on the letter should be submitted for forensic examination. The senior officer carried out his investigation and concluded that the immigration officer had not been biased, but forensic examination of the letter revealed that the signature probably was Mrs. Mundiya's, and as a result my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury, who is now the Minister for Overseas Development, wrote to the then hon. Member for Bradford, West saying that it was now accepted that there was no intention on Mr. Mundiya's part to decieve the Home Office, and that accordingly Mr. Mundiya's leave to remain was not viewed as a nullity and he had been released.

The Parliamentary Commissioner's report shows, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, that the representations made on Mr. Mundiya's behalf were taken extremely seriously by the Home Office and dealt with speedily, leading to his release. Whether in those circumstances, and in the light of the fact that Mr. Mundiya's case is now being investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner, the hon. Gentleman was wise to talk as he did the other day of senior officers having made a mistake in attempting to remove him from the country, I know not. We must wait for the commissioner's findings to decide that. However, I know that it was thoroughly irresponsible of the hon. Gentleman to seek the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10 on 29 November and, at column 1117, claim that the officers tried to cover up what had happened by asserting that the marriage was one of convenience. There is nothing whatsoever in the report which we are debating to lead to that conclusion.

It is, of course, conceded that a mistake was made in my right hon. Friend's letter of 17 September. The letter was right to explain that Mr. Mundiya was detained because it was believed that his leave to remain had been vitiated by deception, but it was a mistake to say that evidence had emerged that the marriage was one of convenience. It mystifies me, however, how the hon. Gentleman can allege, as he did on 29 November, that the phrase was inserted in the letter to cover up the alleged mistake in trying to remove Mr. Mundiya.

There was no need to allege a marriage of convenience in order to explain Mr. Mundiya's earlier detention. We all know why that happened. It is rather preposterous to talk of a cover-up when it is plain that when the former hon. Member for Bradford, West produced further evidence about Mr. Mundiya's marriage it was immediately investigated and acted upon and Mr. Mundiya was released.

So there it is. The facts speak for themselves. The other day the hon. Gentleman talked of the Home Office viewing immigration as a political battlefield. It is he who has tried to create a battle, but he seems tonight to be short of troops. There is no glory here for him and there is certainly no shame to be attached to the immigration service, which had to deal with a difficult case where the parties were at odds. The immigration service and the Home Office did their best in those circumstances to be even-handed.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The Minister's reply was disgraceful. He has not accepted ministerial responsibility for what was done by his Department's servants. One would think that the ombudsman had never issued a report critical in the most stringent terms of malpractice within the immigration service. The least one would have expected from anyone but him——

Mr. Waddington *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: No, I shall not give way. The least one would have expected would have been an unqualified apology from the Minister for what was done by his servants.

Mr. Waddington: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman has risen in the last moment or two of the debate to make a statement which he must know is completely incorrect. In the first words of my speech I said that I accepted the criticisms made by the Parliamentary Commissioner and that we in the Home Office had consequently apologised to Mrs. Mundiya.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. That is a matter for argument, not a point of order.

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister did not apologise, but merely said that apologies had been made. His characteristically squalid speech confirms every critical statement made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), with which I fully associate the Labour Front Bench. The Minister's attitude towards immigration and racial matters is a reflection of the inherent racism of the Government——

Mr. Waddington: Has the right hon. Gentleman read the report?

Mr. Kaufman: Yes, my hon. Friend gave me a copy. He deserves every credit for representing his constituents and all the ethnic minorities, who clearly can expect neither justice nor decency from the Home Office.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 14 December 1984

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Torture

9.35 am

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): I beg to ask leave to present a petition signed by 2,000 residents of the Welwyn Hatfield constituency and neighbouring areas, who are registering their strong support for the campaign against torture organised by Amnesty International. My petitioners wish to see torture totally eradicated from the world.

I very much share the concerns expressed by my constituents and wish to be fully associated with this petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Embryos

9.36 am

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): I beg to ask leave to present a petition signed by 1,000 residents of the Welwyn Hatfield constituency and neighbouring areas, who are responding to the Government's invitation to comment on the Warnock committee report via the Life organisation. My petitioners welcome the report's statement that

"The status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation",

and its recommendation that

"the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law."

I very much share the concerns expressed by my constituents and wish to be fully associated with this petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I beg to ask leave to present on behalf of over 2,000 of my constituents in the city of Cambridge a petition concerning the protection of the human embryo, which concludes with the words:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

I wish to associate myself strongly in sympathy with my constituents' petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of 2,500 of my constituents in Slough. It is in similar terms to those presented by my hon. Friends the Members for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) and for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James). The petition concludes:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

When I was lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, in the recent debate in the House on the Warnock report, I made it clear that I support fully the sentiments expressed in the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I beg to ask leave to present a petition about the protection of the human embryo. I associate myself strongly with the terms of the petition, the final paragraph of which reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on the protection of the human embryo in the same terms as those already presented.

My petition is signed by 1,635 residents in and around the Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency. The petitioners refer to the statement in the Warnock report:

"The status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation".

My petitioners seek legislation in the terms already described to give the human embryo that protection.

It is my hope that such legislation will be before the House in this Session and that I shall be able to sponsor and support it.

To lie upon the Table.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of a large number of my constituents in south-west Cambridgeshire with which I agree and in which my constituents pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray etc.

The famous Bourn Hall clinic is in my constituency. It is known throughout the world. About 300 babies have been born there as a result of fertilisation in vitro to men and women who otherwise would have had no chance of having their own children. Work is done there to avert the birth of abnormal babies through inherited defects. That work does not always receive the attention that it deserves. The Bourn Hall clinic welcomes the Warnock report and agrees that the embryo of the human species should be protected by law, as do I and my petitioners.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I beg to ask leave to present two petitions relating to the Warnock report on behalf of a large number of my constituents in Cliftonville,

[Mr. Roger Gale]

Margate, Whitbrook, Herne Bay and Herne village. The petition was collected by Mrs. J. Kruger of Margate, and Mrs. Joyce Thompson of Herne Bay.

The petitions are similar to those already presented. I draw attention particularly to the phrase in the petition:

> The status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation.

The petition also recommends that

> the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law.

That has my full support.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I beg to ask leave to present a petition signed by residents of the Stafford constituency in response to the Government's request for comments on the Warnock report. I totally agree with the contents of the petition, as I said in the debate on the Warnock report. The petition prays that

> the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any proceeding which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned). And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg to ask leave to present five petitions on the protection of the human embryo in the names of Mary B. Barry of 36 Highview road, Ealing, W13, and 1,213 of my constituents, Julie and Carole Taylor of 35 Jubilee road, Perivale, Greenford which contains a large number of signatures, J. J. Bateson of 104 Barnmouth avenue, Perivale which contains many signatures, Mrs. and Miss Meakins of 64 Greenford avenue, W7, Pastor Stephen Bickley of the International Presbyterian church, Drayton Green, Ealing, W13, and Mr. Clive Bishop of 43 Eastmead avenue, Greenford, of the Knights of St. Columba, St. John Fisher church, Perivale.

I have spoken in the House previously but briefly saying that life is sacred, being in the image of God, from the moment of conception and therefore should not in any circumstances be violated by man. I therefore associate myself strongly with my constituents whose petition states:

> Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray etc.

I hope for early legislation along those lines.

To lie upon the Table.

Rates Act 1984

9.46 am

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of over 30,000 people of the London borough of Greenwich, in which they pray that

> your honourable House repeals the Rates Act 1984.

Under that Act, the Greenwich borough council is subject to rate capping on the ground that it is unduly extravagant and that the ratepayers need protection from unnecessary spending. However, the petitioners, most of whom are ratepayers, plead that that is not true since the members of the council are directly elected by the people of Greenwich, and therefore are accountable to them for the decisions that they make. Moreover, they contend that the Rates Act is damaging to the people and the services of their borough, many of which are run to meet the needs of the elderly, the disabled, the sick and the poor of the borough. The petitioners believe that such vulnerable people will suffer as a consequence of rate capping and that 1,000 employees of the council will lose their employment as a result of it.

Above all, the petitioners say that the borough has lost tens of millions of pounds of rate support grant and ask for that money to be restored to them. The petition states:

> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House repeals the Rates Act 1984 and restores the tens of millions of pounds taken from our Rate Support Grant. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

I should like very strongly to associate myself with the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Homeless Persons (Accommodation)

9.47 am

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I beg to move,

That this House, in view of the appalling conditions, harassment, exploitation and high fire risks in houses of multiple occupation, calls upon the Government to introduce legislation to regulate conditions and charges in such houses; further to make single payments available for all claimants obtaining unfurnished accommodation; to review its latest proposals for board and lodgings payments; and to increase the provision of secure rented accommodation by local authorities and housing associations.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to initiate a debate on a subject which concerns all hon. Members. During the past five years there has been a sustained increase in the number of people who are forced to use board and lodging houses. In 1979 all or part of the boarding charges for 41,000 households were paid for by supplementary benefit. The number had risen to 139,000 by 1984, according to official Department of Health and Social Security figures.

Today I shall demonstrate the need to introduce legislation to regulate conditions and charges in houses of multiple occupation which I shall refer to as HMOs. I shall deal in particular with harassment—young women being pressurised to provide sexual gratification to landlords in exchange for rent reductions; exploitation—residents are sometimes forced to sign over their benefit giros to management under threat of assault; fire risk—there are 10 times more chances of being in a fire in an HMO than in self-contained accommodation; conditions — which can be bad physically; and the food provided. I shall also comment on the furniture grant system and the Government's recent proposals being considered by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

First, I shall deal with the conditions that prevail in many boarding houses which can be classified as HMOs. The Institute of Environmental Health Officers estimates that about 85 per cent. of HMOs in England and Wales fall well below the minimum housing standards, as laid down by various Acts. From my local knowledge, I know that much boarding accommodation is used by unemployed people and is characterised by damp bedrooms, inadequate heating, overcrowded washing facilities and the enforced sharing of rooms with strangers, sometines even with members of the opposite sex. There is inadequate maintenance which constitutes a health and safety hazard, with cases of bad wiring, broken windows and defective plasterwork. There are examples of poor quality food provided by the owners, and, in general, poor maintenance standards.

A report on Newcastle HMOs was published in April this year by an organisation in my area. Its authors included local authority representatives. The report gave the views of 62 residents of 13 establishements within the DHSS board and lodging limit. According to the report, half the residents complained of damp bedrooms, and more than half found the rooms too cold. Only one in five had exclusive use of a hand basin, and some residents had to share a bathroom with between 10 and 20 others. One resident in four compained about the food. They complained of tiny quantities and in some cases of food poisoning. Some so-called hotels did not even provide food, and, although full hotel services were charged for, the residents had to wash their own bed linen. Another factor of great concern is the lack of fire precautions in such places. According to the latest figures from official Government sources, 600 people were killed in fires in HMOs between 1978 and 1982. Residents in such accommodation are 10 times more likely to die or to be seriously injured than people living in self-contained accommodation.

Three weeks ago, on 20 November, there was a fire at a bed-and-breakfast establishment in Camden owned by a company called London Lets, the proprietor of which is Mr. J. Doniger. On 3 December, Salman Rushdie, an author of some renown, wrote an article in *The Guardian* in which he described the situation in the house at the time of the fire:

"When it started, no alarm rang. It had been switched off. The fire extingishers were empty. The fire exits were blocked. It was night time but the stairs were in darkness because there were no bulbs in the lighting sockets. And in the single, cramped top floor room, where the cooker was next to the bed, Mrs. Abdul Karim, a Bangladeshi woman, and her 5 year old son and 3 year old daughter died of suffocation."

All hon. Members would agree that the conditions were disgraceful and outrageous, yet a local councillor has estimated that the cost of housing such a family in that accommodation was £280 a week. As Mr. Rushdie commented, death traps are not always economical.

I am critical of the Secretary of State for the Environment for not adding to the statutory order requiring all local authorities to inspect all HMOs with three or more storeys and a gross floor space of more than 500 sq m. Only 2 per cent. of HMOs are of that type. The majority of those who have died in fires were living in smaller establishments.

Chris Holmes, the respected director of the Campaign for the Homeless and Rootless, told Nick Fielding in an article in *London Housing*:

"The fire at Glouscester Place tragically shows the need for there to be a legal duty on local authorities to inspect this kind of property. If an HMO Act had existed that family need not have died".

In September 1983 the DOE asked local authority associations and others whether the existing minimum protection should be extended. However, as late as July 1984, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who I am glad to see in his place, said:

"The implications of any extension in the scope of the existing order are receiving careful study. My right hon. Friend will make a statement as soon as this is completed."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. *539*.]

That statement is long overdue. It is urgently needed. I ask the Minister to urge his right hon. Friend to make a statement to the House in early 1985, because the Under-Secretary informed my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mr. Golding) in January 1984 that consultation had been completed.

The consultation, therefore, had been completed a year ago. I have a catalogue of replies to letters and parliamentary questions which record the way in which the matter has been continually delayed throughout 1984.

The Government should also introduce legislation on conditions in multi-occupied housing, because there is clear evidence of the failure of the bewildering array of housing and public health Acts and circulars to make any significant impact on conditions in such accommodation. For example, in 1982, on an estimated 145,000 substandard HMOs, local authorities served only 627 repair notices, 1,414 notices about basic amenities, 651 closing orders and about 4,000 management orders. Only

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

in 17 cases did the local authorities take control of HMOs because the health, safety and welfare of residents were at risk.

In June this year, a major report by the Institution of Environmental Health Officers revealed:

"Few local authorities throughout the country have a comprehensive approach . . . or even a coherent policy".

It is clear that existing legislation is inadequate and ineffectual in requiring local authorities to maintain proper standards in HMOs. However, the Government still insist that there is no need for new legislation. They consistently failed to support the HMO Bill that was before the House at the time of the general election.

Residents of HMOs suffer harassment and financial exploitation. Through my contacts with residents in board and lodging accommodation in the north-east and with the agencies concerned with their circumstances, I can vouch for the existence of systematic harassment of residents by landlords in many establishments. Residents are forced to hand over their benefit giros for cashing by the management, under threat of assault. Landlords' "heavies" wait at offices to catch residents receiving personal issue giros and ensure that the giros are signed over to the management. Residents are threatened or assaulted for complaining about standards of food.

Especially disturbing is the evidence of sexual harassment of women residents by landlords. Pressure is put on women to provide sexual gratification for landlords in return for rent reductions or in lieu of eviction when benefit giros are delayed.

These occurrences are not hearsay. I am aware of sworn affidavits from residents supporting such allegations, and I have been supplied with written and signed statements by other residents. I shall not apologise to hon. Members for reading extracts from three such statements. The first statement is from Mr. C:

"Whilst I was resident in a b & b establishment in Newcastle, I saw first hand how the landlord would physically hurt some of his tenants and how he sexually harassed some of the female residents by way of suggestions of other ways to pay the rent."

There is also a statement from a young female whom I shall call Miss X:

"When I moved to an annex I thought I would be safe because there were other young girls living there. I soon found out that the owner was coming to see these girls who had a special arrangement with the owner, one girl was short of money and was foolish to borrow money from him which she could not afford to pay back. The only way to pay him was on one or two visits a week from him. She used to hide in my room or run out the back door when the owner was visiting the building. He offered me a loan. When I said no, he offered me enough money to see me through till my giro came. For this he told me I had only had to use my hand to satisfy his needs. I objected to this, and when I knew he was visiting I used to lock my door, or go out."

My final quotation on this subject is a statement by someone to whom I shall refer as Mr. B. He said:

"I have seen a bed covered in excrement and soaking wet, and the landlord's remarks were, 'turn it over—they won't know'. If you were lucky enough to get good sheets you hung onto them like they were gold. You took them to the laundry and cleaned them yourself. You would not dare to complain as the landlord would put you onto the street, or his bullyboy mate would call to see you late at night and he had keys to get into any room or building that he wants to get into. Young girls would run out the back door or hide in the wardrobes when the landlord called as he always 'had something to discuss with them'. But I could go on for hours about the things that go on in these bed and breakfast establishments. People go into these places as a stepping stone to their own house or flat and they end up in prison. I was lucky, I escaped!"

I hope that the House found those accounts as harrowing to hear as I did to read them. They are representative of the evidence that I have been given in preparation for the debate. They are not exaggerated and I assure the House that, given time, I could have read or mentioned much more harrowing events.

It is regrettable that residents in such accommodation have virtually no security of tenure and no redress against such harrassment. I should like to pay tribute to Newcastle city council which is so worried about what is happening in its area that it has guaranteed that any resident who is evicted for complaining or campaigning about conditions will be rehoused.

I shall now consider costs. Board and lodging provides a lucrative business for landlords who have cashed in on the growing homelessness. DHSS expenditure on keeping people in such accommodation has soared recently. In 1979, about £52 million was spent each year and the predicted sum for 1984 is £380 million. It might rise even higher. Such expenditure cannot be equated with any notion of value for money, bearing in mind the conditions that residents have to endure. Such expenditure guarantees the wealth of landlords, however. One Newcastle landlord is estimated to have a gross annual income of £160,000 a year from six properties. According to a competent group of researchers in the north-east, that is by no means exceptional.

I am worried about the Government's proposal to curb expenditure. The current proposals which are with the Social Security Advisory Committee will do nothing to prevent harrassment, nothing to reduce profiteering and nothing to improve conditions in HMOs. On 29 November, the Secretary of State issued a paper, the theme of which was that expenditure needed to be brought under control. During 1983, there was a massive increase in expenditure from about £200 million to £380 million a year. If my figures are not quite what the Government think they are, I am sure that the Minister will correct me. I understand that the cost is projected to increase by a further 125 per cent. during 1984-85. That would take the total to more than £500 million. If the new arrangements are brought into operation on 1 April 1985, Shelter—another highly respected pressure group—predicts that there will be more homeless people on the streets.

It is interesting that we are discussing this topic on the eve of Christmas. The slogan "Crisis at Christmas" is deeply relevant to the people who live in the type of acommodation of which I am speaking. They have virtually no security of tenure and some of them may find themselves on the streets during Christmas. It is certain that, unless the Secretary of State modifies his proposals, many people will suffer dire and serious consequences.

I shall not read all the Secretary of State's proposals but shall select a few that will have a serious effect. One is his proposal to limit benefit ceilings of £60 to £70 a week in London and £50 to £60 outside London. That would cut the amount of benefit received without there being any effect on the charge made for accommodation by rent regulations. Few landlords will drop their charges, so residents will be forced to pay rent out of their meal and personal allowance or move to cheaper accommodation, if such a thing is available. If they can find such

accommodation, I have no doubt that it will be even more inferior. The choice could be between starving or moving. Some people might have to do both.

The DHSS's proposal states that the new limits may mean that, in some expensive places such as central London, claimants will have to accept only basic shared accommodation or live in cheaper areas. However, if residents look for accommodation elsewhere, they will quickly cease to receive any benefit, because the Government propose to limit board and lodging payments for people who move to accommodation outside their local DHSS office area, after two or four weeks. After that time, benefit will not be paid. We are all anxious about young people in these difficult social and economic times and yet they are to be especially penalised by the proposals. To 16 and 17-year-olds in boarding accommodation, the Government propose to pay only the non-householder rate of benefit, which will inevitably be less than the charge made. It is about £17. I am pleased to see the Minister for Housing and Construction nodding agreement.

If introduced, the proposals will have several effects. First, by reducing the amounts payable for lodgings, they will force claimants into worse accommodation. Overcrowding will therefore be increased and the availability of better quality accommodation will be drastically reduced. The already critical problem of residents in boarding accommodation will be made even worse. Secondly, people will be forced to move but if they move into another DHSS office area—there are several such areas in many towns and cities — they will be entitled to benefit for an extremely short time. Presumably they will then be forced penniless on to the streets. I cannot believe that even the present Government have that intention.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I understand that hostels and night shelters are not exempt from the limits and that some may have to close down because of the reduction in incomes from residents. The Government have encouraged housing associations to enter agreements with local voluntary organisations to set up hostel projects for homeless people. Many such projects in Wales, for example, will not be able to continue if the proposals are implemented. I ask the Government to re-examine that matter——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I hope that the hon. Lady will be brief—this is an intervention.

Mrs. Clwyd: Perhaps my hon. Friend will ask the Government to re-examine the proposal. Some local authorities such as Swansea city council are to be congratulated on enforcing limits on houses in multiple occupation from 1 January. It is to impose heavy penalties for infringements.

Mr. Boyes: I note what my hon. Friend has said and applaud what Swansea city council has done. I hope that many other authorities will follow its lead.

What I cannot understand is that young people have been singled out for especially harsh treatment. The proposal to pay them even less than the proposed reduced maximum will mean that 16 and 17-year-olds will not be able to use boarding accommodation, despite the lack of alternatives.

In their obsessive pursuit of public expenditure cuts, the Government have either failed to recognise the dramatic social effects of the proposals or are callously ignoring them. I estimate that about 50,000 claimants are likely to be affected by the proposals and forced to live in dangerous and squalid conditions. That can only increase the already serious threat of death or injury from fire, or make them homeless and penniless. If ever there was a charter for a return to conditions experienced by the poor in Victorian times, the Secretary of State has produced it.

I ask the Government seriously to consider the consequences of the proposals that they will seek to introduce early in 1985. I do not think that they have thought out what will happen to our youngsters if the proposals become law.

I object to the notion that is perpetrated that some people are scroungers. The notion that thousands of people, especially youngsters, are living the good life in boarding accommodation at taxpayers' expense underlies the announcement. That is not so. Given the conditions and insecurity and harassment in such accommodation, it is clear that people do not choose to live in it. They are forced to live in it because of a lack of alternatives. They are not happy in it. Hon. Members may be aware of the occupation of Camden town hall by residents of the boarding house to which I referred earlier. They are demanding decent, self-contained housing where they can live normal independent lives. They are calling on the council to empty the boarding houses within six months. To judge by the support and encouragement that they have received for their campaign, they are not alone in that demand.

The Government are well aware of people's views. On Channel 4 in February the Minister for Housing and Construction said of boarding accommodation:

> "It is very expensive, on the whole people don't like it and it's much more economical that people should be in houses or flats or in hostels specially designed for the homeless than in this kind of bed and breakfast accommodation."

If the Minister is correct, why are people forced to accept such accommodation? It is too simplistic to make judgments in terms of abuse and exploitation of the system by young people, as Conservative Members have suggested.

Shelter suggests that the following three points should be considered. First, no mention is made of the impact of youth or adult unemployment on the cohesion of the family. Secondly, no mention is made of the impact of the cutting of the housing addition of £3·10 from the weekly benefit of unemployed young people living in their parent's homes. Thirdly, no mention is made of the effects of denying furniture grants to young people who may be able to acquire a district council or housing association tenancy.

The rule that requires claimants to take suitable furnished accommodation where it is available has forced many young people into board and lodging accommodation. In the long term that is extremely expensive for the DHSS. That seems to fly in the face of Conservative party philosophy.

Homelessness among young people has reached crisis proportions in small towns, cities and conurbations. It is not the result of a rapid growth in the attraction of young people to the so-called bright lights of large cities. In many instances they have been forced to leave home because of the breakdown of relationships with parents. It is no coincidence that that has arisen at a time of record unemployment.

[Mr. Boyes]

The chairman of housing in Newcastle—priority is given to housing all homeless 16 and 17-year-olds—was reported in the *Evening Chronicle* of 26 November as saying:

"These are not runaways with comfortable homes to return to, but are the casualties of the increasing economic pressures on many families, particularly in this region."

There is not one mention of the concept of value for money in the Secretary of State's statement. It is vital for people who live in such accommodation that charges should relate to standards. We are seeking legislation about that.

Many hon. Members are worried about the refusal of the DHSS to make furniture grants available to single people and childless couples moving into unfurnished council houses. Despite dwindling housing resources, some local authorities are attempting to meet the housing needs of residents of boarding houses, but those laudable intentions are being effectively torpedoed by the regulations governing single payments for furniture and household equipment.

Whereas the entitlement to such payments for claimants who are pensioners, sick, or disabled, who have dependent children or who are pregnant, is based on the need for furniture, there are further conditions for single people and childless couples. They must already have been receiving supplementary benefit for six months, and they must also show that there is no suitable alternative furnished accommodation available. That involves obtaining as many as 15 refusals of such accommodation from landlords.

In addition, because the regulations and policy guidance instructions are so complex and tortuous, it is almost impossible for claimants to know whether they qualify. There is evidence from advice centres that many claimants who are entitled to payments receive them only after substantial negotiation and with assistance from advisers and Members of Parliament.

In numerous cases board and lodging accommodation is regarded by the DHSS as being a suitable alternative, despite its insecurity and often appalling conditions. In other instances the homes of parents, friends and relatives where the claimant has been staying are regarded as suitable, even if the claimant has been asked to leave or has been thrown out. That is totally unwarranted discrimination against single people and childless couples. It fails to acknowledge that they have genuine housing needs and no means of providing themselves with furniture.

In many areas the offer of unfurnished accommodation is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity because of the acute shortage of such housing. To be unable to take up a tenancy because of the refusal of a payment for furniture is devastating. It is ironic in the light of the Government's concern about the increasing use of board and lodging accommodation by supplementary benefit claimants that the provisions governing single payments for furniture force many claimants into board and lodging houses. The Government, I am sure, will see the logic of that argument. It does not make economic sense.

Calculations made in the north-east of England show that the DHSS will pay £3,900 a year to keep a single person in boarding accommodation at the current local maximum, as against £2,433 a year for an average council flat, which would mean a saving of £1,500 per person a year. If a grant of £400 a year for furniture was made to enable a person to move into unfurnished accommodation, which he or she will clearly want, the DHSS would still save money and enable that person to live a normal life.

It would even be cheaper to build council houses. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment stated in a written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that the average cost of providing a one-bedroom council flat was less than £17 a week, including subsidy. That is far less than the average board and lodging payment for a single person.

I submit that Government policies are forcing many thousands of people to live in squalid and dangerous conditions — against their will — in which many are likely to die. The profits accruing to landlords represent a misuse of public funds that should be put towards providing housing for rent and grants to assist those on benefit to furnish their accommodation.

I therefore call upon the Government immediately to announce an extension of the fire precaution regulations under schedule 24 of the Housing Act 1980 to all houses in multiple occupation; to introduce legislation to control standards in such housing as provided in the Housing (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Bill 1983; to withdraw recently announced proposals to restrict payments for board and lodgings; to provide furniture grants according to the needs of those on benefits to enable them to furnish newly acquired accommodation; and to amend the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 to afford rights to permanent housing for those single people and childless couples currently excluded from its provisions.

I share the Government's anxiety about board and lodging payments — they line the pockets of a new generation of slum landlords. If real progress is to be made, the cause not the symptoms must be tackled. The system must be amended, not its victims punished even more.

The programme that I have outlined represents a cost-effective and socially responsible response to squalor and exploitation. The Government's response will show whether they seriously want to tackle the problem or simply to continue to increase the misery of those who have no option.

I wish to pay tribute to all those voluntary organisations such as CHAR, Shelter and Single Homeless on Tyneside in Newcastle and others in many parts of the country which are asking the Government to improve the living standards of young people living in such homes. Although I have not mentioned all the organisations by name, I assure them that their views and the documentation that I have received in preparation for this debate have been taken into account. I and my colleagues shall continue to press the Government until the living standards and accommodation that homeless people are entitled to and deserve have been achieved.

10.22 am

Mr. Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): The House should express its thanks to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) for introducing this motion. It includes within it a number of aspects of the problems which are of great interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House. The hon. Gentleman mentioned a number of cases which should worry us. I am sure that if the evidence is available the people involved

will be punished. However, when he has heard what I have to say it will remain to be seen whether he will say that he is pleased that he raised the subject.

I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's motion has arisen out of a move by the Government, which I strongly welcome, to change the present procedure. I thank all the Ministers who have responded quickly to the anxiety which has been expressed in various parts of the country.

I pay tribute to various people in my constituency, who were among the first to bring this matter to light. It subsequently featured fairly loudly in the press. The people to whom I am referring include members of the chamber of commerce, the local council, the district council, the police, local officers of the DHSS and various others who have co-operated by providing figures and information about what has been going on.

Newquay is an extremely attractive, well-known tourist centre, to which many people from all over the country go on holiday. It has attracted an unfortunate element to it, and also publicity arising from the board and lodging allowances. Being highly tourist-oriented, my constituency has a number of establishments which in recent years have gone over to the care of the elderly who are in receipt of supplementary benefit for their board and lodging.

I shall seek to touch on the development of the process which has brought us to the present state of affairs and then to comment more specifically on the proposals which the Government have laid before the House and upon which they seek consultation.

I regret to tell my hon. Friend the Minister that, having thought about the matter deeply and analysed the problem, I am fearful that the Government's proposals will not achieve the results that he hopes, and I urge further changes.

In 1982 the board and lodging allowance for unemployed people and those receiving residential care in nursing homes amounted to £205 million. That figure rose in 1983 to £380 million. It is estimated that during the current year it will be £580 million, of which £380 million goes to those receiving board and lodging allowance.

I congratulate my hon. Friends at the Department of Health and Social Services making it plain that they do not intend to push elderly, disabled or handicapped people out of nursing homes. That would be wrong and reprehensible, but when one considers the present system, it is evident that drastic changes are necessary.

Under the supplementary benefit system, the cost of board, lodging and meals is paid, and there is an extra personal allowance for clothing. In 1983 it became plain that the locally fixed arrangements were getting out of hand, and in November 1983 local DHSS offices were asked to fix maxima for their areas.

I shall cite Newquay as an example. Hon Members on both sides of the House may recall that national publicity was attracted to the fact that many young people were coming from the north-west to take up board and lodging in Newquay and were able to occupy premises there and greatly enhance the amount that they could obtain on benefit. Stories were reported of people coming to Newquay and instead of being able to claim £26·80 as a single person living in accommodation with cooking facilities, they could claim £43·30 for board and lodging and an extra £8·85 for personal expenses. It hit the press that those people were living in that lovely town, not doing any work, and claiming those sums of money.

I responded to that publicity, and the various organisations that I have mentioned took the matter up with the Government. I must confess that I had not realised the circumstances which prevailed across the country. A national scandal has been exposed and the figures show that, far from Newquay being extravagant, the DHSS officials there are among the most frugal and careful with taxpayers' money of any in the country.

At this point I refer hon. Members to a circular entitled "Supplementary Benefit local limits on board and lodging payments to be adopted by the Secretary of State for Social Services under the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Amendment and Temporary Provisions Regulations 1984", a copy of which is in the Library. This document sets out the limits for all towns and areas, including those represented by hon. Members who are present today. I discovered to my amazement that if, in the west country, three young people were discussing their entitlement and one said that he came from Newquay and was claiming £43 a week plus personal clothing allowance and so on, making up to about £52 a week, he would not be getting the most. If the second young man came from Plymouth, he would be able to say that he could claim £55 a week. To my embarrassment, I discovered that the third young man, if he were living in my constituency, in Launceston, would be claiming £65 a week, and receiving it.

There is an extraordinary discrepancy between the amounts that people can claim in various parts of the west country. In London there are just as many discrepancies. For example, somebody claiming benefit in Hendon as an ordinary individual with board and lodging can receive £77 a week. The residential care allowance that can be claimed is £154 a week. The claim for nursing home residence goes down to £110 a week. However, along the road, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), the board and lodging payment is £82·30 per week and residential care is £200 a week, and for a nursing home it is £275 a week.

The figures show that board and lodging payments acros the country stretch from £40 a week to £110 a week. Residential care allowances go from as low as £51 a week to £215 a week and nursing home allowances from £80 a week to £299 a week. If any right hon. or hon. Member can justify that, I should like to hear his reasons.

Various criticisms were made by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington about the way in which the system is working. I shall criticise it from a different point of view. At the moment, it is difficult to check the costs within these homes. Clearly, cartels are being operated between homes. It is interesting to note that there are examples of people going to find out whether there is accommodation for them, particularly in residential care, and being given one price if they are on DHSS benefit and a lower figure if they are paying privately. That is scandalous, and it shows that the Government have to pay far more than is necessary. There is an increasing mix-up between the responsibilities of the councils and those of the DHSS.

In the board and lodging sector in my constituency and elsewhere there have been reports of the most disturbing arrangements, and some prosecutions, of hoteliers and claimants getting into agreements to defeat the system. If the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington is under any illusion, he need not suspect my constituency of being a high-paid area because, quite to the contrary, it is a low-paid area. I say to every Labour Member who sincerely

[Mr. Gerrard Neale]

champions the cause of the low-paid that the indignation among the low-paid in my constituency about the high sums of money being paid to board and lodging claimants is unbelievable. They are very angry. They do not see any justification for this, and they want it to be stopped.

Considerable numbers of young people are coming to my constituency. I have it from various sources that at least 1,000 in Newquay alone have come from the north-west, and recent suggestions are that this figure has risen to over 2,000. A fundamental point needs to be made. The figures show apparently large-scale unemployment in Newquay. In May of this year, for example, in a town of about 17,000 people, 2,071 were unemployed. Only 35 of those were school leavers. An analysis of the figures shows that 52 per cent. of the unemployed males in Newquay are under 29 and 40 per cent. are under 24. It is impossible for Newquay, of its own accord, to have that number of unemployed people.

If any hon. Member disbelieves me, I have here a letter from the local tourist information office, which represents the Newquay hoteliers' and caterers' association, with about 750 establishments. It tells me that, despite the level of unemployment, and despite the fact that every week in the past few weeks as many as two dozen youngsters have been arriving in Newquay, more than 100 vacancies for work have been available in hotels and restaurants in Newquay alone which it has been unable to fill. That is intolerable.

The freeze on the limits is welcome, as are the limits that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is putting on 16 and 17-year-olds. They mean that we have told young people of that age that they should rely on the home, with certain exceptional circumstances which are listed in the consultation paper. It is clear from what my hon. Friend has said that he intends to hear any views, and I am sure that he will be listening to the debate to see if the "exceptions" need to be extended. However, he has placed certain eminently fair and sensible provisos on that restriction.

My hon. Friend has made his aims known to the House. The new board and lodging allowance should be made available only to those who need that form of accommodation, and he is to be congratulated on that. The aim to improve the equity between those on supplementary benefit and those with low incomes is also welcome. To remove disincentives to work is most important. It is also important to dissuade the unscrupulous landlord, as the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington pointed out.

My hon. Friend talks about limits being proposed in London of £60 to £70, and outside London of £50 to £60. However, I remind him that this anxiety arose in no small part from the feeling of scandal, annoyance and indignation in the west country, where more than £43 a week is paid, and here we are thinking in terms of increasing it still further. Any hon. Member going round my constituency can find a wide range of available accommodation. In my view, if the limits could be set as low as £43 a week in Newquay, I fail to see why, with the obvious exception of London, they cannot be set much lower than my hon. Friend proposes.

On the consultation paper, I beg to differ strongly from my hon. Friend about those who are between 17 and 25 and the proposal to restrict their claims to two to four weeks. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington that it should be widened. I go in the opposite direction.

The Government are facing two ways already. To illustrate what I mean, I give an example of what happens at present. Let us suppose that there is a married man living in Padstow, in my constituency, who has two children and has been unemployed for nine months. His nephew, who is also unemployed, is a single man and lives with his uncle and his family, claiming the £26. The uncle sees an advertisement for a job in Oxford. He gets the job. He goes back to his excited family saying that nine months of unemployment are over. He assumes that he and his wife and children can move because he can get help to do so from the benefit office under the employment transfer allowance. He goes to the office, only to be told that he cannot get a penny under the scheme because there are local unemployed people who are deemed to be suitable for the job. He has got the job, but that does not matter. Over nine months he has run out of resources, so he cannot take the job because he cannot afford to make the move.

On hearing about this, his nephew decides that he would prefer to go to Oxford to live. He turns up at the benefit office in Oxford and claims the benefit, which from memory is more than £60. He can live there for as long as he likes, simply because he is available for work.

That must be wrong. Either the Department of Employment is correct, in which case my hon. Friend must change these regulations, or the Department of Employment is wrong and must provide help for anyone who gets on his bike and looks for work.

One way out of this is to say to anyone who is proposing to move from an area where under existing arrangements he is able to claim £26 a week, to another area which will involve him in board and lodging, that under the new scheme he will be able to obtain the board and lodging allowance only if there are no locally born suitable unemployed people available to fill vacancies in that area. If that were the case, anyone in that position would have to go at his own risk and expense.

We cannot have one law for one and another law for another. Much more research should go into this to establish a much fairer system for people living in constituencies such as mine where there are high levels of unemployment. They do not want to see their own job prospects put further at risk. More particularly, they do not want to see around them people on the dole drawing not only much more money than they are getting themselves, but much more than they could ever earn in the area. My hon. Friend should take this strongly into account during his deliberations. In areas such as mine it would bring great comfort and reassurance to many millions of people living on low incomes, having been born there, who are unable to find work.

I am sorry to have spoken at length on this subject, but I hope that the House will appreciate that I feel strongly about it and have some experience of it in my own area.

10.46 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): This is a very important debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on choosing this subject. It is an issue which affects many thousands of our young people.

Over the past few weeks all right hon. and hon. Members have received a great deal of information from

organisations which work with homeless people. In my constituency I have the Threshold housing association, which operates in the London borough of Wandsworth and also in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

At the outset of my remarks I want to refer to one or two of Threshold's comments, because they are the views of people who over many years have tried to specialise in the services that they provide for young people, especially for young homeless people.

Threshold held its annual general meeting on Wednesday of this week. I attended as the local Member of Parliament, and I heard some of the sorrowful stories told by people working with Threshold of the problems which they have to try to resolve day in and day out. Its annual report, published only recently, says, under the heading "Young people in bed and breakfast":

"Finding homes for teenagers is a mammoth task. As workers of Threshold know the chances of obtaining suitable secure local accommodation are practically non-existent. This results in large numbers of young people facing a future in bed and breakfast establishments with no privacy or security on which to build a future. The problems of living in bed and breakfast are numerous, particularly for young people, risks of financial and sexual exploitation coming high on the list. A person is placed in a highly stressful situation while trying to cope with natural adolescent emotional growth. This type of accommodation is expensive and far from suitable for young people, many of whom are trying to fend for themselves for the first time in their lives, and with limited financial and social skills it is easy for them to end up in debt and homeless again."

Threshold says that 29 per cent. of all its clients have left home because of family disputes, and 21 per cent. were already in temporary accommodation when they came to see officials of Threshold.

The report continues:

"Some people leave home because it is overcrowded. Others leave because they are physically abused by their parents. Many people leave home because they are evicted by their parents. Often this is because parents expect their children to get jobs once they leave school and do not understand it when they fail to do so."

Those are the views of a respected housing association. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House could give similar examples. Both the House and the country have to realise that youngsters who are placed in this position are not scroungers. They are facing a housing problem in many areas of the country as a direct result of Government policy. Youngsters will come to my advice service tonight and say, "You are the local MP. You are the person who is supposed to advise and help people. Tell me where I can get a job. Tell me of any firms in this locality where I can go on Monday and say 'I am without work, but I want to work.'" I shall have to say to them, "I cannot help." There are no jobs in my area, even for adults with experience, so there are even fewer jobs for young people.

The problems faced by youngsters such as those referred to by the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale), are caused by the actions of the Government. That is the real indictment. A few months ago two senior members of the Government—the right hon. Lady the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry — made speeches about this problem. In a speech that she made somewhere in south Wales the Prime Minister said, "If you cannot get a job in this locality, move somewhere else," but she did not say that even if people could get a job somewhere else they might not find somewhere to live. We remember the speech of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at the Conservative party conference. He said, "If you cannot get a job, be like my old Dad; get on your bike and find one." Even if somebody is fortunate enough to find a job elsewhere, he may be unable to find a place in which to live. Those two comments indicate the lack of understanding of the problem by very senior Ministers.

For many years youngsters have left home quite happily, thinking that is was time they began to build their own lives. They were able to move to many parts of the country where they could find a job and somewhere to live, but it is virtually impossible to do so now, either in London or in any of our large cities. Ministers should not need me to tell them that this is not just a problem which affects big cities. One can go to some of our smaller cities and find that they are faced with the same problems as are to be found in the London borough of Wandsworth. I shall read later a letter which illustrates this point.

We should not support abuse of this kind any more than we support tax avoidance abuse. Unfortunately, the Government do not appear to be so concerned about the millions of pounds which are not collected each year by the Inland Revenue because certain individuals have the means with which to obtain professional advice to avoid the payment of tax. We do not hear so much about tax avoidance abuse, although it is state money.

The Government ought to be helping people of all ages who become homeless. Families become homeless. That is what we should be talking about. In many parts of the country very little local authority accommodation is being built. In the London borough of Wandsworth, hardly any local authority accommodation is being built, because of the Government's policy. No doubt the Minister will tell us that this is because the Government wish to encourage incentive by the sale of thousands of council houses. In my area and in many other parts of the country, homes have been deliberately boarded up. When local authorities are asked to justify the fact that they are putting people into bed-and-breakfast accommodation when hundreds of homes have been boarded up, their reply is that, although they do not like it, they do not have the money with which to put these homes back into use. Young people and adults who are homeless do not want to live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The Minister must be aware of the Department of the Environment report "The Single and the Homeless". It was based on about 7,000 interviews. It dealt with the kind of accommodation which homeless people would like to have. It demonstrated that they want decent, reasonably priced accommodation in which they can prepare their own meals and live their own lives. The problem is where to find such accommodation in the United Kingdom, coupled with the opportunity to get a job. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us where they can find it. I do not believe that it is to be found anywhere in the London area.

I mentioned earlier that although we think that this is a big city problem, it is not. I received a letter this week which is a terrible indictment of life in this country in 1984. It was written by a young man who lives in my constituency. He said:

"I have been living in Northampton for the last 14 weeks. I did not find it a very pleasant experience. I was very lonely and depressed. I have now landed at my mum's doorstep last night absolutely homeless. I have been staying in bed and breakfast since I came down from Northampton for the last few nights, which has drained me of most of the money I had left. I went to social security. They gave me a list of bed-and-breakfast

[Mr. Tom Cox]

accommodation which is approved and they paid for it. These premises were fully booked so I had no alternative other than sleeping on a park bench because Mum has Jim and Ann at home and there really is no room for me other than spending a few nights on a soft camp bed."

This is not a sponger or somebody who is trying to abuse or work the system, but a young man who has a genuine problem. Where does he turn for help?

Today we are debating the abuse, so we are told, of social security payments. What a different attitude the Government showed last week when we were debating student grants. They do not want to see people fiddling the state of £50 and are determined to put such people in their place. We were not talking last week about the children of low-paid people. Had we been, I should have been in the forefront giving my support. We were talking about the children of people in Britain who are extremely well paid and who have done well out of the Government since they came to power in 1979. What a different attitude we are seeing today.

There is already much accommodation throughout Britain which could be made available to those in need. All that is needed is Government money to enable those properties to be brought into use. However, what we really should be talking about are standards. About three weeks ago I was a member of a Committee of the House which looked at standards in residential care accommodation. We all know the rackets that exist there. We all know the sudden great anxiety of hundreds of people throughout Britain to look after the elderly, the disabled or the sick. That is because they now realise that by setting up residential care homes large sums of money can be claimed from the DHSS to pay for the care of people in those homes. If people genuinely want to look after elderly, disabled or sick people, I applaud that, but I reject completely those who have jumped on to that bandwagon because they realise that there is a great deal of money to be made.

We know from what my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington said, and from the Threshold annual report which I read out, that standards in much bed-and-breakfast accommodation are deplorable. The Government cannot say that that situation has just arisen and that they are worried about it. They should tell us what they intend to do.

My hon. Friend talked about fire prevention. Sadly, we hear about too many fires. There is much abuse by people running such establishments. They are free to sit on their backsides and not worry about regulations, because the accommodation that they provide is needed. They believe that the powers that be will not be too difficult. It is a terrible thing to say in 1984, but it would be far more acceptable for some people to be in prison than have to live in some of the conditions that homeless people face. Wandsworth prison is in my constituency, and I know that prison can be an unpleasant place, but at least certain standards have to be observed there. In much bed-and-breakfast accommodation there are virtually none.

We heard this week that in next year's Budget tax concessions will be a top priority. That may or may not be a good thing. It will depend on who those tax concessions go to. The Government should give priority to those genuinely in need. That is something that we have not yet seen.

Life will continue to become more and more difficult for homeless people, and, in particular, for young homeless people. I hope that we shall see a much greater Government commitment to dealing with those problems. The Government know the problems that exist. All too often the Labour party is accused of believing that abuses should take place. We do not believe that. I have already mentioned those who, with great regularity, avoid paying income tax year after year. However, we do not hear much from the Government about stopping such abuses. We are entitled to expect a real commitment from the Government to provide suitable housing. Local authorities should be able to give help and advice to homeless people, especially young homeless people.

This week we have discussed the Local Government Bill, and we have commented upon the ever-increasing problems of ratecapping. It will become more and more difficult for local authorities genuinely to help people in their areas. I hope that we shall see much stronger and more sensitive legislation to tackle abuses, not only those in bed-and-breakfast accommodation but against those who have to live in such accommodation.

We do not want to hear the Government say that they are concerned about the problem but that they will leave it to local authorities to deal with. I could give countless examples of assurances from the Secretary of State for Transport that my local authority will honour a promise that he has made. My local authority is one of the greatest supporters that the Prime Minister has in local government. However, it goes out of its way to avoid any commitment to do anything. If the Government genuinely wish to see progress, they should ensure that sufficient money is ploughed into local authorities to enable them to provide the necessary services.

Until that happens, all the problems that have been mentioned here today will continue and the suffering will remain. That is a deplorable indictment against the Government in 1984. The real problems of homelessness, and those associated with it, are the direct result of the Government's policies since 1979.

11.7 am

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): I join the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) in congratulating the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on having secured first place in the ballot. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman also on having chosen an important subject. I hope that he will not think it presumptuous if I congratulate him further on his meticulous research in preparing his speech.

I hope that it will be for the convenience of the House if I intervene at this stage to comment on some of the housing matters that have been raised by the hon. Gentleman's motion. If he should catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security will comment on those matters which fall within his responsibility.

Let me deal first with the duties of local authorities under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Their main duty is to secure accommodation for those who are genuinely homeless in the priority need categories. Those categories include families with dependent children, pregnant women, those made homeless through fire or other emergency, and those vulnerable through old age or mental or physical disability, or for some other special reason.

In our code of guidance, which was revised in July 1983, to which authorities are required to have regard, we asked them to treat as vulnerable battered women without children and young people at risk of sexual or financial exploitation. That was a particular matter to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Those priority need categories were decided by Parliament when it approved the 1977 Act. As the House knows, we considered carefully whether any change should be made when we reviewed the operation of the Act in 1982. We received many representations during that review, some in favour of extension and some against. We decided in the end to make no changes to the Act. I consider that the present categories are the right ones and that to extend them to other single people would disadvantage those in housing need on council waiting lists.

While I do not favour extending to homeless people outside the present priority need categories the duty laid on local authorities to secure accommodation, I hope that authorities will act as generously as they can in providing the advice and appropriate assistance for the non-priority homeless to which section 4 of the Act refers.

It is for local authorities to decide how to discharge the duty laid on them—whether to provide general advice, lists of agencies or accommodation or to secure or provide accommodation. As for the provision of council accommodation, the House will know that, under section 6 of the Act, authorities have a duty in the selection of council tenants to give "reasonable preference" to homeless people.

Figures for the first six months of 1984 show that about 9 per cent. of those for whom authorities secured accommodation under the Act were outside the priority need categories laid down in section 2.

It is for local authorities to decide how the homeless should be accommodated. The duty to secure accommodation can be met by placing people in private sector or housing association property, as well as in the council's own housing stock. In some cases — while they are making inquiries to determine the extent of their duty under the Act, when they are satisfied that the applicant is in priority need, but intentionally homeless, and while arranging for a transfer to another authority with whose area the applicant has a local connection—councils have a duty to provide temporary accommodation only. Here again it is for authorities to decide how to fulfil their duty, and our code of guidance makes a number of suggestions.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Minister cannot so easily pass responsibilities on to local authorities. Does he accept that it is impossible for them to provide all that is needed for the homeless, because of the huge cuts in housing investment programmes that have occurred under this Government?

The root of the problem is the dramatic rundown in local authority house building. It is not only better, but cheaper, to enable local authorities and other socially responsible agencies to provide proper, permanent accommodation than to pay through the nose to commercial landlords who provide squalid alternative accommodation in bed-and-breakfast establishments.

Mr. Gow: I shall be dealing with resources. I was reminding the House that responsibilities are laid on local authorities under the 1977 Act. It is up to local authorities, first, to discharge their statutory duty and, secondly, to determine their own priorities after we have made our HIP allocations. No one disagrees with the hon. Gentleman when he says that the resources available for housing are a material factor.

The suggestions in our code of guidance include the use of short-life council dwellings and the taking of a short-term lease on empty private sector property. It is a continuing scandal that 25,300 local authority-owned houses and flats hve been empty for more than 12 months. If some of those could be brought into use we would make a significant contribution to solving some of the problems that we are considering.

There will always be financial constraints. We would always like to be able to spend more on a range of socially desirable purposes. Because there will always be financial constraints, it is particularly important to ensure that the fullest use is made of all existing dwellings.

As the House knows, my Department has just completed a study of the problems of the 30 authorities with the most long-term empty dwellings, and we are taking action in two ways. First, I am extending the eligibility for housing association grant to short-life properties in local authority ownership.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): About time too.

Mr. Gow: I am glad to have the support of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). We have been considering taking such action and I believe that it will make a valuable contribution. The extension of the grant will enable housing associations to put local authority dwellings back into use. We are also making a grant to the empty property unit established by Shelter to further its work in providing advice and information to housing associations and others about the short-term use of empty property. Housing advice centres — the hon. Member for Tooting made this point—contribute to the fuller use of existing property by advising people about vacant accommodation or agencies which may be able to assist them. Many authorities provide useful help in that way.

I pay tribute to the dedicated people who work in the centres run by voluntary bodies and deal sympathetically and helpfully with a wide range of complex housing problems. We have recognised the value of the work done in the voluntary sector by giving grants to bodies operating at national and regional level. They include the London Housing Aid Centre and the Housing Advice Switchboard for the London area, the Shelter National Housing Aid Trust for many areas outside London, and, more recently, the Tyneside Housing Aid Centre, which covers the Houghton and Washington constituency.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I hope to raise in detail and quietly the problem of the Scots, often teenagers, who leave home, come to London under the illusion that they will find work, cannot do so and get into all sorts of difficulties.

Is it the Minister's impression that housing centres and voluntary bodies pay sufficient attention to such teenagers —from the north in general, and not just in Scotland— who arrive in London and get into difficulties, perhaps partly of their own making, which create endless problems? Does the Department have a view on that matter?

Mr. Gow: It is precisely to give help to those people, who are sometimes very young and may never have been outside Scotland before, that the advice centres exist. Some hon. Members will be familiar with the excellent work done by those centres and the sympathetic advice that is given. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has drawn our attention to an important subject.

I was describing the initiatives that the Government are taking. I shall be giving fresh advice to local authorities, describing the ways in which better management practices can reduce the number of empty dwellings. I shall be emphasising the scope for using short-life schemes and short-term lettings to bring empty properties back into use and to rehouse families accepted as homeless and others in the greatest housing need.

Our code of guidance under the 1977 Act makes it clear that, in securing accommodation for the homeless, local authorities should regard bed and breakfast very much as a last resort. I do not quarrel with some of the descriptions used by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington. Like other hon. Members, I have seen some of that accommodation myself. Even as a temporary expedient, it is unsatisfactory.

Homelessness is taken into account in deciding housing investment programme allocations. The Government recognise the increasingly serious problem of the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I have just approved a research project to be carried out by my Department. The results of that research will be available to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and to me. The project will include a survey of a sample of bed-and-breakfast landlords and the experience of those who live in that type of accommodation.

The Government share the concern that has been expressed by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington about houses in multiple occupation. Local authorities have extensive statutory powers governing means of escape from fire, which were strengthened by schedule 24 to the Housing Act 1980. Since December 1981, local authorities have been under a duty to exercise their powers to require the necessary means of escape from the largest HMOs, where the potential risk is greatest.

We have amended the Housing Act 1974 to enable special grant to be paid for means of escape from fire in HMOs, and for the payment of grant to be mandatory where work is required by notice under section 15 of the Housing Act 1961 for standard amenities, or under schedule 24. Through the Housing Act 1980, and the Criminal Justice Act 1982, we have increased fines for offences relating to houses in multiple occupation. Many of the increases have been substantial. In 1982 we issued a circular to housing and fire authorities in England and Wales giving guidance on the changes in the law and clarifying the scope of the statutory powers and responsibilities that authorities have for improving fire safety.

The powers available to local authorities are mostly discretionary, because the Government believe that each authority is best placed to apply these powers as it thinks fit, bearing in mind its specialised knowledge of the area and of the properties concerned. Section 70 of the Housing Act 1969 places a duty on local authorities to make inspections to see what action needs to be taken under the Housing Acts. Part II of the Housing Act 1961 and part IV of the Housing Act 1964 provide local authorities with discretionary powers to require improvements in the management and physical condition of HMOs. They can also require the provision of standard amenities, or alternatively limit the number of occupants. Local authorities can also make a control order, which allows them to take over the management of an HMO to protect the safety, welfare and health of those living there.

Some who live in HMOs may be tenants who are protected by the Rent Act 1977. In that case, they may have full security of tenure and be entitled to apply to the rent officer for a fair rent. Whether or not they are protected by the Rent Act, they are likely to be protected by the Protection from Eviction Act 1977. That Act prohibits harassment and illegal eviction of any tenants or licensees. However, I take very seriously some of the examples given by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, and I should be glad to discuss with him later the examples to which he drew the attention of the House. Indeed, I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing our attention to some very terrifying examples.

I remind the House that it is a criminal offence for anyone to turn a tenant out of his home without a court order, or to try to make him leave by intimidation or violence, or by withholding services such as gas or electricity. If a tenant considers that he is being harassed he should complain to his local authority, which has powers to prosecute under the Protection from Eviction Act.

I turn now to rented accommodation owned by local authorities. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) asked about the resources available for public sector housing. In the coming financial year, total gross public sector housing provision will be £3,056 million. That is to say, it will be £65 million less than the target announced last year, but that is still a very substantial sum.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister may think that there is a "mere" reduction of £65 million on what was originally scheduled, but does he agree that that sum depends on estimates of considerably increased capital receipts for local authorities during the course of next year? Are not those expectations totally unrealistic?

Mr. Gow: The Government's estimates for the sale of council houses are the best that we can make. One can never be absolutely certain about the extent to which tenants will want to take advantage of the substantially more favourable terms introduced by the Housing and Building Control Act 1984, but the House will remember that the Labour party, and even, I think, the Liberal party — which is not represented in the Chamber today — voted against the 1984 Act.

In view of the criticisms made by the hon. Member for Tooting about the right to buy, I was particularly interested to notice that the *Birmingham Post* of Tuesday had the following headline:

"Labour Party pledge to sell council homes".

I congratulate the Labour party on its conversion. It is a long time since the Labour party began to tiptoe onto the middle ground of politics. Indeed, I welcome the excellent speech made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), in which he promised that his party — which went into the last election pledged to repeal the right to buy — had now abandoned its pledge to repeal that provision. As time proceeds, I hope that Labour Members will be persuaded by the strength of our arguments, not only on home ownership, but on wider elements of denationalisation. I shall gladly give way to

the hon. Member for Oldham, West if he wishes to comment on the Labour party's policy on council house sales.

Of course, part of the problem of housing is the condition of our housing stock. In a debate such as this it is relevant to remind hon. Members that in the year ended 31 March 1984 more than £900 million was spent on improvement and repair grants. Even in this financial year, our latest estimate is that some £700 million will be spent on improvement and repair grants. I remind the hon. Member for Oldham, West that in the last year of the Labour Administration that he adorned, total expenditure on improvement and repair grants was £90 million.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing the housing investment programme allocations shortly. We are making a change in the method of making housing investment programme allocations which is related specifically to the problems of homelessness being debated today. The national total of resources is distributed using the generalised needs index. The index is also used, in part, for distribution to individual local authorities. One of the indicators in the index is the homelessness indicator, which takes up 10 per cent. of the total GNI. The indicator is based on the number of lettings to homeless households. In the past we have used the number of secure lettings for this indicator, but, following discussion with the local authority associations, for 1985-86 we will be including non-secure as well as secure lettings. This is a useful change in the methodology.

The motion refers to housing associations. I pay tribute to the enormous contribution that the voluntary housing movement has made, and continues to make, in meeting housing needs. Our acknowledgement of their contribution is reflected in our allocation to the Housing Corporation this year of £687 million. Our allocation for next year will, I hope, be announced at the same time as the housing investment programme allocation. In making our allocations we will take full account of the fact that the housing association movement provides good quality homes and manages and maintains them well, and that it caters for the special needs of the frail, elderly and disabled, as well as for single people, one-parent families and the homeless.

With the Housing Corporation, the housing association movement has been invaluable in taking up the challenge provided by our hostels initiative. Launched in 1980, that initiative has provided the first major expansion for many years in the provision of hostels and other forms of shared housing. Since the Government came to power, the Housing Corporation has approved accommodation of that type for more than 8,500 of those who are least able to help themselves. Much of that accommodation is for the single homeless, including the elderly.

Development finance is available for housing associations from the Housing Corporation. Where necessary, my Department pays deficit grants to meet the shortfall in housing running costs. The hostels initiative is something of which the Government have every reason to be proud. They have made a major contribution towards solving the real problems of homelessness.

The motion refers to board and lodging payments. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington will understand if I leave that matter for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. I hope to be in the House for almost all of the remainder of the debate. My hon. Friend will reply to the social security aspects. If hon. Members raise other housing matters, I shall, of course, write to them.

11.32 am

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I congratulate the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) both on his success in the ballot and on using this opportunity to highlight an extremely important problem. We are all concerned about the massive rise in the number of supplementary payment claimants in board and lodging and its cost. The figures provided by the Campaign for Single Homeless People show that the numbers of claimants in ordinary board and lodging has shot up from 41,000 in 1979 to an estimated 139,000 this year. The expenditure involved has risen from £52 million in 1979 to £380 million. The average payment has risen from £20·40 a week to £52·35.

Like other Members on the Opposition Benches, I object to the way in which the Government view the problem solely in financial terms — something to be sorted out through the social security system. Instead, they should be tackling the root causes of the problem — homelessness and the lack of appropriate housing provision. In recent years, the problem has been very much aggravated by the increase in unemployment, especially among young people, and by the increasing shortage of private rented accommodation.

I wish to concentrate my remarks on the problems of single people who, I believe, are most at risk. The 1981 census showed that there were more than 9 million lone adults in Britain of working age. Despite their aspirations, only about one third of them have a home of their own. Only 7 per cent. of council tenants are single people of working age. We know that a number of local authorities simply do not consider housing applications from single people. The shrinkage in the private rented sector has aggravated that problem considerably.

I understand the Government's case about abuses of the social security system. However, what the Government are doing—and they do it so often—in trying to tackle the general problem of abuse is to create real hardship for genuine cases. The idea of a reduction in payment levels for 16 and 17-year-olds seems to be based on the idea that young people deliberately leave their homes in order to claim benefit. That is nothing but a myth. The great majority of young people in temporary accommodation, or those who are potentially homeless, are staying with friends or relations. That trend is growing. It has become unusual at my Friday surgery not to have one young person coming to me because he is homeless. He might have been turned out by his parents because of overcrowding or a family row. The family may have moved away from London and the young person is left high and dry. The youngsters sometimes sleep in cars or sleep rough but, more often than not, they sleep on floors at the homes of friends and relations until their welcome is worn out. That is a subjective judgment, but it is borne out by some expert assessment.

The Minister referred to the Housing Advice Switchboard, which provides help for single homeless people in London. I am proud to be a sponsor of that body. It collects statistics about those who contact it for advice. Last year 980 young people under the age of 18 contacted it for advice. Of those, 43 per cent. were already homeless, 25 per cent. were in temporary accommodation

[Mr. John Cartwright]

and 15 per cent. expected to be made homeless within a month. Of the latter two categories, 75 per cent. were staying with friends or relatives, only 10 per cent. were with their parents, 6 per cent. were in hostels and 6 per cent. in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Those figures have increased during the past three years. The trend is clearly towards young people staying with friends or relations. There is no evidence in London of a massive abuse of the benefit system by young homeless people.

I was concerned by the suggestion that boarders who are outside what is known as their usual DHSS office area would receive payments for only two to four weeks if unemployed and without children. That suggests that those people need only a short time to sort out their affairs. A survey by the Housing Advice Switchboard of 9,000 people of all ages in the London area showed how permanent "temporary" accommodation can be. Of those in temporary accommodation, almost 45 per cent. had been there for between two years and three years, and 26 per cent.—more than a quarter—had been there for four years or more.

I endorse what the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington said about furniture grants. All too often it becomes a Catch-22. Claimants who, at last, have found their way out of temporary accommodation into perhaps a permanent unfurnished home provided by the local authority or a housing association, then discover a whole new bureaucratic minefield that they must negotiate. I know of a gentleman in his fifties in my constituency who was in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for 11 years. He at last found a small unfurnished flat through a housing association. He thought that at last his problems were solved. He went to the DHSS and asked only for a bed and a cooker—a very modest request. He was met with the response that he must demonstrate and prove that there was not adequate furnished accommodation in the area that he could take up, instead of becoming a tenant in unfurnished accommodation in his own right. Much public money could be saved by that one individual move, when the Department of Health and Social Security is paying out over £50 a week for bed-and-breakfast accommodation and meals out. Less than half that amount would be involved in someone living in a home of his own.

I should like to recount one other personal experience showing just what can happen to young single people who are homeless. A hostel was established in my constituency in a former doctor's surgery acquired by the Department of Transport in advance of the east London river crossing road scheme. The hostel was at 291 Plumstead high street. After the Department acquired it, two individuals produced a scheme for a hostel for young homeless men. In February 1983, planning permission was given by the London borough of Greenwich for a group home for six homeless boys which opened in the middle of 1983. Earlier this year I started to receive considerable complaints from residents about noise, rowdiness, vandalism and break-ins, and the police were involved regularly.

My investigations revealed that the Department had not been paid a penny piece in rent and was owed about £5,000 in rent by the operators of the hostel. My investigations established from former residents of the hostel that there were major complaints of overcrowding. There was planning permission for up to six people, but sometimes 15 were resident in the hostel. There were complaints of glue sniffing, drug taking and all sorts of crime. There was no supervision of the hostel. Although the residents paid for an evening meal, it was served at 4.30 in the afternoon, and if a resident was not present he did not get it.

I then discovered that the DHSS had been referring people to the hostel and paying £50 a week for that service. I established from the local office that that was correct. The manager told me in a letter dated 26 November that in March 1984 the charge for bed and breakfast and an evening meal had increased from £36 a week to £50 a week. With the other allowances made to those resident at the hostel, a total of £68·85 a week was being paid to residents. The manager told me frankly that it was not the responsibility of the DHSS to check that that was an appropriate place for young people. The Department's job is simply to ensure that the money is paid to the young people. In this case, the charges were paid by the young people, but unfortunately those who ran the hostel did not think it appropriate to go on paying their rent to the Department of Transport. As a result the hostel suddenly closed in November and it is reputed that another is opening up somewhere else in south London.

In that case there was no supervision by the DHSS and no check on whether that was an appropriate place for young people. There was no supervision or investigation by the London borough of Greenwich, although its planning stipulations had been massively exceeded. What is most worrying is the fact that young people were being put at risk and thousands of pounds of public money was being spent on what I can charitably describe only as an extremely inferior service.

All of us must recognise that the problems of single homelessness, particularly of young people, are increasing not just in the inner cities where they have been a traditional problem, but throughout our major towns and cities. We shall solve the problem not by altering the operation of the benefits system, but only by providing more appropriate housing for single people at rents that they can afford. That would enable single people to do what they want — live independently and in some dignity. As other hon. Members have said, that would be a much better investment, providing better value for money than what the Government are now doing in funding bed-and-breakfast accommodation and similar accommodation.

I welcome the steps that the Minister announced in his speech. They were useful as far as they went in terms of tackling the scandal of empty local authority property and helping effective advice services. However, what the Minister said falls far short of what is needed. Local authorities and housing associations need more financial encouragement to enable them to undertake the specific housing programme directed at single people. Unless we tackle the problem with determination, the scandal of single homelessness will go on haunting us for many years to come.

11.45 am

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on securing the debate. I enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who always speaks with great strength of feeling on this subject, although sometimes with rather one-sided logic.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that no one in the community should be without a roof over his head, warmth and food. We are all united about that. The problem comes when either side of the House becomes so taken with one side as to ignore the other. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington was very anti-landlord. I am very pro-landlord, although not all landlords. We need more landlords and a bigger rented sector so that people can get homes and there is mobility of labour.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction used marvellous, magic words in saying that it is our job to look after the genuinely homeless. Nobody contests that for a second. The genuinely homeless must be looked after. However, I have seen and I know the abuses. If the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington does not believe that they exist, he can join my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) or come to Ilfracombe or Barnstaple in my part of the world and see those abuses, which are perpetrated by both sides of the set-up, on the one side by the bad landlord, and on the other by young people whom we are forcing—I mean forcing—to become pensioners of the state in their youth. I fear that many will remain pensioners of the state throughout their adult life, into old age and when they go beyond, to whatever happens then.

The present system of benefit is well intentioned, well meaning, but oh so vast that only one or two voluntary organisations ever seem able to interpret the various rules and regulations, which make it virtually impossible for a young person of limited skills to secure and be able to afford to take up gainful employment.

On occasions such as this, it is a habit to talk about what is happening in our constituencies. I shall give two simple examples. A young lady was offered a position in a business with which I am connected—the shopkeeping business. She wished to take it, but said that the basic salary was not enough to cover the benefit now that she had left home of her own free will. It was a good home, reasonably prosperous—I know it—but because she had left it the total benefit for that young girl of 18, who was reasonably qualified, was about £61 net per week. To get that amount one has to earn about £100 gross. Alas, £100 gross is not earned by a junior shop worker, certainly not in the depressed west country. That is the first problem, of the person who wants to work.

My second example concerns someone a few years older, a panel beater, who was offered a job at £125 a week, which, in our part of the world, is not a bad basic weekly wage. His problem was that he had a wife and two children and had been unemployed for some time. He would have been worse off in work than out of work.

A debate such as this gives us the opportunity to ask where we are going wrong when, with the best will in the world, both sides wish to help, but, alas, people in the Opposition, such as the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, say that all the folly and all the fault is on one side. The hon. Gentleman said that there are no scroungers. I say that, unfortunately, there are too many. He said that there are bad landlords. I agree, but there are also good ones. We must find the balance.

I should like to reverse the normal procedure and give my conclusions first, while my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing Construction is still here, on some of the things that we need to change. Then, in the best *Reader's Digest* tradition, I shall give some potted—though I trust not potty—arguments on why those changes should be made.

We need a fresh definition of houses in multiple occupation and of common lodging houses. We need to amend existing planning law to control the vast increase in the number of so-called houses in multiple occupation. We need a definition of the regulations so that we can enforce control of houses in multiple occupation. The abuses are vast.

Something must be done in the DHSS to give incentives, to young single claimants in particular, to remain within their family units. It is lunacy to encourage young people to ask the state for rent payment when they have a safe, secure and happy home in which they could remain.

We must give local authorities powers to set locally determined limits. A maximum for London inevitably becomes the limit elsewhere, where the costs are different. As a result, all rents go up. It is easier to attract a young unemployed person to a property than it is to attract a working tenant who cannot afford £60 a week rent. People at all levels in my part of the world cannot afford such a sum.

Savings can be made. We should extend rent legislation to include HMOs and common lodging houses. We should help housing associations, non-profit-making charitable organisations and local authorities to widen the choice of single accommodation for the young single person and for older widows, widowers and divorcees. We must organise better inspections of lodging house accommodation before vast sums are handed over to them.

Like other constituencies, mine has the advantage of having good voluntary and self-help organisations. They help hon. Members irrespective of party politics. The North Devon Inter Agency Group is a wonderful organisation set up recently by Councillor Mrs. Fay Webber, the chairman of the North Devon district council housing committee. She was disturbed by her experience as a Barnstaple district councillor of the sheer extravagance in spending forced by national Government on local government. Local government has no say—it must pay.

The group comprises district and county councillors, rent officers, social service officers, members of the community health council, the police, probation officers and others with community and youth interests. They voluntarily give their time to the incredible problems that they encounter. The North Devon health authority also assists these good people. One of the problems is caused by young people leaving their parental home and claiming social security benefit to supplement their independent self-chosen life style. In Barnstaple and Ilfracombe, ghetto-like accommodation is emerging as a result.

One might say that that is all right if that is what a young person wants to do. The state says that someone must pay, but I cannot accept that. It infuriates working people to see gross abuses of taxpayers' and ratepayers' money. Local aggravation is considerable. It is no surprise that in my area the police encounter frequent problems between landlords or tenants and local working people who are struggling to make ends meet. They are annoyed at the fairly extravagant life style of those who claim to be unemployed and unable to obtain employment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North talked about the availability of jobs. There are job problems in

[Mr. Tony Speller]

most parts of the country, but jobs are available, here in London for example, in the catering industry. I have an interest in that industry, and I know that the major firms have a problem in finding staff at the lower levels. Why cannot they find people? It is the same old story. People find that it is not worth taking such a job because their totted-up benefit makes it unwise and worthless to work a 36-hour or 40-hour week for an extra pound or two.

Probation officers say that some young people with jobs cannot find accommodation either because the folk without jobs have taken it or because they cannot afford it. Rents are forced up and social problems arise.

I do not seek to exonerate the bad landlords, but, for goodness sake, let us look across the board and consider what we politicians have done to force upon authorities the obligation to do certain things which they would not otherwise do, although they are good and caring. The people at the grass roots know more about what happens locally than we do.

I do not want to burden the House when so many other hon. Members wish to speak. The problem is straightforward. The housing stock in my area is being run down. The older stock is over-occupied, the fire hazards are vast, as are the improvement grants. We must check to ensure that people do not exploit the system so that they receive vast sums to spend on their property. We must ensure that people do not extract large sums from tenants who could not care less how high the rents are, since someone else pays them.

Local authorities have to pay the rates for such accommodation and the water authority receives its rates from the local authority. Who pays the local authority? It seems that central Government pay less and less, while local government pays more and more.

Rateable values are low in many parts of the country, and rate income is therefore low. Areas such as north Devon do not seek to be mean or parsimonious to those who are less fortunate than those who have jobs. We must look to the future. People outside the House and outside politics, as they watch us go about our work, do not understand why we put yet more burdens on people who are willing to bear them, and then we do not provide the finance.

I am sorry if I have been slow in my delivery. This morning I ran over my National Health Service spectacles. Fortunately, I was not wearing them at the time. It means, since I come from a family originally named Kelly, that I am today one-eyed Riley. I apologise for taking the time of the House in a winking and blinking fashion.

I appreciate what my hon. Friend the Minster for Housing and Construction seeks to do. The Government are trying to make the system more sensible and logical. We are always pasting up another three or four pages of amendments to attach to legislation. Would it not be nice to have a bonfire of all the books and start again with a small charter based upon the belief that nobody should ever be without a roof, without warmth and without food? We should try to find ways of providing that more simply and at less cost.

11.59 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is not the occasion on which to make simplistic political points. I had the good fortune to go to Barnstaple in the constituency of the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on 21 November to speak to the Barnstaple constituency Labour party. I know of the problems experienced in the west country. The hon. Gentleman used the phrase, "pensioners of the state in their youth". I hope that he will bring pressure to bear on his Government to do something about it and also about local authorities' worries about central Government.

Barnstaple is a beautiful place, and north Devon is a beautiful place, but I must turn my attention to the north. I am concerned about the boys and girls—for such they often are—about the young men and young women who come to London, not only from Scotland, but from the north of England, too, as my hon. Friend the member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), to whom I am grateful for initiating this debate, knows.

The United Kingdom is becoming two separate countries. The Minister for Housing and Construction represents Eastbourne. One must travel a long way from Eastbourne before one reaches the nearest Labour constituency. Equally, there is no Conservative Member of Parliament in the Greater Glasgow conurbation. That is a sign of the fact that north and south are becoming two different worlds.

The Scots have traditionally always come to London, but they are now doing so often in circumstances of despair. The problem has been chronicled by the *Sunday Mail* and the *Sunday Post*, but I eschew relying on press stories. I would rather talk from my personal knowledge and experience and from what I hear from my constituents and the parents of my constituents, and at my surgeries.

The young people from Scotland, the north of England and Tyneside are subject to financial exploitation. They are sometimes subject to sexual exploitation. They are sometimes subject to enforced sharing. Sometimes, not in the first place through their own will, they become enmeshed in criminal activities—sucked into them.

The parents of those children are often horrified and shattered. It is difficult to convey the heartbreak of some parents—good-living people—who had thought that it would never happen to them and that a child of theirs would ever leave the family home in resentment and go down to London. The departure is often the fag end of a tiff in the family home. Given the economic pressures and the strains of unemployment, such quarrels break out more and more frequently. Young people arriving in London find it far harder to get work than they had imagined. Some go to the DHSS for advice. I wonder whether the Under-Secretary is satisfied with the advice given by his Department to young people from Scotland and the north. I believe that some offices, and some individual officers, are extremely good and caring and take a great deal of trouble, but, as so often, everything depends on the people involved. There is no universal standard.

What general guidance is sent out to DHSS officers to help them to deal with youngsters who are often inadequate and who are almost always very vulnerable? If they do not become involved in drugs they may become involved in prostitution, and if they do not become involved in prostitution they may be caught up in crime. They are very often naive, if not innocent. They need help.

The young people's intention may have been only to visit London. The difficulty is that they find it embarrassing, once difficulties have set in, to go home. In reality there may be no need for them to be embarrassed, but that does not help much.

We need to be more strongly influenced by the medieval idea of sanctuary and of rendering help. A stitch in time never saved nine so truly as in such situations. I do not want to point to a particular church, but in my own experience Roman Catholic priests are often extremely good at coping with such situations. I also have the highest regard for the work of the Salvation Army. Many Salvation Army officers are latter-day saints in the best sense. They go to endless trouble to try to contact the young people's homes.

The Minister referred to hostel initiatives. I wonder whether enough is done to persuade young people who arrive at hostels that they would be welcome if they returned home. Very often young people arriving at a hostel say, "Whatever you do, don't contact my mum and dad," and the hostel does not do so. This is a delicate matter—the young people involved may be 18 or 19 years old—but I believe that, in the case of those who can be considered to be children, the adults involved in the case should contact the home. The parable of the "prodigal son" was never more relevant.

Between 1965 and 1967 I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the late Dick Crossman in Housing and between 1968 and 1970 in the DHSS. In those days a great deal of attention was paid to this problem, even though it was not nearly as serious as it is now. Great civil servants such as Sir George Godber, Dame Evelyn Sharpe, Dame Muriel Riddelsdell and others devoted their time to this problem. I do not believe that their successors care any less about it, but I should like some explanation of the Government's policy on what additional help could be given to these unfortunate youngsters.

Even at the very simplest level, that of cost, failing to take action will prove very costly to society. In this matter, we are our brother's keeper. However, even if one does not accept the moral necessity, one must accept that we would save a great deal through the avoidance of potential crime—I do not speak of the potential unhappiness that could be averted—by doing something at an early stage.

I promised my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that I would be brief. However, I must say that a great deal more could be done for the construction industry in the north. I know that the Minister has no responsibility for Scottish housing, but this is once again a question of public expenditure. The extra cost of a proper and much-needed house building programme, over and above what is spent out of the oil revenues on unemployment benefit, would not be very great. Construction workers would come from recipients of unemployment benefit.

Ministers from the south of England live in a very different world from people in the north. It is not my intention to sneer at them. This morning, however, until the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd) arrived, the Front Bench had been peopled entirely by hon. Members representing the south of England. Southerners have responsibilities towards people in the north. They would not get very far without the tankers which every eight hours or so—I can see them from my study window in my constituency—set off from Mound Point at Queensferry to take North sea oil to Korea, Japan and other countries. The south has an obligation to the north, which produces the oil revenues.

The United Kingdom is one country. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) and I may disagree about many other matters, but we share a certain history on the question of devolution, and we both believe that this is one country. I am not simply beating a Scottish or northern drum. I am very much alarmed about the way in which the country is being polarised.

No speech from me would be complete without reference not just to the north but to the south Atlantic. I shall do no more than draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Brewster houses have so far cost £6·3 million, or £120,000 per house. Twenty-one of them are unoccupied.

I do not wish to abuse the debate, so I simply point out that defence expenditure is running amok. Perhaps just a little of the money that is spent on defence could be given to solve these urgent problems and to help the construction industry, which is the root of much of the problem. If there were homes and jobs in the building industry, not so many people from the north of England and Scotland would come south.

Like many others, I walk home from the House at night. I have to report that, going up Horseferry road, which is within eight minutes of the Chamber, I occasionally see a man who sleeps out. I once poked him because I thought that he was very ill—in fact he was just asleep. Like many others, he sleeps under the arches. Some of us might pass by and feel like the Biblical Levite, but it is the personal observation of those of us who walk home from the House that there are far more people out on the streets and without homes than there have been in the previous 20 years during which we have had the privilege to be hon. Members. My observation is that the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington has raised are growing.

12.10 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) for enabling us to express our anxieties about issues which certainly worry my constituents. East Kent has witnessed the exploitation of a system which is designed to help people in need. Many of my constituents are sure that that system is being manipultated and abused by the greedy.

In regard to east Kent, we are not discussing houses in multiple occupation in back streets, although there are some, but the use of prime site seaside hotels which have been converted to DHSS hostels. Those hotels have been advertised in the press in east London, the midlands and Liverpool. The advertisements entice young people to the area, saying that their rail fares will be paid and, in one case, that there is a taxi service from the hotel to the DHSS office. That means that the young people can collect their benefit and, more importantly, that the landlord can ensure that he collects their benefit. That is not what the system was designed for.

The going rate for full board in these hotels is about £65 a week. The Margate hotel and guest house association tells me that it can provide clean, decent and comfortable accommodation and good food in many of its smaller hotels, as it does for visitors throughout the south, for £45 a week. I must therefore tell my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security that the going rate for Dover, which is likely to be listed at £60 a week, is far too high. There is a considerable profit margin. I know that an offer of £200,000 was made for a 14-bedroomed sea front hotel in my constituency, with a view to converting it into a DHSS hostel. The offer consisted of £170,000 on mortgage — there was no

[Mr. Roger Gale]

money up front—and £30,000 in cash in two years' time. It is not difficult to work out who would pay the £30,000 cash—the taxpayer.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) about planning law requiring serious and urgent consideration. Officers in Thanet district council have examined it to see whether they can exercise any control over the abuse. They have found it extremely difficult because it is difficult to establish whether a seaside hotel has been turned into a house in multiple occupation. That problem is exacerbated when it is possible to rotate the tenants around different hotels so that they appear not to be in long-stay accommodation. As they are technically in short-stay accommodation, the hostel is still a hotel. I must observe, with all due respect to my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction, that housing legislation is being ignored in regard to the enforcement of any form of quality control.

Abuse of the system is especially serious in seaside constituencies such as mine where we are trying to revitalise our tourist trade. The east Kent economic development group is working hard to create new jobs in tourism and to attract new industry. To do that, we need the seed corn of our tourist business—our prime site hotels. We have too many small guest houses and hotels which provide too low a standard of accommodation. It would be good if we could encourage the conversion of some of those properties into holiday or long-stay flats to be made available in the private rented sector. One of the causes of the problem is the shortage of private rented accommodation. It is not that the accommodation does not exist but that successive rent legislation, despite the Government's attempt to encourage letting through the introduction of the shorthold lease, has resulted in much privately rented accommodation simply not being made available.

Is there scrounging and is the system being abused? Housing benefit provisions allow benefit to be paid when people move from one part of the country to another for a good reason, such as looking for a job. We are trying to create employment in east Kent. I hope and believe that we shall. I also hope that east Kent, which is a prime corner of England and which is closer to the continent than any other part, will have employment to offer to young people such as those who are represented by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and others. At the moment, however, we are faced with 24 per cent. male unemployment. Our overall unemployment rate is 19 per cent.

It cannot be right for most of the people who are being enticed to the south-east, I believe cruelly, to believe that they are looking for jobs. Some hotels offer them a choice. Either they can take full board or they can pay rent, take cash, and find their own food. Some of the costs of rent provided to the DHSS include beer money, which is on credit at bars which are kept open late into the night. In other cases, which are currently being investigated by the police in regard to fraud, some people are living on social benefits while employed as painters and decorators in the black economy. I hope that every hon. Member will agree that that is not what the benefits system was designed for and, therefore that it is right for us to address ourselves to the level and manner in which benefit is paid.

To demonstrate the point about the desire for employment, may I point out that I wrote on 26 November to two proprietors of the sort of hotels about which I have spoken. I said:

> "I would also like at this stage to ask you to be kind enough to indicate to any of your present tenants, who are now technically my constituents, to make contact with me with a view to the provision of employment. While I, like the Jobcentre, do not have a magic wand, I am more than willing to assist anyone who is reasonably willing to assist themselves. I would be grateful if they could be advised to telephone our office . . . for a suitable appointment: In view of the numbers involved I propose to make special arrangements to see any tenant so inclined rather than to overwhelm a normal surgery morning."

In other words, I offered an opportunity for people to attend a special surgery for the sole purpose of endeavouring to establish the type of employment that they were seeking, and to assist them to find it. I am sure that all hon. Members would have sought to do that. The offer was also carried in the local press. I received replies from children of my constituents asking for help, but I did not receive a single reply from anyone receiving DHSS benefit and staying in one of those hotels. Therefore, I question whether there is a serious search for work.

I welcome the measures that my right hon. and hon. Friends have taken, which seek to help those in genuine need. I agree with the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington that we must have controls enshrined in legislation for the inspection and registration of establishments which accommodate people receiving DHSS benefit. The level of payment should be established in exactly the same way as that from the public purse for private rented accommodation — that is, by the rent officer. We should know the standard of accommodation and food that is being provided and, therefore, what a reasonable rent and rate for the service is. At the moment people are paying through the nose for substandard accommodation. It is a racket and it must be stopped.

A matter not yet touched on but of considerable anxiety to my constituents and to my hon. Friends who represent seaside constituencies is the subject of board and lodging payments for old people in what are euphemistically called rest homes, nursing homes and mental after-care homes. There are both good and bad homes. I have many honourable examples of first-rate homes in my constituency. However, I am ashamed to say that there are also far too many bad ones.

In a town in my constituency a hotel describes itself as a holiday hotel for gentlefolk. A DHSS resident from inland was referred to it for a holiday and found it to be a mental after-care home. So serious was that that a constituent's child was chased up the road by a resident, and a bicycle was thrown through a front window, the glass from which nearly blinded his sister. The resident was taken to a local institution where he was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic and subsequently released back to the same sort of home. That is disgraceful.

The rate in east Kent for a rest home is £129 a week. That is the maximum and has immediately become the minimum. I am told by friends who run rest homes that it is possible and proper to provide a good service, accommodation, facilities and food for £80 a week and still make a profit. A great deal of money is swilling around in the pockets of people who are patently not earning it. We must address ourselves to the provision of attendance allowance and determine that, if it is to be paid,

it should be paid for genuine attendance. Anyone who runs a rest home can quickly claim the best part of £29 a week per resident in return for virtually nothing.

There is a genuine need to determine that those providing care in rest homes and nursing homes have a minimum standard of care training, and that everyone employed in such homes is registered and trained before attendance allowance is paid. At the moment the system is being milked.

We should spend less. The public purse has a right to value for money. At the moment it is not getting it. We can save considerable sums in this area. That money would be infinitely better spent on providing back-up services through our excellent district nursing services to allow people to be cared for, not as cabbages in institutions, but in the community where they belong. We are throwing that opportunity away because we are wasting scarce resources.

I welcome the fact that the new regulations that govern the operation of such homes will come into force on 1 January. I hope that they will be stringently enforced. If that means closing those homes, they should be closed. The state and the beneficiaries of such care should get genuine value for money, care, rest and comfort. A high standard can be provided, but to do so we must eliminate the greedy, encourage the dedicated, and use the savings to improve the support services.

12.28 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I should like warmly to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on his choice of subject for debate and on the moving and feeling manner in which he introduced it. As hon. Members will be aware, my hon. Friend had considerable professional experience of this subject before his election to the House. His passion, eloquence and carefully researched argument all bore witness to that.

I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that this subject is of critical importance to the distressingly fast escalating numbers of homeless, unemployed, and vulnerable — young people in particular — trapped in despair because of the deprivation of home and job. Over the years, my hon. Friend has conscientiously fought for the interests of such groups. His speech brought to the forefront of public attention those who are all too easily forgotten but whose needs are desperate and not of their own making. I pay him the warmest tribute for that.

The cruellest aspect of the debate is that, 11 days before Christmas, which is normally identified with families, security, warmth and reconciliation, we are debating changes in board and lodging allowances which will increase homelessness, divide families and worsen the living conditions of some of the poorest, most deprived and most vulnerable members of our society.

The Government's case is that overall expenditure on board and lodging allowances has escalated uncontrollably over the past five years and must, therefore, be sharply reined back. There are two reasons why that is an unjustified and callous response. One is that the Government have largely caused the problem. The second is that the substantial rise in expenditure is the result not, as has been suggested, of extravagance or malingering but of the remorseless rise in the number of people caught in the trap of homelessness which is not of their own making.

On the first count, we indict the Government as the cause of the problem because the numbers living in board-and-lodging accommodation have risen for two fundamental reasons: first, unemployment has soared, especially long-term unemployment among young people; secondly, the general shortage of rented accommodation has forced single people and families into lodgings. There is a shortage of rented accommodation because the Government have made enormous cuts in housing investment since 1979. Those huge, swingeing cuts amounting to a staggering reduction of 40 per cent. in real terms have run into hundreds if not thousands of millions of pounds in the past five years.

The other reason why we indict the Government is that, so far from the increase in costs being the result of abuse, the overwhelming cause is the relentless and terrifying rise over the past five years in the number of people driven into board-and-lodging accommodation. The figures have been quoted but I shall give them again. They have risen, according to Government handouts, from 41,000 in 1979 to 139,000 in 1984—an annual increase of 28 per cent.

There have been some suggestions in the debate that the rise in expenditure was due primarily to the sharp increase in charges. The Government's own press releases, however, show that average payments over the past five years have risen by 17 per cent. a year which is much lower than the increase of 28 per cent. in the number of claimants. It is significant that the increase since the new limits were introduced a year ago is estimated to be about 9 per cent. only. That is a relatively smaller increase than the increase in charges.

The problem is not caused by an excessive or unreasonable rise in payments; it is caused by the remorseless and frightening rise in the number of people deprived of a home by the dramatic collapse of house building by local authorities due to the Government's huge cuts in housing investment.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is it not a fact that between 1979 and 1984 the average payment per claimant increased from £20·40 to £52·35 per week? That is two and a half times more and is staggeringly more than inflation.

Mr. Meacher: Of course it is an increase. We have all seen those figures. Although there has been a significant increase—greater than the rate of inflation—that is not the cause of what the Government call an uncontrollable rise in overall expenditure on board-and-lodging payments. The real cause in the increase in the numbers who have been driven by homelessness into board-and-lodging accommodation and bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

I shall press the charge against the Government even further. While the number of people in hostels and common lodging houses has remained fairly static over the past five years, there has been a huge rise in the number of people in board-and-lodging accommodation which is almost entirely due to the increased use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Such accommodation is used as a last resort by the increasing number of homeless single people. They live in this form of temporary accommodation not because they wish to but simply because they cannot obtain access to any form of ordinary permanent housing. That lies at the root of this problem. I repeat that it is the Government's wilful and destructive chopping of

[Mr. Meacher]

housing investment by nearly a half that is wreaking such a crucial penalty of homelessness, hardship and danger this Christmas.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman has failed to take account in the wrong statistics that he is quoting of the extent to which it has been possible to finance the Government's housing policy as a result of the sale of council houses. If one takes that into account, public sector investment in housing fell by 17 per cent. in cost terms between 1979-80 and 1983-84. On the same basis, when the Labour party was in power between 1974-75 and 1978-79, expenditure fell by 45 per cent.

Mr. Dalyell: That is not new investment.

Mr. Meacher: As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has said so correctly, the transfer of ownership is not new investment. That is the crucial point. There has been a cut in the housing budget—and the Minister will confirm this—from £5 billion in 1979 to approximately £3 billion this year. That is a colossal cut, and the human misery that all hon. Members see every week in their surgeries is testimony to the consequences of that.

That will be the fate of up to approximately 50,000 of our fellow citizens this Christmas. Far too often, conditions in bed-and-breakfast accommodation provide no security, practically no privacy and thoroughly inadequate amenities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington said so powerfully. In the worst cases, people are forced to endure squalor that every hon. Member would agree is intolerable. There is overcrowding and risk of death or injury from defective fire precautions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington beat me to the quotation of what happened in Camden. There have been many lethal fires and one such, which was little noticed, was the one in Camden a little over a month ago. It was nothing spectacular, and very little notice was taken of it at the time. It was just one cheap bed-and-breakfast establishment going up in flames. The fire was at 46 Gloucester place, a property owned by London Lets. Three persons suffocated in a top room. They had been housed there by Camden council, which estimated that the cost of housing people in such places was £280 a week. I repeat the comment made by one Camden councillor, that even death traps, it would appear, are not necessarily cheap.

Scandals such as this cry out for far more regulation of lodging houses and far greater protection of those who are forced to use them. However, the Government's new board-and-lodging allowances will bring about exactly the opposite. Single people aged 16 or 17 could have their benefit cut immediately. Other unemployed claimants could have their benefit cut after two to four weeks unless the DHSS officers accept that they are claiming at their normal local office, however that is defined. I hope that the Minister will help us on that point. Families with children could face cuts after an unspecified time, and all these measures will come on top of the effects of the imposition of national limits on board-and-lodging payments.

What these effects mean can be shown by the survey done by Shelter—I am sure that other hon. Members have been supplied with a copy of the report — into hotels in seven areas of the south-east of England. In a letter to me, Shelter said:

"less than half the hotels contacted would take homeless people with children and the average cost of bed and breakfast for a couple with two children under 11 was £156·29 per week. If the Government's proposed regulation changes come into effect, the maximum amount payable to the family would be £133·80 a week. After the family had used their personal allowance to pay the difference, they would only have £2·21 per week to pay for meals and all other expenses."

That is the meaning of what we are discussing.

Homeless people without children will have to try to find accommodation in the area in which they became homeless. With the Government insisting on the requirement to return to "the normal office area", they are reviving the practice of parish relief of the Elizabethan Poor Law era whereby the poor were hounded from parish to parish until they were eventually forced to return to their place of origin. We are seeing exactly the same process today. The terminology is modern. No longer do we talk about parishes. We now talk about the normal benefit office area.

Perhaps worst of all under the new regulations is that the lower cost ceilings mean that accommodation at a price that homeless people can afford will be scarcer. It will be of a low standard. Abundant evidence has been produced in the debate to show that to be true. Sharing rooms with strangers will be inevitable.

The DHSS suggests that claimants without children should look for cheaper accommodation in other areas. At the same time, it is restricting payments to boarders outside their normal office areas after two to four weeks. This seemingly unnoticed contradiction is just one illustration of the confused and inadequate thinking underlying these proposals.

Before the end of the consultation period on 28 December—which in any event is much too short a time —I hope that the Government, in the light of today's debate, will seriously think again of the appalling misery that these new measures will bring about for some of the most helpless and innocent victims in society.

These proposals will save the Government money, but at what a cost! For those at present in lodgings, hotels and bed-and-breakfast establishments the Government's saving will mean increased overcrowding, slum conditions, squatting and in some cases even sleeping rough in the streets. People will have to choose, after these regulations, between a bed and a meal. There will not be money for both, as the example supplied by Shelter demonstrates. These proposals will deny to those in lodgings the basic right even to a minimum decent existence.

In my view, what makes all this so much more tragic and very much more deplorable is that these cuts in allowances for the homeless are being imposed by the Government at the same time as the Prime Minister delivers herself of an unequivocal commitment to maintian mortgage interest tax relief, even when it benefits the rich disproportionately and inequitably. It is all the more deplorable when cuts are being imposed on poor and homeless claimants with scarcely a murmur from the parliamentary Conservative party — indeed, we have heard acclamation from some Government supporters. Only two weeks ago they were in uproar about the proposals for the relatively smaller cuts in education grants for the children of rich parents.

Mr. Gow: Since the hon. Gentleman has now ventured into fiscal policy and is critical of the Government about tax relief on mortgage interest, perhaps he will say what is his party's policy towards tax relief on mortgage interest.

Mr. Meacher: I believe that we should reduce mortgage interest relief at the higher rates. That money is exclusively concentrated on the rich and, by any standards, it is totally unjustified when at the same time the Government seek to make savings by hitting exclusively at some of the poorest.

The Government's role this Christmas will be remembered not for any spirit of compassion or reconciliation, which generally all Governments have managed in the past at Christmas time, but for a rancorous and hard-nosed spitefulness towards some of the most vulnerable and needy groups. This Christmas the Government are knocking £1 off the supplementary benefit of some of the poorest pensioners with heating allowances. They are knocking an extra £1 a week off the already severely depleted supplementary benefit for the families and children of striking miners. They are now cutting the allowances for the homeless which will undoubtedly lead to some of the unemployed and the homeless being thrown on the streets. I hope that the Government, in the smug and pauchily self-satisfied form of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, are well satisfied with the savings that will be made by these cutbacks in board-and-lodging allowances at an execrable cost in human suffering.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman has destroyed his case by massive overstatement. Perhaps he would confirm, since he is talking about generosity at Christmas time, that he was a member of a Government who in two years failed to pay the Christmas bonus.

Mr. Meacher: What matters to pensioners is——

Mr. Gow: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that?

Mr. Meacher: Since the Minister has raised the matter, the fact is that during the five years that we were in government the value of the pension rose by 20 per cent. in real terms. For a married couple it would be £5 per week higher today than it is if this Government when they first took office had not broken the link with earnings in the uprating of the pension. The huge increases for pensioners which were given by the Labour Government have been denied by this Government. The hon. Gentleman should look at his facts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): Since the hon. Gentleman has referred to the impact of his Government's policies on pensioners, does he also take into account, and will he allow pensioners to take into account, the impact of the huge inflation which his Government launched upon pensioners' incomes and pensioners' economies?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has clearly not got his feet under the table, following his shift from the Foreign Office. When we refer to "real terms" we mean that even after the increase in inflation there was an increase of 20 per cent. for pensioners under the Labour Government. Under this Government the increase is about 1 or 2 per cent. Under the Labour Government pensioners secured a massively higher benefit than they have secured under this Government.

This is not the way to deal with the intensely bitter and harsh problems of homelessness. The only satisfactory answer to the worsening scandal of often poor and sometimes appallingly squalid bed-and-breakfast accommodation is to guarantee the right to a decent, secure home. What is fundamentally at fault is the huge cut in housing investment, and the enormous rundown in local authority house building.

In his speech the Minister said that it was a matter of resources. We agree that it is a matter of resources. The Minister made great play of the fact that there has been a cut in the housing investment programme of "only"—that was the Minister's word—£65 million. No doubt the Minister wishes to take credit for the fact that had it not been for him the cut might have been larger. I give him credit for that. But that is not the point. The point is that there would have been a significant increase this year if the Government had not voluntarily chosen in the Budget to halve the stamp duty on stock exchange transactions and to abolish the investment income surcharge; £520 million was handed out exclusively to those with stocks and shares in excess of £100,000 per person. The Government now have the audacity to come to say that there are insufficient resources for the homeless and the unemployed.

Mr. Gale *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has made his speech. Other hon. Members wish to speak and I do not wish to speak for very much longer.

What is clearly needed is a revival of local authority house building within which a duty can then be placed on local authorities to provide permanent accommodation of a satisfactory standard for anyone who becomes homeless. That must be the right answer to the problem.

Secondly, if the DHSS can introduce a registration scheme for residential homes—which I support—why not do the same for houses in multiple occupation? That is much needed. At present, owners of multiple-occupied houses have no duty in law to observe decent standards and to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their tenants and residents. Surely at the very least mandatory minimum standards are required to protect residents against fire and overcrowding and to maintain basic amenities, repairs and management in all multi-occupied hostels, lodging houses and bedsit flats.

Thirdly, it is imperative that adequate furniture grants should be readily available to enable people on benefit to move from temporary accommodation into permanent housing. It is outrageous that supplementary benefit restrictions on furniture grants, especially the notorious suitable alternative furnished accommodation rule, should block claimants in bed-and-breakfast accommodation from obtaining cheaper permanent accommodation when it is readily available to them. If the debate achieves nothing else, the Minister should at least announce the lifting of that iniquitous rule which traps people in board and lodging.

Above all, the Government must accept that simply reducing claimants' benefits—the line adopted by the Government throughout the debate — and holding ceilings down on overall expenditure is not the answer to the problem. The Government must acknowledge that control of bed and breakfast by keeping ceilings down has been tried before. They tried it before November 1983 and they had to abandon it last year because claimants were

[Mr. Meacher]

unable to secure accommodation at all or they had to pay charges out of their own money. That is already happening in London where DHSS ceilings are already well below market prices in many cases.

The debate concerns an intensely human issue where the cause of human misery is clearly identifiable and preventable. Yet the Government have chosen to target the victims and not the cause. In effect, homeless claimants are being made to pay the price for the Government's failure to tackle the root of the problem in the rundown of local authority house building which forces thousands upon thousands of homeless persons against their will into squalid and often dangerous bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The effect of that disregard of the real cause of this terrible human tragedy and the consequential financial punishment which is now being levied on the victims is not only economically misplaced and unwise but surely, by any standards, callous and cruel.

We have learned from bitter experience of the Government that appeals to a spirit of Christmas compassion will undoubtedly fall on stony ground, but we deeply hope that this time public indignation at the gratuitous intensification of the misery of those now made homeless through no fault of their own will cause the Government at least seriously to reconsider the harsh morality of the measures.

12.53 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): All hon. Members present today are grateful to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) for giving us the opportunity to have this debate. It has been characterised by some thoughtful and well-researched contributions, not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), and the particularly thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Therefore, it is rather sad that the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) should have descended into the extravagant rhetoric of party trench warfare.

We face a serious problem which worries hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is particularly serious because so many young people are being enticed from the north of England, Scotland and other places to our major cities and, increasingly, to seaside resorts. There is ample evidence of that enticement. Unscrupulous hoteliers and boarding house operators in my constituency have put advertisements in Liverpool newspapers inviting people to come to Bournemouth and occupy accommodation that will be paid for by the DHSS. That enticement of young people from their homes and families is taking place on a massive scale.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West was wrong to say that recent developments are associated with increased unemployment. Last year's figures show that while unemployment among those under 25 increased by 9 per cent., the number of claimants for board and lodging in that group increased by 60 per cent. That shows the scale of the problem.

In my constituency, the number of claimants for board-and-lodging payments has increased by 40 per cent.—from 5,000 to 7,000—in the past two years. The estimated number from the Merseyside area has increased from just over 1,000 to 2,500.

There has been an explosion of bed-and-breakfast accommodation in seaside resorts, partly because of the large increase in permitted payments. The Government recognised the problem in the autumn of last year, when they attempted to put limits on the amount that could be paid in any one area and suggested the implementation of local maximum payments. The problem is that the local maximum has become the basic rate in many areas and unscrupulous operators promptly increased their charges when the maximum was set.

My local hotel and guest house associations confirmed to me that that happened and that the rate paid for DHSS accommodation is higher than the rate charged for bed-and-breakfast accommodation that is readily available elsewhere in the town. The net national average payment increased from £47.50 a week in 1982 to £66 a week in 1983. Payments range from £40 to £110 per week.

One hotel in a prime location on the west cliff at Bournemouth now houses only DHSS claimants. We are talking, not of back-street accommodation, but of prime hotel accommodation in prime locations.

The attraction of young people to London and to seaside resorts in the south, which my local newspaper now calls the Costa del Dole, has produced enormous strains on the resources of local authorities, which have to inspect the accommodation, and of fire oficers, who have to ensure that the accommodation complies with fire regulations. The explosion in the number of young people coming into areas in the south of England is causing the difficulties that have arisen with regard to fire regulations and local authority inspections.

More importantly, we are in danger of treating a whole new subculture, because young people who remain unemployed for a long time and who live in such accommodation may turn to wholly undesirable activities. In my constituency there is growing evidence of an increase in drug abuse and drug trafficking, particularly involving hard drugs such as heroin and cocain and, of course, that has implications for muggings, burglaries and prostitution. That is why I am particularly grateful that the Government have taken some action to reduce the number of 16 and 17-year-olds able to qualify for such accommodation, as I believe that those people are particularly vulnerable, especially given the moral decay that seems to accompany such large numbers of young people occupying bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

We have a national scandal on our hands, which the Government's proposals go some way towards correcting. Nevertheless, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North that the proposed levels of payment are often still far too high. In my constituency the present level is £60 a week, but there is ample evidence that that amount is over-generous and well above the amount necessary to provide a reasonable profit and return for genuine guest house proprietors.

I welcome the fact that the Government are proceeding further with a period of consultation, and I hope that it will result in the worst abuses being checked. The Government will then earn the gratitude of the people of Bournemouth, and of taxpayers and parents throughout the United Kingdom, who are deeply concerned about what is happening to so many of our young people.

1.2 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on his success in the ballot and on his choice of motion. It is all too seldom that we have an opportunity to discuss the terrible plight of homeless people in this country, yet they are the most vulnerable and deprived people of all. As we approach Christmas, it is particularly appropriate to consider the desperate circumstances in which many people are forced to live.

The debate has so far been marked by a number of powerful and moving speeches, but for the record I should point out that, unfortunately, no representative of the Liberal party has been present for it. Nevertheless, the debate has been characterised by completely different approaches on the part of Conservative and Labour Members. For example, the basic argument of Conservative Members is that an abuse has been identified which the Government are apparently tackling. The honesty and sincerity of Conservative Members in identifying abuses would be more readily commendable to us if the Government and their supporters were less selective in the way in which they identified them.

If the Government were more concerned about the £4,000 million a year that is lost to the Exchequer through tax evasion, and slightly less concerned about other abuses, we might take what they say more seriously. When they identify abuses which affect small numbers of people at the raw end of our supposedly prosperous society, and then go over the top in condemning those abuses while ignoring others, that gives us the right to challenge the Government's thinking. We also have the right to challenge the Government's proposed solutions to those abuses. Their proposals on the board-and-lodging allowance tackle the symptom rather than the root causes.

I wish to tackle the issue raised by a number of my hon. Friends, which has not yet been answered by the Government, about single payments for furniture. It is surely nonsense for the Government to insist, through the DHSS, that claimants for single payments for furniture wishing to move into independent unfurnished rented accommodation must go through an obstacle course which appears deliberately to be designed to prevent them from succeeding. That is surely nonsense when the Government are condemning young people and others for their adoption of the board-and-lodging alternative, into which they have been forced by the Government's policy on single payments.

I took up the matter with a local DHSS office at Archway tower in Junction road. I asked about its policy towards applicants for single payments for furniture. I was rightly referred to the decision of the tribunal of commissioners, which stated clearly:

"the onus of proof on the question whether there is suitable alternative accommodation in the area available to him, lies on the claimant."

That is bad, because imposing the search for alternative accommodation on a claimant might lead to his not moving into proper, decent, unfurnished rented accommodation. I hope that the Government will say today that they will soon change the rules.

The interpretation of the rules is even worse. When the claimant goes to Archway tower to apply for single payments, he is told that he must show:

"1. No suitable furnished accommodation is available in the area or,

2. furnished accommodation is available but it is not available to you or,

3. furnished accommodation is available but it is not suitable to you and the members of your household."

To prove one, two or all three of those criteria, the claimant is presented with a list of five items of information which he must provide before even being considered for single payments. The list includes:

"1. the sources of information used by you to find addresses of suitable furnished accommodation . . .

2. A list of up to 15 addresses for rent which you have visited or contacted.

3. Addresses of accommodation to rent available to you.

4. Addresses of accommodation to rent, available to you but not suitable, and the reasons why they are not suitable.

5. Addresses of accommodation to rent but not available to you, and the reasons why they are not available to you."

That requisition for information is presented to the applicant who goes to the DHSS saying that he wishes to move into rented accommodation, but does not have a bed or a cooker, and asks for a single payment to enable him to buy those items of essential equipment and furniture. If that is not a deterrent for those wanting to go into rented, unfurnished accommodation, I do not know what is.

The net effect of such a process — that obstacle course—imposed on claimants is inevitably that people are forced back into the board and lodging and hotel situation which they are often desperate to get out of. Such a requirement imposes on them the need to go into that inadequate and often squalid accommodation which the Government rightly say is inadequate. I hope that the Government will not hide behind the answers that they have given so far to myself and my hon. Friends when we have pressed the point and argued about it.

The Government have said that the matter is under review and that they will report in due course once they have considered all the information. Surely they have had long enough to see what is happening on the single payments for furniture issue, and surely it is now time for them to come to the House—I hope that the Under-Secretary will say something about this later—and tell us that they have decided to get rid of this wretched tribunal decision and wretched rule, which imposes such an obstacle course on claimants. That is the first and, in many ways, most important commitment that the Government might be able to give us.

Another issue was referred to ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington — the conditions of bed-and-breakfast and hotel accommodation into which not just single people but families with children are forced by local authorities around the country. In passing, I should like to pay tribute to the efforts of my own local authority, the London borough of Islington. It is much maligned by many people, but it has an exceptionally good record in its treatment of homeless families. At the moment it has no families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and, what is more, hotels that lie within its boundaries are the subject of rigorous investigation by both the planning department and the environmental health department to ensure that at least some minimal standards are met. That is not true in many other local authorities around the country.

The conditions in which many families are forced to live are, quite frankly, intolerable. The details have been given by others of my hon. Friends, so I shall not rehearse the well-known details of the squalor that many children,

[Mr. Chris Smith]

parents and single people suffer when they are put into those horrible and distressing places to live, often for a long time. It is no accident that the families in Camden have revolted so strongly in the past month over the conditions in which they are being forced to live. It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) to say, "Of course there are these problems, and I am sure that the people responsible will be punished." The problem is that the people responsible will not be punished under current legislation.

I recently asked a written question about bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I asked the Secretary of State "whether he intends to propose legislation which will ensure that conditions in these hotels are satisfactory and safe."

The answer concluded:

"Authorities have ample powers to ensure satisfactory conditions, amenities and safety in houses in multiple occupation. The need for further measures will be considered in the light of the outcome of the Department's current research into the use and condition of such accommodation. — [*Official Report*, 11 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. *441*.]

When will that research be concluded, and when will the Government make proposals? We have waited too long already.

The Minister did not answer my question. The reply was about existing legislation, which enables some local authorities, at their discretion, to take action to try to make the hotels a bit safer. The record of local authorities of all political persuasions is not good. For example, it took Tower Hamlets five long years to get round to tackling the conditions in Princes lodge. The notoriety of the treatment of the inhabitants there was exposed in the *Daily Mirror* six or seven months ago.

After the fire at Clanricarde gardens, the ombudsman found the Kensington and Chelsea authority guilty of maladministration because it had failed to follow up complaints over a number of years. The list of instances is long.

There is no duty on local authorities to enforce proper minimum standards of safety and condition for houses in multiple occupation. Local authorities should be under a duty; they should not be left with a mere discretion. The owners of such houses should also be under a duty in law to observe decent standards and to ensure the welfare, safety and health of tenants. Neither duty exists in law. It is about time that the Government stopped delaying and came forward with proposals for legislation to impose those simple duties.

The relegation to board and lodging or inadequate hotel accommodation of young people, the elderly and families with children is overshadowed by the need for a proper and decent programme launched by the Government to provide houses to rent through local authorities and housing associations. The Minister told us that enormous sums were going into house building. That sounds wonderful, but the reality is different. Housing investment programmes and allocations to local authorities have been more than halved in the last four years. Each year, about 1,500 or 1,600 homeless families in my constituency apply for assistance. About 8,000 people are on the waiting list and about 7,500 on the transfer list. In those circumstances, the cut in the provision of funds for housing to rent is scandalous.

I welcome the provisions which the Minister for Housing and Construction announced earlier today, but they are marginal. I welcome the reinstatement of the freedom to use Housing Corporation short-life money for dwellings owned by the local authority. However, I must point out that that power was removed by the Government two years ago. Now they are trumpeting the fact that they have brought it back. That is wonderful—I welcome it —but it is not enough and it is too late.

The change in the homelessness indicators in the general needs index for the HIP allocations is also welcome, but it is on the margin and will not in any way meet the enormous need that exists and the desperate need to increase the amount of investment devoted to the provision of decent quality accommodation to rent from local authorities.

The Government have reneged on their obligations to homeless people. In bringing forward their latest measures they have identified the wrong problem and adopted the wrong solution. I hope that when the Government consider the desperate needs and plight of so many people around the country who have no job and no home and simply want to create a decent minimal standard of life for themselves, they will listen with more attention to their conscience. The Government are not helping those people. I hope that as a result of today's debate they will think more seriously about the needs of those people and give them more attention than hitherto.

1.22 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): I, too, welcome this important debate, which has made it plain that there is concern and caring on both sides of the House about a problem which is not just financial — perhaps not primarily financial—but arises from a combination of financial and deeply human factors.

My interest in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and hotels began with a letter from a constituent in July 1983. My constituent wrote to me from a hotel in Croydon. He told me that he had been a Croydon resident but had gone north with his wife to obtain employment. In the north he had been made redundant twice. His health had suffered and a doctor advised him and his family to return to Croydon and they had done so. My constituent wrote:

"My wife and I and our two daughters aged 9 and 5 now live in a room 12 ft by 10 ft. We eat in here, we live in here and sleep in here. The rent is £102 a week, which the DHSS pay. I receive £152 a week in total. I have been offered jobs at £80 and £90 a week but I cannot afford to take them because my benefit will go and I will not be able to stay here any longer. I am currently ill with worry and my wife and I fear a breakdown."

That is a typical example of the letters that many hon. Members have received in the past few years. I went to see the family and found that the conditions were just as my constituent had described them. I saw the two children. They were already looking almost numb with the shock of the life that they were leading. Two children aged 9 and 5 were existing in that small room. I thought that it would be small wonder if, when they reached the age of 14 or 15, they became delinquent or problem children. If those children turned to crime, who could say in all conscience that the answer lay in detention centres, corporal punishment and more discipline?

I thought that I saw 10 rooms there. They were let at an average of £100 a week. That meant an income for the landlord of about £40,000 or £50,000 a year. That seemed a little greedy — a somewhat high return on his investment. I also saw that the taxpayer was not being given value for money, but the taxpayer is not the only

customer. The real customers are the husband and wife and their children. There are two customers in any service. I also saw the overcrowding. I wondered what on earth there was to stop the landlord telling the husband and wife, "Have a room for yourselves and put your children in another one." Where was the compassion in that hotel, or was the only motive money?

I followed the matter up by asking the Minister who was then responsible for these matters whether it was the DHSS's responsibility to check the quality of accommodation before making payments, with special reference to overcrowding. His response was that responsibility lay with the local housing authority, not with the DHSS. I immediately thought that something was wrong, because much money is being paid by the taxpayer, but the taxpayer, through the DHSS, is not checking the value of the accommodation.

I then got in touch with the local housing authority and discovered, as the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) so eloquently argued, that there is no legal obligation on the local authority to check accommodation. It has only powers to do so. I read a letter which set out those powers and found it complicated. It seemed full of red tape. I also discovered that local authorities are often too busy, for whatever reason, to follow the issue through and to oblige owners of such accommodation to comply with decent standards. They do not follow through their powers as they might. Ought there not to be duties rather than powers?

I fear that the problem is so enormous that we cannot get a straightforward answer. We have too much to do to achieve better results for taxpayers and customers. However, it is ridiculous that the man in the hotel could not afford to take jobs paying £80 or £90 a week because his supplementary benefit of £152 a week would disappear. That is sad, because there is dignity in a job. We should get to grips with our benefits system and enable people who are offered work to take it. They should not be penalised by loss of benefit to the extent that working becomes not worth while. I would much rather that the man were in work for £80 or £90 a week and had his income topped up by supplementary benefit. He would then have the dignity of work.

There should be an obligation on some body, whether the DHSS or the local authority, to inspect accommodation and tell a landlord, "This will not do. You must do better. You must provide two rooms for a husband and wife with two or three children. You cannot crowd them in like this. We will not have such housing in our area."

In general, however, I welcome the Government's proposals to prevent abuse of supplementary benefits paid to people in board-and-lodging accommodation. Perhaps the Government are approaching the problem from only one end. Although we must examine the financial abuses, we should approach the matter from the other end and ensure that the customers — those who live in such accommodation—get value for money.

I welcome the Government's proposed survey of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. If they examine the matter from the point of view of the interest of the recipients—those in housing difficulties—that will be good.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for the fact that I may not be present to hear his reply, but I shall read it with great interest. I know from my short time in the House that many hon. Members from all parties are caring and compassionate, and have knowledge of the problems at the sharp end. It is vital that we recognise our responsibility both for the public purse and for each other's welfare. We should help solve each other's day-to-day problems. We must remove the blot on the landscape. No hon. Member can be proud of the appalling conditions that exist in this area. We would do well, if we are to pass on to our children and grandchildren a civilised country, to concentrate on some of the saddest aspects of homelessness.

1.30 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): I apologise for my absence at the beginning of the debate. Together with virtually every London Member of Parliament, I had a meeting with the Commissioner of Police about the reorganisation proposals that are to be introduced in the London area. There would have been more London Members present had we not discovered that the chief of police had decided to consult Marks and Spencer and MacDonald's Hamburgers on reorganisation rather than hon. Members. I am sure that hon. Members will deplore that.

It is clear that tax cuts on the cost of reducing support for the homeless are a leg-up for the better off, a spit in the eye to concerned public opinion and a kick in the groin for those who are already down and out. The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) gave the impression—it reflects the false popular image—that accommodation for the homeless is a case of young scroungers taking holidays in seaside resorts. But people are in bed-and-breakfast hostels because they have nowhere else to go, and many of them are not young people.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) argued, the number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has increased because homelessness has increased. The Government claim that many more people under the age of 25 now claim board-and-lodging allowances. That reflects three main factors. First, benefit rates for people who stay with their parents have been cut, which has led to more pressure to leave home. Secondly, the long-term effects of youth unemployment are beginning to show, with more people getting on their bikes to look for work. Thirdly, no other housing options remain open.

The tragic position of the homeless reflects the abolition of the strategic housing role of the GLC. I witness that in my own constituency. When I became the Member of Parliament for Vauxhall in 1979, we used to move 3,500 families or individuals from the borough to alternative accommodation in London. That has now trickled almost to a standstill. My constituents recognise the inter-borough nomination scheme to be a farce. The abolition of the GLC's housing role has slammed the door on the inner city and doubled the waiting list. There are 20,000 people in Lambeth waiting for housing transfers. People come every week to my advice surgeries to protest about the conditions in which they live and about the fact that they are in hostel accommodation. They need, as the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) rightly said, better value for public money. But the best value for public money would be council house accommodation or other housing.

The Government's proposed limits are hopelessly unrealistic. The rate for London will be £60 or £70 a week for full board and lodging. The current DHSS level in four central London offices is £89 a week, and for Tresco house

[Mr. Stuart Holland]

£110 a week. How is that gap to be met? The effects will be little short of catastrophic for the least privileged and most socially handicapped in our society. Many voluntary hostels will be forced to close as they will have no source of funding to replace lost rent. Many people will be thrown out because they cannot pay. Landlords will have a financial incentive to pack in more people per room and to spend less on maintenance. More tragedies such as that which occurred in Camden will happen.

Hostels which are aid or refuge projects, such as the Clapham women's aid project in my constituency, will have problems. The Government have changed the basis of payment to the refuge. It will no longer be made direct to the refuge from the DHSS, but will go to the women who use it, many of whom are in desperate financial circumstances. The result is that the refuge cannot rely upon a steady rental income. It is therefore faced with a possibility of closure. I am sure that the Minister will wish to address himself to that aspect of the problem and return the payment system to the status quo. Without it, several of the women who are gaining considerable support from the project will be rendered technically homeless and some of them will be put out on the street.

I was impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West. He was right to challenge the amount of money spent in bed-and-breakfast hostels and to stress that we must consider not just the cost to the taxpayer but the value for money obtained by the user. But he did not follow through the implication of his analysis, which is that when high rents are being charged by unscrupulous landlords there should be at least a rent ceiling if not rent control.

The Government, who so often stress that they want value for money in the private sector, as the spending agency have every right to determine standards of accommodation to avoid overcrowding and a system of rent ceilings and control. There is a double standard at present. There has been a consensus on housing since the Parker Morris standards were introduced after the war. Rooms built in the public sector had to be of a minimum size. But we do not demand the same in the case of accommodation for the homeless. The Government are therefore inconsistent.

The cuts in social expenditure directly reflect the general cuts which are endemic to the Government's economic strategy. That strategy is designed to maintain the shibboleth of monetary targets, but it completely fails to recognise that public spending, such as the social security spending on the homeless, directly sustains rather than drains the private sector.

I should like to take up the points made by the hon. Member for Thanet, North with which I strongly disagree. He gave an example of a hostel which had a £30,000 cash turnover from single homeless people, which was paid by the DHSS. Let us analyse what that revenue is spent on. It is public money going to the private sector. Who does the repairs? It is almost always the local builder. One of the major companies—ICI or Berger—will provide the materials for the decorations; Allied Carpets will probably supply the carpets; and the furniture may well be supplied by GEC's Schreiber division. There are no public enterprises supplying such goods and services or things like blankets and sheets.

DHSS payments for accommodation for homeless people are a direct transfer of money from the public to the private sector. There is only one exception. It is the public-to-public transfer of money for gas or electricity. That includes heating. Do the Government wish to condemn those people who might otherwise be on the street to hypothermia?

The Prime Minister has cited St. Francis of Assisi, but this is not the morality of that saint. Rather, it is the morality, denounced by St. Matthew, of to those

"that hath shall be given . . . but from him that hath not shall be taken away".

It is a poisoned Christmas present which neither the homeless nor the caring public will forget.

1.40 pm

Mr. Nell Thorne (Ilford, South): I have listened with great interest to the debate and I compliment the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on introducing this subject, which needs airing frequently. Today, from both sides of the House, we have heard some unsavoury stories of what is going on in such accommodation. Undoubtedly, there is a lot of profiteering and racketeering at the expense of the taxpayer. The Government have decided, partly because of the publicity given to recent cases, to take some action in this regard, and it is right that they should do so. We have also heard about fire hazards, assaults on tenants, the problems of getting proper service, of general harassment and even about the bully-boy tactics of some grasping owners who go down to the post office to assist in a strong-arm way the people who are claiming their benefit to collect their money. We all deplore this.

For too long, we have relied on the present system to solve the problem. We have to look much deeper below the surface than we have looked this morning. No hon. Member could do other than deplore the conditions under which so many of these people are living, but we need look a little deeper and ask ourselves how this has come about. We have heard something this morning about lack of Government investment in this sector. We have been told that if only the Government would spend more money in this way things would be better. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) pointed out the advantages to British industry of supplying equipment for proper fire-proofing and for kitchens in making accommodation much more suitable. I accept what he says and I support him and other hon. Members in their demand that there should be an effective inspectorate to ensure that where the taxpayers' money is being spent it is being spent properly. Those who provide accommodation for those who are not able to look after their own interests adequately, for the reasons explained by a number of hon. Members, should at least be required to reach a certain standard before such accommodation is considered suitable for taxpayers' money.

However, I wish to draw the attention of the House to one fundamental aspect of this matter—the role of the private sector. We have had controls over the housing sector since the first world war, when rent controls were first brought in. Since that time it has been a requirement that certain unfurnished dwellings — and now even furnished dwellings that are let and are not part of a hotel or hostel complex which include the provision of service

—are subject to control. The control is such that it deters the majority of people who would be able and willing to make an investment in that sector.

To whom do I look to do it? I have no wish to look at the kind of racketeers who are operating in the market at present. But there are substantial sums available. We have heard recently about the millions of pounds removed overseas by the National Union of Mineworkers. There are substantial sums available in the trade union movement generally. Millions of pounds are invested by the life assurance offices every week. The pension funds have similar sums which they have to place to make an investment return for those who benefit from the income.

Where is all this money going? It is going to the stock market and to the money market, but not to the housing market where I believe it should be going. If we had tackled the problem sooner—certainly by the beginning of the 1950s — housing today would not be in the appalling state it is. There would be a lot more choice for people looking for accommodation. There would be a lot more competition. Who, after all, would go to a shop to buy a second-rate pullover? Instead, we go to Marks and Spencer and other similar stores where we find extremely good value for money. That good value for money has been created by the sensible investment of capital in machinery, enterprises and shops.

There is no earthly reason why the same should not have been done in housing, why there should not have been a choice, and why ill-equipped and poor housing should not have been phased out many years ago. Sadly, that has not happened because successive Governments have tried to interfere in the market, and we all know what happens when Governments interfere in any area—and certainly it applies to housing.

We are discussing the appalling conditions being experienced at the margin. It is people who are not able to look after themselves who are so badly affected. If we had made a proper market, these people at the margin would have been provided for in adequate accommodation and it would not have been necessary to look for other remedies.

In the general housing sector we have the fair rent officers, who were a creation of a previous Labour Government to reintroduce a system to ensure control. That control is fine for those who have adequate places in which to live, and there is no difficulty for them. They can quite easily go on living in the accommodation that they occupy. They have certain rights given to them by Parliament to remain in that accommodation, and Parliament also gives them protection. But it does not provide for those who come along subsequently looking for accommodation and are not provided for, and there is no way in which property owners will provide accommodation if the return that they can get on it is limited and they are prevented from maintaining it as they should.

If we accept that it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that everyone is adequately housed, it should also be their responsibility to ensure that a proper return is obtained for those who provide sensible and adequate accommodation. That we have not done. As a first step there should be a requirement that fair rent officers must take into account the cost of the construction of the buildings that they are considering so that the owner, whoever it may be—whether a trade union or a private individual — receives an adequate return upon his investment. He should be able to invest a sum of money that has a certain purchasing power. He ought to be able to realise that sum of money in the future and find that it has a similar purchasing power. That is not possible in the housing market now.

We acknowledge that in the majority of cases it is the taxpayer who makes up the difference. Therefore, it would not be the tenants, who cannot afford to pay, who would be meeting the extra cost; the extra cost would be met by the taxpayer. In freeing the market we should enable a person who is receiving benefit to have a much wider choice. He would not be inhibited, as he is now, by being restricted to that section of the market that ensures that he lives in sub-standard accommodation.

The only answer that has been offered this morning is that we should introduce yet further controls, rules and regulations. That will cost the taxpayer a great deal more money in supervision. Therefore, would it not be more sensible to look at this problem sensibly, in a proper and open way, and try to move as soon as possible towards a decontrolled market, thereby increasing the quality of life for everybody, including those harassed and inadequately accommodated people whom we have been discussing this morning?

1.52 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): The motion on the Order Paper today is a bit of a catch all. It covers a very wide range of topics. However, we recognise that the motion has been put down for the worthiest of motives. I congratulate the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on the dignity and responsibility with which he introduced this most important topic. The House may not be so full on a Friday as it might be, but, as is often the case on a Friday, the debate has been informed and interesting for those who have taken part in it. No doubt that has been noticed by the considerable number of members of the public who have been listening to the debate.

The debate concerns the housing of people in need. My concern is the housing of people who are in housing need. Therefore, I reject the case that has been made for many young, homeless people. They are not in housing need. A very large number of them are not homeless. They have homes to which to go. Indeed, they have homes which they have recently left. My experience in Birmingham and London and the experience of hon. Members on both sides of the House who have constituencies in seaside resorts is that many of those young people would be much better served by a caring and responsible housing department or social services department giving them a train ticket, walking them to the nearest station and putting them on the train back home. If they are unemployed and miserable in Glasgow, we can be absolutely certain that if they are unemployed they will be a great deal more miserable in London. It is not right and proper that, where they are unemployed, they should be perhaps enjoying themselves prancing around on the beaches, as we have seen recently on television programmes, in the constituencies of a number of hon. Members.

There are young homeless people. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, who was an assistant director of social services, will be aware that one of the most acute problems is that which faces young people who have grown up in the care of local authorities. I was responsible for 4,000 young people who were in that

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

position. We carried out a survey and found that it was misnamed a children's department. Three quarters of those we were looking after were over the age of 11, and half of them were over the age of 14. Consequently we were preparing those young people to live in institutions of one kind or another—frequently, sadly, penal institutions—for the rest of their lives. Therefore we have been cruel by being kind to many of those young people. It would be better if we said to them, "Go home, and start to learn how to get on with your parents, your brothers and sisters and everybody else."

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) referred to elderly and handicapped people who are living in private and voluntary homes. That is not just a problem in the major resorts of the south coast; it is becoming a major problem in many parts of the country. Many of those homes—in my view, most of them—are first-class and provide an excellent standard of care, not just for the elderly but for the mentally ill, mentally handicapped, disabled, disabled children, and so on.

Some of the growth in accommodation provided no doubt shows the considerable growth in need during recent years, particularly as hospitals for the long-term care of disabled people have tended to reduce their numbers. But some of the growth also shows the greed of those who are prepared to provide the accommodation. In 1978, 7,000 such people claimed supplementary benefit as residents in private and voluntary homes—about 20 per cent. of the total number of beds provided in such accommodation. By 1982, that had risen to 15,700—30 per cent. of all beds. It is estimated that by 1984, 42,500 people will be living in such specialist—or purporting to be specialist—accommodation and claiming supplementary benefit. That must be nearly half of all the beds so provided. The cost has risen from £6 million in 1978 to an estimated £190 million this year. That is a staggering growth.

There used to be no controls whatever on DHSS payments to people in such accommodation, controls were then introduced and they were entirely locally determined. That posed considerable problems for DHSS officers in the regions. If there were only one such home in the region, or of that type in that neighbourhood, that proprietor could jolly well claim what he or she liked and that became the norm for the neighbourhood. The result has been a rapid increase in expenditure. That contrasts with restrictions on local authority expenditure, and, in some parts of the country — not the area I represent — considerable restrictions and, indeed, cuts on NHS expenditure which have prevented the easy movement of people out of hospitals and long-term care. The Government now plan some changes and they are very much to be welcomed.

I want to add to what my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North said in drawing attention to the problems that some of those changes will present. We are talking not just about the amount of money that goes to pay for all those people, but about standards of care. The Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983—a hesitant attempt to enforce standards of care, particularly in nursing homes — does not touch the majority of the 40,000-odd people that I have just mentioned.

There was a persistent problem in Birmingham in enforcing any standards whatever in terms of care. The environmental health departments had ample powers to enforce standards in terms of the number of kitchen tiles that should be used, the number of toilets and the quality of the lino, but nobody has any powers over any institution that calls itself a hotel to enforce some standards of care.

I strongly believe that a percentage of the money that the DHSS will pay for that accommodation should be handed over, perhaps in some registration form, to the local authority in order to pay for an inspectorate. When the Select Committee on Social Services visited Norfolk recently—that county has had an enormous growth in private care, much of it excellent—we were told that the local authority had one officer to go round the various establishments to advise them on the kind of people that they were sometimes unwittingly taking on—sometimes mentally disabled people with serious problems. That local authority was doing its best to help the individual and the proprietors of the various establishments.

Some standards of care should be set. That would not be too difficult, because in many cases, as has already been pointed out, the establishments are claiming an attendance allowance, so somebody is looking at the residents and making a judgment about what standards of care they require. I feel strongly that, as we have little control at the moment on how much we spend on that, and no control on what the money goes on, the divorce between cash and care has become complete. That is wrong and a terrible way to treat those poor people.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction is right to say that we have loads of legislation on multiple occupation. Do we need more? There is legislation going back to the Sanitary Act 1866, when the term "houses in multiple occupation" was introduced. We have 120 years of legislation on conditions in houses in multiple occupation.

Management orders can be served when it appears to a local authority that there are unsatisfactory conditions in an HMO. Such orders can cover the water supply, drainage, kitchens, bathrooms, water closets in common use, sinks, wash basins, staircases, corridors, outbuildings, and so on. If the owner does not do what he is told, he can be served with a detailed order telling him what has to be put right, and that can cover natural and artificial light, ventilation, water supply and so on.

Under the Housing Act 1980, and previous legislation, local authorities may require the provision of satisfactory means of escape from fire. Under more recent legislation, it is mandatory on local authorities to require such provision in HMOs of three storeys and more.

There is more than enough legislation. The problem is that most local authorities do not use it.

Mr. Boyes: Does the hon. Lady agree that only 2 or 3 per cent. of HMOs have three storeys or more? We are worried about the vast majority, which have fewer than three storeys.

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Gentleman may know more about the matter than I do, but I understand that local authorities have powers in respect of all such properties. The mandatory requirement is imposed only in respect of fire escapes in larger properties.

The fact that local authorities have the powers has been amply demonstrated in Sheffield. In the late 1970s, the city council decided to have a crack at its houses in multiple occupation. It did a full survey and read the law to find out what it was entitled to do. It was found that the

vast majority of houses in multiple occupation in Sheffield were occupied by young single people, as one would expect in a university city.

Many of those HMOs were substandard: 64 per cent. had an insufficient number of wash hand basins, 47 per cent. did not have enough WCs, 7 per cent. had too few bathrooms—they must be a clean lot up in Sheffield—53 per cent. did not have fire-resistant doors and screens and 42 per cent. did not have fire escapes. A total of 84 per cent. needed essential repairs.

Sheffield was starting from a reasonable base, which is more typical of places outside London than it is of London itself. The council decided to use its powers. It spoke to all the owners and asked the owners of 60 per cent. of the HMOs to comply with occupancy, amenity and safety standards.

As a result, the owners of 22 per cent. of the properties incurred extra costs, the owners of 8 per cent. lost income, mainly through a reduction in occupancy, and the owners of 26 per cent. both lost rent and incurred costs. One might expect landlords to pull out promptly in those circumstances, but that did not happen. About 70 per cent. said that they would relet any vacant property, and when a check was done a year later — what a competent authority to find out what had happened—it was found that 76 per cent. of HMOs were relet, mainly to the same sort of people.

The magazine *Housing Review*, of November-December 1983, said:

"The Sheffield experience suggests that where a council uses its discretionary powers there are good chances of HMOs being up to standard, that in using its powers it runs no apparent risk of creating a greater withdrawal of lettings than would otherwise occur . . . A significant minority are, however, still substandard, partly because, in the context of other priorities, the Council has not been conscientiously searching them out, getting them registered and improved."

Cases of bad practice are rife when the council does not bother. There was a tragic case in Manchester when four men died in a lodging house called the Hyde House hotel in the Ardwick green area on 16 December last year. There was a fire and a substantial investigation, which resulted in reports at the inquest as to why the fire occurred and why those involved could not get out. The hotel did not have a fire certificate. The door leading to the fire escape on the top floor was nailed up at the time of the fire, the fire alarm system did not work and there were no extinguishers. At the inquest a fire prevention officer said that he was not sure whether there were any extinguishers, and was criticised by the coroner for his vagueness. In other words, someone had been to the house and had had a look round, but had done nothing about it.

There were continuous reports from voluntary organisations about that property, even in the couple of weeks leading up to the fire. One problem noted at the time was that residents could not complain, because the owner made them sign over their Giros and then gave them their change after the rent had been deducted. Ten years ago we came across that problem in Birmingham. It is not that difficult for a social services department to appoint a social worker as trustee—which is what we did—and then to ensure that any money, particularly from mentally handicapped people, is handed over through the social services department, and put into their post office books. A responsible local authority would have done that. But Manchester has set up a working party.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction, who sadly is not present, will find that any efforts to set up an inquiry are in danger of the same thing. There is a habit of saying, "Let's take another look at the problem." But we know what the problem is, as it is only too apparent. Consequently, we should ensure that local authorities use their ample powers. Indeed, my right hon. and hon. Friends would be well advised to kick them along a bit.

Bed-and-breakfast hotels are an absolute scandal. Placing tenants in them is really done only in London, where there are one or two honourable exceptions, of which Islington is the most noticeable. The amounts expended on putting poor souls into diabolical accommodation are staggering. There are now more than 500 homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Brent alone, at a cost to the taxpayer in 1982-83 of almost £3 million. By 1986, it is estimated that Brent will be forking out £6 million per year to London hoteliers, which is enough to repair more than 21,000 council properties annually and to finance a house building loan of £100 million, which would provide permanent housing for every Brent family now in bed-and-breakfast accommodation from now onwards.

The amounts of money are staggering. Last year, London's 32 councils managed to spend more than £7 million on keeping the homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. In particular authorities the problem is acute. For example, in Hackney the number jumped from 92 homeless families in 1981 to 209 only two years later. Yet Hackney has more than 400 empty properties, over 200 of which have been empty for more than a year. So it would serve Hackney and its tenants very well if the money were spent on repairing properties and sorting out some form of permanent accommodation.

I recommend to my right hon. and hon. Friends that housing investment programme returns should require details of families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation; otherwise it is difficult to find out the facts. It is worth pointing out that in the sort of properties under discussion, GLC fire certificates are mandatory, although many of the properties have not been inspected for years. If we are thinking of how to find some money, I suggest that the GLC could first use the £10 million with which it has been promoting its own future, and then use the £10 million with which it funds its silly women's committee. That is simply a way of paying a load of lady councillors to talk to each other round a table.

Attention has been drawn to the death of Mrs. Karim and her two children in a fire at 46 Gloucester place. That is the only point at which some hon. Members have got their facts slightly wrong. Their mistake is significant. Mrs. Karim and those who besieged Camden town hall were Camden tenants, but they were being housed not in Camden, but in Westminster. I see that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) confirms that. That is interesting, because it means that not one, but three councils were involved; the council that placed the tenants, the council in whose area the tenants were placed, and the GLC. Thus, it is very easy for there to be a lot of buck passing. For example, the owner of the properties has not been prosecuted, but he should have been. In June this year he owned several adjoining properties. The GLC issued a consent to join Nos. 42, 44 and 46 by breaching the party walls, yet no fire certificate was issued.

[Mrs. Currie]

The families, having made a fuss, have now been allocated accommodation elsewhere in Camden. If they can be allocated that accommodation after someone has died, they could have been allocated it previously. There is absolutely no reason for any family to be put into bed-and-breakfast accommodation when there is empty property in this city, as there is in other cities, and when there is money available. Such people could obtain housing benefit on a permanent tenancy. If Islington can do it—and it has—and if Birmingham can do it—and it has because there is not a single Birmingham council tenant in bed-and-breakfast accommodation — so can Brent, Hackney and other areas.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the hon. Lady accept that Camden, in giving a recent commitment to house all the homeless families currently housed by London Lets—which, because of the squeeze on its overall housing programme, must renege on its obligations to many families on the waiting and transfer lists—will solve the problem that she rightly identifies?

Mrs. Currie: All councils must decide which families come first. I suggest that Camden should pay a great deal more attention to those families than to the young homeless for whom it appears to have a great deal of affection.

It is not housing management; it is a case of out of sight, out of mind. It is an absolute scandal. I recognise the genuine desire of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington to help people, especially families, in desperate need. It is sad that so little attention is paid by all the authorities to the genuine problems until they begin to cost a great deal of money, in the case of the Government, or until somebody dies, in the case of councils.

We have obligations towards many of those people and we should use the existing law and existing cash to discharge those responsibilities to help people towards a happier and more settled life.

2.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I join the chorus of congratulation from both sides of the House for the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on his good fortune in winning first place in the ballot for private Member's motions and on using it to introduce such an important subject. I also congratulate him on making such a responsible start to what has proved to be a valuable debate.

The debate shows the importance of Fridays when, to some considerable extent, we forget our party political rhetoric and show that we recognise the problems that inevitably exist in our society. I must mention especially the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) and for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). They demonstrated that Conservative Members very much share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington and his hon. Friends about housing problems.

I hope that I shall not spoil this beneficent beginning by saying that it is a pity that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) saw fit to enter into the realms of party hyperbole, which was not surprising as it was characteristic of him. I am sorry that he is not here now. He, together with other hon. Members, was kind enough to apologise for his absence because, like all of us should do, he is rushing to his constituency. I hope that he will understand that his absence cannot exempt me from responding to what he had to say.

The issues that we are dealing with, particularly the DHSS measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State some weeks ago, must be set against a financial background. I should be the first to recognise that we are not only talking about money, but money must be a part of our consideration because we are concerned about the massive resources that are being used, and we must use them properly and effectively. The serious questions that have arisen are based on the proposition that the sums that we are talking about can be used much more effectively in other areas of the social security programme or of the Government's general public spending programme.

I remind the House that, for example, spending on ordinary board-and-lodging accommodation rose from £166 million a year in December 1982 to £277 million in December 1983. Our best estimates show that the total is now running at about £570 million a year and, unless action is taken, that figure is likely to grow by a further 50 per cent. by December 1985.

Mr. Stuart Holland: That is one seven hundredth part of total national expenditure. Will the Minister answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), myself and others that that public spending goes almost entirely to the private sector and probably less than 10 per cent. goes in electricity or other heating charges?

Mr. Whitney: The essential question is how we use the £40 billion in the social security programme. This is a serious problem. Ironically, it was considered by the hon. Member for Oldham, West as a serious problem on 29 November, when he said that there was an

"enormous and reckless abuse of taxpayers' money." — [*Official Report*, 29 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 1099.]

The hon. Gentleman seems to have changed his mind in the few days that have elapsed since then. I do not know what the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) thought on 29 November.

I am glad to know, however, that this financial problem has been recognised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Therefore, it would have been irresponsible not to take action to prevent that trend from continuing because otherwise it would have jeopardised other parts of our social security programme.

As a first step, we laid regulations on 22 November which will enable Ministers to take direct control of existing limits governing board-and-lodging payments. Those regulations were debated and approved in Committee on 12 December and will be debated in another place on 17 December. In other words, we are instituting a temporary freeze while the consultative document is considered. We recognise that the consultative process is fast, but it must be fast because of the nature of the problem and the rate of growth in the financial spending with which it seeks to deal.

I hope to deal with some of the points that were made on both sides of the House in the debate. It is right that the debate continued a little longer than usual, but it means that there is little time left for my reply, so if I cannot deal

with all the points, many of which were considerably detailed, I shall write to the hon. Members who raised them.

Many hon. Members concentrated on the levels that we have proposed as maxima for board and lodging in various parts of the country. For example, the hon. Member for Vauxhall thought that the maximum of £70 in London was woefully inadequate, whereas many other people take a different view. It seems to me that that is entirely likely to be right. My hon. Friends the Members for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale), for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) and for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) suggested that the maximum of £60 that we have proposed in those areas may be on the high side. We welcome those contributions. That is the sort of issue that we shall consider in the consultative process.

One point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North seemed to be based on a certain misunderstanding. My hon. Friend was worried about the new proposed limit. As the consultative document makes clear, where the existing limit for an area, uprated by 5 per cent., still falls below the proposed new limit, that figure will be adopted until November 1986. That will apply in areas such as Newquay where the local present limit is less than £50. I hope that my hon. Friend is assured about that. An important consultative process is involved.

The evidence that young people are being given board and lodging, especially in seaside resorts, is worrying, and a more important factor than some Labour Members admit. The number of boarders under the age of 25 rose by about 60 per cent. between 1982 and 1983. The number rose from 23,000 to 37,000 in that year. That figure should be set against the 9 per cent. increase in the number of claimants in general in that age group. The increase in the number of people moving to seaside areas is marked.

Several of my hon. Friends have cited figures. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West said that the number of people from Merseyside moving to his area had increased from 1,000 to 2,500 in 12 months. That is of concern to us all. The number of 16 and 17-year-olds claiming as boarders at any one time is estimated to have risen from about 4,300 at the end of 1982 to about 10,000 today.

We have heard much from Opposition Members about the family and the pressures upon it. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South said about that. I agree with her about ending "privileges" for the 16 and 17-year-olds. We should invite them to move back to their families, where they should be. Young people should not be subjected to the pressures of the present system.

The system is often abused. I think of the wealth of advertisements for Thanet hotels and guest houses specifying "High class DHSS accommodation", "DHSS fees arranged" and

"On DHSS? Living in poor conditions? Why not live by the sea at Margate . . . ?"

We must end such pressures. It cannot be for the benefit of the family to allow young people to be beguiled in that way. The regulations allow accommodation for those who are looking for work and we recognise that there are exceptions.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), in an effective contribution, referred to the pressures on young people north and south of the border. Government Members representing southern constituencies know of the pressures. The difference between north and south is not as absolute as the hon. Gentleman suggests. We recognise the pressures on young people. I agree that we should ensure that proper reception arrangements are available for the young people who come to London, but should we not make changes to discourage young people from moving.

Both the hon. Member for Linlithgow and the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) asked what opportunities were on offer to the young people. A number of alternatives are on offer. In particular, there is the youth training scheme, which is under-subscribed throughout the country. I understand that even in the area represented by the hon. Member for Linlithgow more places are available than are taken up. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, except in special individual circumstances, with which our regulations can certainly deal, it would be much more sensible for a young person from Scotland or anywhere else to stay put and join the youth training scheme than to go to the Costa del Dole, as it has been called, or to face the uncertainties of central London.

We understand the concerns that have been expressed, but we believe that our proposals are flexible enough. There would be exceptional categories. Those categories would include young people with a dependent child or children, or who are pregnant; young people who have been in local authority care and cannot return to a family home, and handicapped young people who need to be in board-and-lodging accommodation. They would also include young people who have been in board-and-lodging accommodation while in employment—but payment as a boarder in such cases will be for a limited period only —and young people for whom accommodation in board and lodging is the only means of preventing serious damage or serious risk to health or safety.

That list shows that we recognise that there are exceptions. I believe, however, that in the generality of cases the best answer is for the young person to stay within a reasonable distance of his home. I am thinking in particular of 16 and 17-year-olds.

References were made to the problems of furnished accommodation by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington and a number of other hon. Members. They referred to the problems connected with the special needs payments. The basis of our policy is a recognition that some people moving into unfurnished accommodation genuinely need such help. Secondly, however, we also recognise that we have a duty to safeguard the taxpayers' money. The purchase of furniture can often involve spending several hundred pounds.

Mr. Stuart Holland: For furniture?

Mr. Whitney: Indeed.

Thirdly, we recognise the need for equity between those on benefit, who can gain durable assets from such payments, and those in work on low incomes who are not helped in that way. We therefore give such help to claimants with a pensioner, child, pregnant woman or chronically sick or disabled person in the family. We also help claimants whose move is necessary in the sense that they have satisfied the conditions for help with removal expenses—for example, because of divorce, bereavement or overcrowding.

Other claimants who have been on benefit for six months or more and have no immediate prospect of a job, and those who have just come out of prison, long-stay hospital or some other institution, can also get help. But

[Mr. Whitney]

in those cases we think it fair, before providing large sums of money to set up home in unfurnished accommodation, to ask whether there is some suitable already furnished accommodation where the claimant could live instead.

I have noted the points which have been made about the "suitable alternative furnished accommodation" rule, but I think it right, for the reasons already outlined, that there should be some restriction of that kind.

Hon. Members have suggested that it would be better value for taxpayers' money to make furniture payments more freely available and so avoid people going into bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I am grateful for their acknowledgement that we are right to try to get better value for money out of board-and-lodging payments. However, I suggest that we are going about it the right way. The answer is not to sweep aside all the restrictions on furniture payments and to pay large sums of money to any claimant who wants to equip a new home, irrespective of his circumstances, job prospects and length of time on benefit. Our rules on furniture payments concentrate help where it is most needed. That is the basis of the policy that we have debated today. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction emphasised what we are doing——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND ARTS

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. George Walden be discharged from the Education, Science and Arts Committee and Mr. Malcolm Thornton be added.—*[Mr. Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. James Couchman be discharged from the Social Services Committee and Mr. Tony Favell be added.—*[Mr. Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

British Transport Police

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): The British Transport police was established in its original form some 150 years ago. It is a body of about 2,000 men and women to the federation of which I act as parliamentary adviser. The British Transport police has provided a quiet and efficient service and it has seldom been necessary for it to ask for assistance to enable it to carry out its duties. I am raising this issue today because there is now an argument for the Government to give it assistance.

The British Transport police have three areas of responsibility—the London underground, docks owned by Associated British Ports, and British Rail premises and trains. The transport police have recently gained some prominence. In April 1984 they were involved in controlling the section of the football supporting fraternity which became rowdy during travel on cross-channel ferries. The House will recall that the transport police's conduct merited considerable praise from the House and the press. Week in, week out, the British Transport police have a duty to control unruly football fans on trains and at stations. I therefore do not need to emphasise their solid reputation for effective policing to standards equivalent to those found in the civil police.

In 1980, there was a joint conference on violence in public transport which was attended by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Transport of the day. A major role in the maintenance of good order on public transport was allocated to the British Transport police. As a result of the conference, an additional £1 million was made available to create special mobile units. As those units have unfolded into the London underground there is little doubt that underground staff and the public have felt considerable benefits. The system has worked well and there is a feeling of greater security. However, that is quite different from saying that to travel on the last train has become an agreeable experience and it is certainly not to say that to be a driver or a guard on a London underground train is not to be left open to considerable risk.

There is now worry about a possible reduction in the number of officers in the force. We are comforted by the implication that the reduction will be achieved by natural wastage. There has been no recruiting since May. But why should there be a reduction in the force? It seems to stem from the reduced Government grant to the British Railways Board. British Rail has been asked to review all its expenditure. It has concluded that a reduction in policing must be part of any package which it presents to achieve that reduction in expenditure.

I do not believe that British Rail wishes to see the strength of the British Transport police reduced. I doubt whether the Government intended that that should be part of the economies which British Rail introduced. Therefore, will the Minister consider telling the British Railways Board that the level of the police establishment should not be included in any review of expenditure which it undertakes? The British Transport police need more officers, not fewer, if they are to be effective in maintaining good order on London transport and British

Rail. More mobile squads are required to combat tube violence, and more British Transport police officers are needed on trains and at mainline stations.

If the British Transport police establishment cannot be maintained and increased as I have suggested, we can expect public disorder. If the Minister thinks that I am exaggerating, I assure him that because of the impossibility of providing police cover, especially at weekends, some stations have had to be closed recently. In those circumstances, damage may result to British Rail property and people may be injured. The establishment is understaffed now and a further reduction would have a serious effect.

My second reason for initiating the debate is that Associated British Ports proposes to terminate the use of British Transport policemen at its ports. It is a private limited company and is therefore entitled to take that action if it wishes. It has said that the reasons are entirely based on cost. Instead, it will engage a private firm. There is no doubt that if it does that there will be a reduction in the standard of protection of the property of customers of Associated British Ports.

Many people will say that that matter is between Associated British Ports and its customers. However, there are matters of public policy involved. The Government cannot entirely escape from some responsibility in this area. If the ports are not properly policed, the opportunity for drug smuggling will be increased. In case the House thinks again that I am exaggerating, I shall illustrate my point. Recently at the port of Dover people carrying 5·5 kilos of cannabis were arrested. If British Transport police cover at ports is withdrawn, criminals will move to Southampton or other ABP ports. There will be no effective cover to discourage them.

I am worried about the importation not only of drugs but of rabies. A lack of policing will make it easier to bring in animals. Terrorists will have a greater freedom to come and go. Illegal immigrants will have a greater chance of entering the country through unpoliced ports. It is clear that such a move would cause considerable problems. The specialised expertise of the British Transport police should be kept intact to counteract those dangers.

About 200 police officers are involved in the policing of British ports. Although some of them will be retained in the form of emergency mobile squads, there is no doubt that if the Government stand by while the force is disbanded it will be an abnegation of their responsibility.

If the only solution to the problem of keeping the force intact to continue in the service of the people is that British Transport policemen be absorbed into local county constabularies, I do not believe that British Transport police would stand in the way of such a move. The alternative is to provide open house to criminals at ports. I do not believe that anyone would wish that to happen.

I know that chief constables will be inclined to say, "If we are to take British Transport police officers into our county constabularies, we will do it only provided we are given some assurance about the additional cost which will fall upon our county constabularies." They may say that they will be prepared to do so only if their overall establishment is suitably increased.

All those matters must be faced, but we cannot drift up to 30 June 1985, which is the date upon which effective police cover will be withdrawn from the ports, and then discover that we have left our ports wide open to all the difficulties and dangers to which I have drawn attention.

I have raised these matters today because, first, I am calling upon my hon. Friend the Minister to set up a review of his Department's insistence that there should be a cut in the forces employed at British Rail premises and on London underground. I hope that I have said sufficient to persuade my hon. Friend that, far from contemplating a reduction in the establishment on London underground and British Rail, we should be looking to increase it if the public is to be protected. Secondly, I seek Government help to keep the British Transport police who are at present available at ports around the country to ensure that law enforcement is advanced. If that can be done only by absorbing the officers into county forces, so be it.

I have the support of a number of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. As they cannot be here, I have been asked by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who are sponsored members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, to say that I have their support in bringing these matters before the House. I hope that they will receive my hon. Friend's sympathetic consideration.

2.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) started his Adjournment debate by mentioning all the good work done by the British Transport police. I join him in that comment and emphasise my admiration for the quiet, effective and unobtrusive way in which officers of the British Transport police carry out their duties.

I am obliged to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to recent developments in the policing of the ports. In the light of events it is entirely understandable that British Transport police officers should have expressed concern over the future of their force. However, I must make it clear from the outset that the establishment and deployment of the British Transport police is a matter not for the Government, but for the British Railways Board, and for the other organisations making use of their services. Nevertheless, I have made inquiries to establish the background to the decision taken by Associated British Ports, to which my hon. Friend referred, to dispense with the services of the British Transport police by 30 June 1985.

The British Transport police at present operate in 13 of the 19 ports now owned by Associated British Ports. The British Railways Board, as employer of the police, makes their services available to Associated British Ports on a repayment basis.

The origins of the policing arrangement are that the British Transport police provided a policing service to the old British Transport Commission. The commission was abolished in 1962 in favour of four separate transport boards — the British Railways Board, the London Transport Board, the British Transport Docks Board and the British Waterways Board; the British Railways Board as the main user of police services took over responsibility as employer of the force, co–ordinating its interests with those of London Transport and the British Transport Docks Board through the British Transport Police Force Scheme 1963, the British Waterways Board having opted out of the scheme.

The 1963 scheme provided for all transport police to be appointed and employed by the British Railways Board,

[Mr. David Mitchell]

and established the title of chief constable for the chief officer of the British Transport police. It also made provision for a British Transport police committee with a chairman and other representatives drawn from the British Railways Board, but also with one member drawn from each of the other transport boards requiring the services of the force. The committee's terms of reference include the supervision of the administration of the force, and the provision of advice to the boards in respect of any matter relating to the British Transport Police.

The British Transport Docks Board was reconstituted at the end of 1982, as Associated British Ports, owned by a parent company, Associated British Ports Holdings, which is now wholly owned by private interests. Associated British Ports inherited the range of statutory powers needed to operate in the British Transport Docks Board's ports, which, among other things, allowed existing policing arrangements to continue. Nothing in the statutes required Associated British Ports to use the services of the British Transport police, though it has done so until now, making repayment to the British Railways Board of the costs involved. However, Associated British Ports has recently reviewed its arrangements. Its resulting decision to dispense with the services of the British Transport police is, I must stress, a commercial matter entirely for Associated British Ports.

The implications of that decision, and in particular its impact on police deployment and total establishment, will need to be examined carefully by the British Railways Board and the British Transport police committee. I understand that the chief constable of the British Transport police has made a detailed assessment of the situation which will assist them in that examination. I should emphasise that these are considerations which are proper either to the police committee, or to the British Railways Board as the employer of the police, and the Government have no power to influence the outcome.

A number of stories have been circulating which suggest that the withdrawal of the British Transport police from some ports will result in an increase in organised crime, including drug trafficking. These assertions stray some way from reality, and in any case ignore the fact that even now not all the ports owned by Associated British Ports are policed by this force. The investigation of criminal offences committed on the property of Associated British Ports can, as with any other private organisation, be undertaken by the local county police. It should be remembered that these are precisely the arrangements which exist in the dozens of ports not served by the British Transport police or having their own individual ports police force.

Mr. McCrindle: I understand that my hon. Friend is replying to the debate as the Under-Secretary of State for Transport. Can he, at the very least, give an undertaking that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will have a word with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, whose interest in the more general aspects of maintaining law and order are such as perhaps to make him more interested than my hon. Friend has implied he is in what might happen if these ports become de-policed?

Mr. Mitchell: That is a reasonable request, and I shall take steps to see that, in one form or other, the implications of the changes that are under way, and any other changes that might develop, are drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary so that he can take account of them and of their effect on the general policing requirements in the county forces in the vicinity of such changes. However, when my hon. Friend refers to Associated British Ports ending the financial arrangement for its internal policing to be carried out by the British Transport police as an open house for criminals, that perhaps is going a little further than my hon. Friend will on reflection feel appropriate.

I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that neither the Clyde nor the Forth has such policing arrangements. I know that north of the border they are very law abiding, but I should have thought that even in those two ports there might be similar problems to those drawn attention to by my hon. Friend. Nearer home to him, in Ipswich, there is no such system. Nor is there in the huge port of Sullom Voe, which handles so much of our oil shipments. Nor is there on the Tyne, and nor is there in Sunderland. We are not exactly going into wholly uncharted waters with the proposal of Associated British Ports that it should bring itself into line with the other ports to which I have referred.

The police authorities and chief constables of civil forces whose areas contain ports from which the British Transport police are to be withdrawn will no doubt be considering with Associated British Ports the extent of the policing commitment required, and laying plans for meeting this. As far as customs requirements are concerned, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise will, I am sure, also be seeking discussions with Associated British Ports to satisfy itself on a port-by-port basis that adequate alternative security arrangements are being provided. Quarantine regulations are the responsibility of the local authorities, and they will no doubt be considering the implications of ABP's decisions and what alternative arrangements might be needed.

The suggestion that one solution to the difficulties on surplus police manpower created by ABP's decision would be to second BTP officers currently serving in the docks to the various county police forces is a helpful one. In principle there is nothing to prevent this happening, though in practice it is not clear that it would necessarily provide a universal solution to whatever additional policing requirements may fall on individual county police forces. But it certainly merits consideration by the parties involved: the British Railways Board, the British Transport police committee, the police authorities, which have the responsibility for setting their establishments—subject to the Home Secretary's approval—and the chief constables, who would need to agree on numbers, ranks and individuals to be absorbed.

Looking beyond the immediate context of Associated British Ports' decision, questions have been raised about the long-term future of the British Transport police. My hon. Friend drew attention to that. I have concentrated specifically on Associated British Ports and the more immediate impact of its decision, but I understand the underlying anxiety that my hon. Friend expressed, and it is right that I should seek to respond to it.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to place on record my own appreciation and admiration of the professionalism and competence of the British Transport police, but I have to say that any assurances about the future, or indeed and decision for change, must emanate from the users of the service. It is emphatically not the

responsibility of the Government to lead either the British Railways Board or the British Transport police committee towards conclusions in this area. Perhaps all that I can usefully add—and I hope this is helpful—is that I am not aware of any major changes planned for the British Transport police, though this is not to say that the future establishment will not need to be revised in the light of future trends and commercial requirements. I can further tell the House that the British Railways Board and the chief constable of the British Transport police are fully seized of the impact on the morale of the force which has been caused by the uncertainties following Associated British Ports' decision and that they are therefore doing all in their power to conclude their assessment, which I mentioned earlier, as quickly as possible.

I understand that quite recently an Opposition spokesman suggested that the Government had decided that it was best to privatise our police forces in the docks. I assure the House that this has nothing to do with the Government. Decisions taken in this area are within the competence of those taking them. The Government are not a party thereto. Therefore, I hope my hon. Friend will feel that he has performed, as I believe he has, a valuable task in drawing attention to the perfectly understandable human reactions to change within the British Transport police force and the anxieties raised by the ABP decision. However, in the light of what I have been able to say, I hope my hon. Friend will feel that it would be right and proper for the House now to adjourn.

Mr. McCrindle: I agree that it would be right and proper for the House to adjourn, but before we do so can my hon. Friend give me one other small undertaking, which I suspect will be easy? Will he have a word with London Regional Transport about the staffing levels on underground trains, which, as he must know from correspondence addressed to his Department, continue to raise concern among both staff and the travelling public? If he were to undertake to have a word with LRT about the continuing effectiveness of the establishment, I believe that I shall have done well in raising this Adjournment debate.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend will know that LRT is one of the responsibilities of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport. I shall draw her attention to the point that my hon. Friend has just made. That would be the right channel of communication. It would be the most effective way for this matter to be drawn to the attention of those concerned.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 December 1984

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Court (Bradford)

Mr. Lawler asked the Attorney-General when the new Crown court building in Bradford will be constructed.

The Solicitor-General: It is the Government's firm intention to provide a new Crown court centre in Bradford. A number of possible sites are under consideration. It is not yet possible to give an estimated date for the completion of the scheme.

Magistrates (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General how many attendances at petty sessions there were by each magistrate for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne for the last year.

The Solicitor-General: The information required cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost, but I will see that the hon. Member receives the latest available figures for the 12 month period ending 30 September 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General what was, for each of the last three years, the number of magistrates for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne who have attended fewer than 26 petty sessions, together with the number who have attended fewer than 26 sessions per year for more than one year.

The Solicitor-General: 1980-81, 52; 1981-82, 23; 1982-83, 40. Twenty-four attended fewer than 26 times per year for more than one year. These figures include justices newly appointed or who resigned or retired within the periods, and those who suffered ill-health or were granted leave of absence.

Advisory Committees on the Appointment of Magistrates

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General whether the two advisory committees on the appointment of magistrates which disclose their membership to the public have encountered any difficulties arising from so doing.

The Solicitor-General: So far as is known, no.

North London Polytechnic Student Union

Mr. Greenway asked the Attorney-General if he will consider bringing proceedings against the student union of the North London polytechnic for its use of student union funds to contribute £1,000 to striking miners; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: The Treasury Solicitor is investigating this matter. If a payment has been made in breach of trust I shall consider bringing civil proceedings against those responsible.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Mohammed Siddique

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Mr. Mohammed Siddique, who is an unconvicted prisoner on remand at Winson Green prison, was told that he could not wear his own shirt during the period of relaxation outside his prison cell and subsequently instructed to return to his cell.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend will write to the hon. Member.

Stop and Search Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will supply the monthly total by district for *(a)* the number of stop and searches undertaken by Metropolitan police officers for the period January 1983 to September 1984, *(b)* the number of arrests arising from these stop and searches for the same period and *(c)* the number of charges, broken down by offence, arising from these stop and searches for the same period.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the available information is as given in the following table. The table shows the number of persons or vehicles recorded as stopped; figures for stops of persons and stops of vehicles are not separately identifiable. Statistics showing the number of occasions on which a search was conducted are not available. Monthly figures and details of charges are not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Stops of persons and vehicles and the number of resultant arrests Metropolitan Police District, 1983

Police District	*Number of stops of persons or vehicles*	*Number of resultant arrests*
A—(Part) Westminster	35,100	2,100
B—Kensington and Chelsea	28,800	3,500
C—(Part) Westminster	33,900	3,400
D—(Part) Westminster	28,700	2,900
E—Camden	31,000	2,600
F—Hammersmith	31,400	2,200
G—Hackney	27,700	2,500
H—Tower Hamlets	24,800	2,400
I—Heathrow, etc.	23,900	1,300
J—Waltham Forest, Redbridge etc.	29,500	2,000
K—Havering, Barking and Newham	36,100	3,700
L—Lambeth	37,400	5,000
M—Southwark	44,600	3,900
N—Islington	28,100	3,600
P—Lewisham and Bromley	44,100	4,500
Q—Brent and Harrow	35,000	2,600
R—Greenwich and Bexley	31,300	3,400
S—Barnet and Hertsmere	42,400	2,100
T—Richmond-upon-Thames and Hounslow	36,200	2,600
V—Kingston-upon-Thames, Merton etc.	30,300	2,400
W—Wandsworth	25,700	2,300
X—Ealing and Hillingdon	35,300	2,300
Y—Haringey and Enfield	30,900	3,500
Z—Croydon and Sutton etc.	34,100	3,700
TA—Thames Division	300	20
Total MPD	786,700	70,600

Note: The figures are rounded because they are based on information recorded in station registers for operational purposes which is unsuitable for the preparation of statistical summaries. Components may not add to the total because they have been rounded independently.

Race Relations Act

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if the Government have any plans to repeal the Race Relations Act.

Mr. Waddington: No.

Prisons (Sanitation)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons are due for refurbishment in current programmes; and in how many night sanitation facilities will be provided.

Mr. Mellor: Major capital work is in progress or planned at 100 existing prison department establishments. When this programme is completed, access to night sanitation will be available in whole or in part at 96 establishments.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason it was decided not to provide night sanitation facilities during the planned refurbishment of C wing at Parkhurst prison.

Mr. Mellor: The work to be carried out on 'C' wing at this stage is the minimum necessary to reinstate the therapeutic unit in the wing as soon as possible. Night sanitation will ultimately be provided in all four wings at Parkhurst. But to provide such facilities in 'C' wing at this stage would delay the reopening of the therapeutic unit, and would have serious implications for the other major redevelopment schemes at the prison.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons presently provide access to how many prisoners to night sanitation facilities.

Mr. Mellor: About 17,000 places in a total of 70 prison department establishments at present provide access to night sanitation.

Prisons (Emergency Apparatus)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is standard practice to situate breathing apparatus for emergency use in all penal establishments.

Mr. Mellor: Self-contained breathing apparatus is not currently available in prison department establishments. However, it is proposed to introduce it on a trial basis at three establishments in the near future.

European Parliament (Members' Salaries and Allowances)

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his practice to collect information on the salaries and allowances payable to British Members of the European Parliament;

(2) on what date since 2 July 1981 Her Majesty's Government discontinued the practice of answering in full parliamentary questions on the comparable salary and allowances payable to United Kingdom Members of Parliament and British Members of the European Parliament.

Mr. Mellor: I will reply as soon as possible.

Warning and Monitoring Organisation

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there are any plans to construct a fallback headquarters for the Caledonian sector of the United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

Metropolitan Police (Clear-up Rates)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the published figures for clear-up rates in the Metropolitan police area for the first six months of 1984 include any changes which result from the experiment referred to in his written answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *493;*

(2) what has been the clear-up rate for murder in the Metropolitan police area in each of the last five years; and what it has been in the three police authority areas with the best clear-up rate for murder and the three areas with the worst, excluding the Metropolitan and City of London police.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I will reply as soon as possible.

Transfer of Prisoners

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the administrative arrangements for the transfer of prisoners between *(a)* England and Scotland and *(b)* England and Northern Ireland; and how many prisoners have been transferred in the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what are the administrative arrangements covering the transfer of prisoners between *(a)* England and the Channel Islands and *(b)* England and the Isle of Man; and how many prisoners have been transferred in the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: There are powers under the Criminal Justice Act 1961 to transfer a sentenced prisoner on his own application between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, or to the Channel Islands and Isle of Man, either permanently or temporarily. Prisoners sentenced in the Channel Islands or Isle of Man may be transferred permanently without their application; this is because of the limited facilities on the islands, particularly for long-term prisoners. There are also powers to transfer sentenced prisoners to face trial, and prisoners (whether sentenced or not) for other judicial purposes; these transfers do not require an application from the prisoner.

Transfers are made by order of the Secretary of State for the jurisdiction in which the prisoner is held initially, in agreement with the authorities in the receiving jurisdictions. Transfers from the Channel Islands and Isle of Man are made by order of the Home Secretary, with the agreement of the island authorities. The detailed arrangements are described in circular instruction 1/1978, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The statistical information requested is not immediately available, and I will publish it in the *Official Report*.

WALES

Heroin Addiction (North Wales)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales, what is his estimate of the number of heroin addicts in north Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Because of the nature of the activity it is not possible to make reliable estimates of the total numbers of heroin users in particular localities. Information available about addicts notified to the chief medical officer at the Home Office by medical practitioners in accordance with statutory requirements shows that notifications of 16 new addicts and two former addicts claiming addiction to heroin in north Wales were received during 1983. Recent research commissioned by DHSS in two urban areas suggests that the figures derived from notifications in those areas may be an under-estimate to at least a five-fold degree, although it is not clear how more generally applicable this finding may be.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Butcher: The grants given by my Department to various non-statutory bodies are shown in the Supply Estimates and revised Supply Estimates for 1984-85, for class IV, votes 2, 4, and 6.

Leeward Islands Air Transport (Aircraft)

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will support an application by British Aerospace for assistance under the trade and aid provisions to enable Leeward Islands Air Transport to purchase the Super 748s it wants rather than the French aircraft insisted upon by the European Economic Community.

Mr. Channon: It would not be appropriate to provide assistance to BAe under the aid and trade provision while discussions between Leeward Islands Air Transport and the EC Commission are continuing. The Government are keeping a close watch on the position.

British Technology Group

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list since 1981 the British Technology Group investments made in companies producing electro-deposited copper foil with a treatment layer compatible with bonding to laminates or similar process and state *(a)* the names of the companies, *(b)* the amount of the investment and *(c)* the reasons for the investment.

Mr. Butcher: In 1983 the British Technology Group approved a loan of £100,000 to Electrofoils Ltd. as part of its technology transfer activities.

BT (Flotation)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the estimated total value of the special concessions being offered to purchasers of British Telecom shares.

Mr. Butcher: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on 27 November.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the estimated total value of the incentives offered to British Telecom's employees to encourage them to purchase shares, assuming all employees take full advantage of the offers made to them; and if he will publish in the *Official Report*, when the information is available, details of the number of employees who bought shares, and the total value of the concessions they obtained.

Mr. Butcher: British Telecom has 241,000 employees, the vast majority of whom are eligible for incentives. The terms of the offer to employees are set out in the prospectus and in my reply of 27 November to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould).

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will request those stockbrokers and other retailers of British Telecom shares who are sharing with charities the 2 per cent. commission they are being paid by the Government to inform him of the proportion of the commission they have given to which charity; and if he will publish the information when it becomes available in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Butcher: It would not be appropriate for the Government to seek information about gifts intermediaries participating in the British Telecom flotation are making to charities.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* when details are available how much of the money paid to the City institutions in connection with the sale of British Telecom shares went to *(a)* underwriters *(b)* retailers of the shares; and if he will list any arrangements made for the sale which have not been common for the sale of shares on previous occasions.

Mr. Butcher: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply of 27 November to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). Many features of the British Telecom flotation listed there have not been common to the sale of shares on previous occasions.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the additional revenue which would have accrued to the Government if all the British Telecom shares sold by 3 December had been paid for in full on that day and not by instalments.

Mr. Butcher: The Government do not believe it would have been possible to make a flotation of this size at a satisfactory price if payment had been required in full at the time of the offer.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the cost to *(a)* public funds and *(b)* British Telecom of administering the sale of British Telecom shares.

Mr. Butcher: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 27 November to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). The expenses of the offer for sale to be borne by British Telecom are estimated in the prospectus to be £8·4 million exclusive of VAT.

BT (Exchange Equipment)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of British Telecom's telephone exchanges rely largely on electromechanical equipment; how many use digital equipment; and what is the estimated cost of equipping an average exchange with digital equipment.

Mr. Butcher: As is stated in the British Telecom prospectus, the numbers and types of British Telecom's telephone exchanges on 31 March 1984 were as follows:

	Local exchanges	*Trunk exchanges*	*International exchanges*
Strowger	3,708	331	—
Crossbar	571	126	6
TXE	1,965	—	—
Digital	48	2	1
Total	6,292	459	7

No estimate of the kind the right hon. Member seeks is available. However, BT's modernisation programme involves the installation of digital switching throughout the trunk network during the 1980s and the replacement of electromechanical local exchanges by TXE and, increasingly, digital local exchanges over the next 10 years.

Falmouth Shiprepair Ltd.

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, before giving his approval for the return of Falmouth Shiprepair Ltd. to the private sector, he will satisfy himself that the recommended bid is judged on the future of the yard and its work force as much as on the size of the largest offer; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the sale and the likely date of an announcement identifying the new owners.

Mr. Butcher: I can confirm that the future of Falmouth Shiprepair Ltd. and its work force will be taken into account before consent is given to its sale. Negotiations are continuing and I am unable to give a date for the announcement of the new owners.

Knowsley (Financial Aid)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list all financial aid from central Government and the European Commission direct to industry in the borough of Knowsley during 1984-85 showing the amount involved in each category;

(2) what is the value of regional development grants and selective financial assistance to Knowsley in 1984-85; what was their value in 1983-84; what their estimated value will be in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what form this assistance will take following his statement of 28 November to the House;

(3) how he envisages the changes in the Government's regional industrial policy will affect Merseyside over the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Ravendale Securities

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set up an investigation under the Prevention of Fraud (Investment) Act 1958 into the operations of Ravendale Securities and its associates in 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Fletcher: Yes, if I judge that an investigation is needed.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many dealing licences have been issued to Ravendale Securities and associated people and companies.

Mr. Fletcher: Five principal's licences are held by companies within the Ravendale group. In addition 10 individuals hold representative licences as employees or agents of those companies.

Licensed Dealers

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if, following a review by his Department, any licences to deal in securities have been revoked;

(2) how many applications to become licensed dealers have been approved and how many rejected in each year since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: The number of licences granted under section 3 of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 in each year since 1979—excluding renewals—is as follows:

	Principal's licences	*Representative's licences*
1979	37	160
1980	56	205
1981	70	155
1982	88	280
1983	225	506
*1984	176	691

* To date.

From 1 January 1983 to date there have been 21 refusals or revocations of principal's licences. This figure does not include licences which holders have allowed to lapse or applications rejected as incomplete. Information about earlier years and representative licences is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if any of the self-regulatory organisations of dealers in securities have applied for a block deal.

Mr. Fletcher: The law empowers me to grant an order of recognition only to an individual association of dealers in securities or stock exchange.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the stringency of the requirements for members of the self-regulatory bodies whose members deal in securities.

Mr. Fletcher: I am generally satisfied with the standards maintained by these bodies. Although there have been some complaints against their members, they are few and far between.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list all the self-regulatory bodies whose members are dealers in securities exempted from his Department's regulations for licensed dealers;

(2) if he will list all the members of all the self-regulatory bodies whose members are dealers in securities exempted from his Department's regulations for licensed dealers.

Mr. Fletcher: The associations of dealers in securities recognised under section 15 of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act are listed, as is the Stock Exchange, in my Department's publication "Dealers in Securities and Authorised Unit Trust Schemes, 1984". This volume also lists the members of five of the nine bodies in question. The membership lists of the other four are excluded on space and cost grounds, but are available for inspection.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the vetting by his Department of applications to become licenced dealers includes checking on the applicants and their associates with comparable agencies in the United States of America and Europe.

Mr. Fletcher: Yes. If the applicant has carried on business abroad or persons (legal or natural) who are based abroad are likely to be able to exercise a material influence over the applicant's business.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications to become licensed dealers have been received by his Department in each year since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: The following numbers of applications for licences to deal in securities have been received:

	Principals licence applications	*Representative licence applications*
1983	247	591
1984 (to date)	137	448

Figures for earlier years are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what is the average age of the inspectors in his Department engaged in vetting applications to become licensed dealers;

(2) how many inspectors in his Department are engaged in vetting applications to set up as licensed dealers.

Mr. Fletcher: There are eleven staff directly engaged in the vetting of applications for licences to deal in securities. Their mean average age is 31·9 years.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints have been received, on average, about any one licensed dealer by his Department in each year since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: The great majority of licensed dealer firms do not give rise to any complaints to my Department. In 1983, 34 complaints were received about 12 firms. In 1984 to date there have been 50 complaints about 11 firms. Figures about complaints received in earlier years are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how often licences to deal in securities are reviewed.

Mr. Fletcher: Each year when they fall due for renewal. Otherwise, whenever there is any complaint or change in circumstances (eg changes of directors) which might call into question the continued fitness of the licence holder.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the criteria which must be met by an applicant for a licence to deal in shares.

Mr. Fletcher: Under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 a licence must be granted unless I have reason to suppose that the applicant is not a fit and proper person to hold a licence. Section 5(2) of the Act sets out the matters to which I can have regard in forming such a view.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has about the regulations governing brokers and dealers in the United States of America; and how they compare with the regulations governing licensed dealers in shares in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fletcher: My Department has copies of the regulations in question. They have much in common with the United Kingdom rules and regulations governing licensed dealers.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the stringency of his Department's regulations concerning licensed dealers in shares: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: Yes. The Licensed Dealers (Conduct of Business) Rules and the Dealers in Securities (Licensing Regulations) were radically revised last year. I have no reason to suppose that, within the limits of my present powers, the rules and regulations are wanting in stringency.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licensed dealers have been investigated under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 in each year since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: Since 1980 the following numbers of licensed dealers have been investigated under Section 109 of the Companies Act 1967:

	Number
1980	2
1981	3
1982	1
1983	6
1984*	1

* to date

The figure for 1979 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the figures for *(a)* bankruptcies and *(b)* liquidations of licensed dealers in shares for each year since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: I regret that this information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A specific obligation on licensed dealers to notify my Department of bankruptcy and liquidation proceedings was introduced in the Dealers in

Securities (Licensing) Regulations 1983. There is, however, no obligation to notify this information after a licence has been revoked or has lapsed.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the criteria for membership of self-regulatory bodies dealing in securities is equivalent to becoming a licensed dealer under his Department's regulations;

(2) what are the criteria for becoming a self-regulatory body whose members are dealers in securities, exempted from his Department's regulations for licensed dealers;

(3) if the membership requirements of the self-regulatory bodies whose members deal in securities exempt those members from his Department's regulations.

Mr. Fletcher: The exemption of members of a body depends upon the body being recognised under section 15 of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act. There are no explicit statutory criteria for recognition. Since it involves, in effect, the delegation of the Secretary of State's own regulatory responsibilities the criteria employed amount essentially, to membership requirements, conduct of business rules, and enforcement affording to standard of investor protection at least equivalent, overall, to that which we seek to maintain under the statutory system for licensed dealers.

Fraud (Prosecutions)

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many successful prosecutions under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 have been brought by his Department since 1979.

Mr. Fletcher: My Department has successfully prosecuted offences under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 as follows:

1979 No cases
1980 2 cases (Section 14)
1981 1 case (Section 14)
1982 1 case (Sections 1 and 14)
1983 No cases
1984 (to date) 1 case (Sections 1 and 14) Others pending.

Charges under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act are commonly not proceeded with where more serious charges are available.

Manchester International Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect for Manchester international airport of the decisions on regional aid announced by the Minister of State on 28 November and, in particular, on whether aid from the European regional development fund will still be available for the further development of the airport.

Mr. Trippier: I will reply to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

British Companies (Take-overs)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to prevent the take-over by large international conglomerates of smaller British companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973 provide for take-overs to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

EC (Industrial Aid)

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on state aids to industry within the European Economic Community.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to the reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *548*]: The Government will continue to support the Commission in the firm and even-handed application of the provisions of the Treaty of Rome relating to state aids.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Offices (Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister if she will make a further statement on the proposals for relocating the Manchester offices of Government Departments.

The Prime Minister: No decision has yet been taken on the future location of certain Government offices in central Manchester, but it is not proposed to relocate them outside the city centre.

Cancer (Prevention and Control)

Mr. Norman Hogg asked the Prime Minister which Government Departments have significant involvement in the primary prevention of cancer; what policy they have for the co-ordination of their activities; what policies they have published jointly or separately for the primary prevention of cancer; and what proposals Her Majesty's Government have for a national governmental body of cancer control to promote the primary prevention of cancer.

The Prime Minister: The Government Departments which have a significant involvement in the primary prevention of cancer are the United Kingdom Health Departments, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Environment Department and the Health and Safety Commission.

The primary prevention of cancer strategy involved control of carcinogenic substances in the environment and workplace and the health education of the public. The Health and Safety Commission advises the Government on the control of hazardous substances at work including carcinogens. There are strict controls on the levels of carcinogens and radiation in the environment and on potentially hazardous substances in food and consumer products. Health education measures include advice on smoking and diet and on preventive health screening for specific cancers.

The Government believe that the present departmental arrangements to co-ordinate and promote the primary prevention of cancer are satisfactory and have no plans to introduce different administrative arrangements.

Asbestos

Mr. Norman Hogg asked the Prime Minister which Government Departments are actively involved in the control of environmental pollution by asbestos; approximately what is the average number of asbestos fibres inhaled by a child each hour in urban air and in rural air in Britain; above what level of asbestos fibres in air, expressed as the approximate number of asbestos figures

per cubic metre of air, the Government Departments concerned regard as unreasonable environmental asbestos pollution; and what official national and international standards have been set for the control of environmental asbestos polluting to protect members of the general public.

The Prime Minister: The Department of the Environment takes the lead in the control of environmental pollution by asbestos. The Department of Education and Science is concerned with asbestos in schools and the Department of Health and Social Security is concerned with asbestos in hospitals. The Department of Trade and Industry has responsibility for asbestos in consumer products and the Health and Safety Executive regulates asbestos emissions from factories. The Welsh Office, Scottish Office and Northern Ireland Office are responsible for these matters in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Measurements of asbestos fibre concentrations in the environment differ widely and are subject to considerable uncertainties. No meaningful estimate of the number of fibres inhaled by a child can be given. The Department of the Environment does not consider that the number of airborne asbestos fibres measured in an "environmental" situation by itself is a reasonable basis for controlling the risk to the general public. The Department advises that environmental concentration of airborne asbestos fibres should be kept as low as is reasonably practicable.

It follows that no national standard has been set for ambient air quality nor am I aware of such a standard having been set in any other country.

Mr. Norman Hogg asked the Prime Minister which Government Department has the principal interest in the control of environmental asbestos pollution; and what published advice is available or what unpublished instructions there are in this regard from the Department concerned for the control of environmental asbestos pollution.

The Prime Minister: The Department of the Environment has the principal responsibility for the control of environmental asbestos pollution. It issued advice on this subject in its booklet "Asbestos Materials in Buildings", which was sent to all local authorities (in England and Wales) with circular DOE 21/83 (WO.45/83) in August last year. The booklet is also available from HMSO. Advice to householders was published in December last year in the free leaflet "Asbestos in Housing", over 300,000 copies of which have been distributed.

The Department has also published guidance on waste disposal in two Waste Management Papers No. 18, titled "Asbestos Wastes", and No. 23 titled "Special wastes: a technical memorandum providing guidance on their definition."

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO

53. **Mr. Stuart Holland** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has yet reached a decision on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced during the debate on overseas aid on 22 November that the Government had decided to submit notice of withdrawal which, unless rescinded, would take effect on 31 December 1985. We shall reconsider our position towards the end of next year in the light of the progress made towards reform.

Ethiopia

54. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received to date about aid to Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: Since the beginning of October, more than 2,700. The Government share the widespread public concern about the famine in Ethiopia.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to how much supplementary food and edible oil the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in Ethiopia estimates is needed to deal with famine relief in Ethiopia for the next 12 months and as to how much has now been offered by the donor communities.

Mr. Raison: The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission estimated, in October 1984, that 33,605 tonnes of supplementary foods and 12,060 tonnes of edible oil would be required in the period till the end of 1985. We do not yet know what donors' pledges for 1985 will be.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the most recent estimates of the amount of grain that will arrive at the Port of Assab in Ethiopia for each of the next eight weeks, and as to how much will be in store at the port in each of those weeks.

Mr. Raison: The World Food Programme expects 112,599 tonnes to arrive at Ethiopian ports or at Djibouti in December, and 94,430 tonnes in January. It is not practicable to forecast these arrivals week by week, nor to forecast the precise rate of evacuation from the port at a time when other essential imports (e.g. fertiliser) will also be arriving or consequently to assess the amounts likely to be in store at Assab. The figures include grain from all sources, and their accuracy will depend on the notification to WFP by both the many aid donors and by commercial suppliers.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals for long-term aid to Ethiopia he is considering following the visit to Ethiopia of the Minister for Overseas Development.

Mr. Raison: No proposals for long-term aid were put to me by the Government of Ethiopia during my visit. I shall be considering with our partners in the European Community how we might help most effectively, taking into account any satisfactory programmes agreed between the Government of Ethiopia and the World Bank.

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent he is employing the resources and expertise of the Crown Agents in the logistics of obtaining and transporting supplies to assist in the famine situation in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: We are using the Crown Agents in Kenya to obtain relief items for Save the Children Fund and Oxfam.

Council of Development Ministers

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent meetings of the Council of Development Ministers in Brussels.

Mr. Raison: The Council of Development Ministers met on 6 November 1984 in Brussels. At the United Kingdom's request, the main topic of discussion was the Community response to the famine in Ethiopia and other African countries. The Council endorsed an addition of 32 million ecu (£19 million) to the Community aid budget for this purpose. I urged early agreement on the Community's 1985 food aid programme and concentration of food aid on emergency needs.

Nicaragua

56. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total amount of aid to Nicaragua in the current year; and what is the planned amount for 1985-86.

Mr. Raison: I expect bilateral aid to Nicaragua to amount to £25,000 in this financial year and to be at about the same level in 1985-86.

Famine Relief

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to consult other Commonwealth Governments on longer-term measures to prevent famines elsewhere, in view of the famine in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: As part of our normal activities we play a full part in consultative and coordination arrangements involving aid giving countries and agencies and the Governments of recipient countries. Longer-term development policies and investments in the agricultural and related sector occupy an important part in these discussions.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he determines priorities for spending within his Department's budget.

Mr. Raison: Priorities for spending the aid programme are decided primarily in the light of our developmental objectives. Bilateral aid is concentrated on the poorest developing countries. Account is also taken of political and commercial considerations, as well as of emergencies.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether it is his policy to ensure that wherever possible generic drugs are used in health projects under the aid programme.

Mr. Raison: I confirm that we would advocate the use of generic drugs wherever this is possible.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Canavan asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many people have been charged as a result of incidents arising from the miners' strike.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: In the period between 14 March and 16 September 1984, 1,342 persons were arrested and charged with offences arising from the mining dispute.

Mr. Soley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what has been the number of written complaints about police conduct during the mining dispute received in each police force area; and what has been the general nature of these complaints.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Inquiry with procurators fiscal and through them with the chief constables of those forces which have had to deal with incidents arising out of the present mining dispute indicate that 13 written complaints about police conduct have been received. The complaints either relate to police tactics in general or involve allegations about the conduct of individual police officers.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost in the present and in the next financial year of mortgage interest relief at the standard and at higher rates of tax.

Mr. Moore: The cost of mortgage interest relief in 1984-85 is estimated to be about £3·5 billion including about £180 million at rates in excess of the basic rate. It would be premature to provide an estimate for 1985-86, since the cost will depend on the amounts of mortgage lending and interest rates as well as on the 1985-86 income tax rates and bands.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Hayhoe: No grants to voluntary organisations are made by my Department.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drug dogs and handlers are employed by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; what is the extent of their training; and what is the annual cost of maintaining this part of the service.

Mr. Hayhoe: Twenty-nine drug dog teams are currently employed. In addition to their normal training as customs officers, drug dog handlers attend a 15-week course at the RAF police school, Newton, which is designed to train them to use dogs to find prohibited drugs. The cost for the year ending 31 March 1984 was about £450,000 including capital and training costs.

National Union of Mineworkers

Mr. Beaumont-Dark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Registrar of Friendly Societies is taking to ensure that the National Union of Mineworkers is complying with its statutory obligations as such a society.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 provides that no trade union can be registered under the Friendly Societies Act 1974. The functions relating to trade unions which were formerly performed by the Chief Registrar are now performed by the Certification Officer in accordance with the Employment Protection Act 1975.

Value Added Tax (Books)

Mr. Murphy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he is planning to have regarding possible imposition of value added tax on books, newspapers and periodicals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Ministers have received a large number of representations on this subject from interested trade associations, other organisations and individuals and a number of meetings have been held or are planned; in other cases requests for meetings are being considered. I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) on 15 November at column *322*.

Customs and Excise (Confiscated Books)

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to the answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, whether the court cases referred to involve the Obscene Publications Acts, the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Customs (Consolidation) Act 1876; whether the instructions were in writing; and if he will publish them.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Business Expansion Scheme

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the companies which currently have an approved fund established under the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Spearing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the categories of, and the actual commodities or services concerned or referred to directly or indirectly, in the reasoned opinion he has received from the Commission of the European Communities in respect of article 169 of the Treaty of Rome, referred to in the reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *476;* and if he will place a copy of the communication and any reply by Her Majesty's Government in the Library.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Pensions

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to seek powers to tax lump sum superannuation benefits; what representations he has received on the subject; how many have been favourable and how many unfavourable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984; c. *606*]: As to our intentions, I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 12 November [illegible] at column *90*. To date about 300 letters have been received, in addition to representations from various trade associations and representative bodies. Almost all have expressed opposition to such a change.

THE ARTS

Repertory Theatres

Mrs. Reneé Short asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what level of funding has been allocated to repertory theatres of similar size to the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester during the last three years.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *604*: The Haymarket theatre, Leicester, the Bristol Old Vic and the Nottingham Playhouse theatres are of similar size to the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester. Their seating capacity, and their grants from the Arts Council in the last three years are listed as follows:

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Leicester Haymarket				
Capacity: 703				
Arts Council	260,000	290,000	311,850	323,500
Local authorities	370,000	344,000	370,000	378,837
Total subsidy	630,800	634,000	681,850	702,337
Bristol Old Vic				
Capacity: 688				
Arts Council	370,000	400,000	428,150	443,500
Local authorities	147,025	163,500	170,040	176,200
Total subsidy	517,025	563,500	598,190	619,700
Royal Exchange, Manchester				
Capacity: 733				
Arts Council	319,270	405,000	456,000	510,000
Local authorities	299,000	326,000	399,000	470,000
Total subsidy	618,270	731,000	855,000	980,000
Nottingham Playhouse				
Capacity: approx. 700				
Arts Council	358,000	386,000	411,840	426,500
Local authorities	225,134	217,555	337,200	295,785
Total subsidy	583,134	603,555	749,040	722,285

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Grants

Mr. Dorrell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish an estimate of the total cost of student grants in 1985-86 following the changes announced on 14 November, together with an estimate of the total value of the savings expected to result from those changes.

Mr. Brooke: The total cost of students' mandatory awards in 1985-86 is estimated to be about £683 million. The total value of savings from the changes announced is estimated at £40 million; after forecast increases in expenditure resulting from increases in the average cost of awards and in the number of students holding mandatory awards have been offset the estimated net saving is £25 million.

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he is planning to have as a consequence of the proposed changes to student grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Government do not consult on matters concerning the public expenditure survey. However, as part of the annual review of the mandatory awards regulations the Department invited and has received submissions from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the local authority associations and the NUS on the changes to be made to the regulations next year. Officials of the Department have met or will shortly be meeting representatives of all these organisations.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the estimated total cost to parents of the changes *(a)* to the scale of parental contributions for assessing parents' residual income for student grants and *(b)* the abolition of the minimum award for the year 1985-86.

Mr. Brooke: Forecast savings in the financial year 1985-86 from the change in the parental contribution scale announced on 14 November are £15 million. A further £9 million will be saved from the abolition of the minimum award.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what the total cost or the estimated total cost to parents of the assessed contributions to student grants has been in each year since 1979.

Mr. Brooke: The figures in respect of mandatory awards are as follows:

Academic Year	*Assessed Parental Contributions £ million*
1979-80	84
1980-81	98
1981-82	127
1982-83	155
1983-84	*165
1984-85	*215

* Forecast

The figures show the assessed parental contribution; many parents are able to take advantage of the covenanting system to reduce their actual contribution.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what the total cost to the Government of student maintenance grants, excluding and including fees, has been in each year since 1979.

Mr. Brooke: The figures for mandatory awards are as follows:

Academic Year	*Total Public Expenditure Including Fees £ million*	*Total Public Expenditure Excluding Fees £ million*
1979-80	550	332
1980-81	679	398
1981-82	783	443
1982-83	681	472
1983-84	*726	*504
1984-85	*746	*512

* Forecast

These figures are derived from LEA final returns for years up to and including 1982-83 and on provisional returns for 1983-84 and 1984-85. The figures exclude the cost to the Government of tax relief on covenants to parents.

Kirklees (Expenditure)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give a comparison of per capita spending on teaching staff, support staff and books and equipment by Kirklees local education authority with the average per capita spending on those items by each other metropolitan district council local education authority in England.

Mr. Dunn: The information for 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, is set out in the table. The combined figures for primary and secondary schools are given.

	per pupil expenditure by LEAs (£ 1982-83 prices)		
	Teaching Staff £	*Educational Support Staff* £	*Books and Equipment* £
Kirklees	535	23	29
Birmingham	541	22	20
Coventry	565	26	31
Dudley	541	9	22
Sandwell	565	32	22
Solihull	532	22	25
Walsall	588	22	37
Wolverhampton	605	41	31
Knowsley	613	17	25
Liverpool	600	26	24
St. Helens	558	19	22
Sefton	565	18	25
Wirral	540	10	26
Bolton	533	22	29
Bury	558	18	30
Manchester	617	38	32
Oldham	516	24	29
Rochdale	593	20	27
Salford	579	17	26
Stockport	537	14	28
Tameside	535	32	27
Trafford	553	13	21
Wigan	584	13	27
Barnsley	549	21	27
Doncaster	567	26	27
Rotherham	535	21	21
Sheffield	602	31	29
Bradford	551	29	22
Calderdale	566	27	24
Leeds	568	21	11
Wakefield	540	28	17
Gateshead	581	19	23
Newcastle upon Tyne	666	44	35

	per pupil expenditure by LEAs (£ 1982-83 prices)		
	Teaching Staff	*Educational Support Staff*	*Books and Equipment*
	£	£	£
North Tyneside	609	30	27
South Tyneside	616	25	27
Sunderland	557	29	20

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Sir Keith Joseph: None has been recruited, but four blind employees taken on prior to 1981 remain with the Department. A number of other members of staff suffer from serious sight impairment but are not registered as blind.

St. Martin's and Central Schools of Art (Merger)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of first degree students in fine arts and graphics entering St. Martin's and Central schools of art in the last academic year before their merger and in the first academic year since the merger.

Mr. Brooke: The number of first degree students who commenced courses in fine arts and graphics in the 1983-84 academic year in each of the two colleges was as follows:

	Number
St. Martin's school of art:	
CNAA BA Fine Art	67
CNAA BA Graphic Design	43
Central school of art and design:	
CNAA BA Fine Art	35
CNAA BA Graphic Design	32

A formal merger between these two institutions has not yet taken place. Some rationalisation of degree courses took place in the 1984-85 academic year, statistics for which are not yet available.

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he informed the Council for National Academic Awards in advance that his officials were having discussions on 26 November at St. Martin's college of art with external assessors whose appointment is ratified by the Council for National Academic Awards and with members of the Council for National Academic Awards panel;

(2) what was the purpose of discussions at St. Martin's college of art between his officials and external assessors and members of the Council for National Academic Awards panel;

(3) if he expects external assessors of art colleges and members of the Council for National Academic Awards panel to report direct to him on their assessment of the work being done in particular art colleges.

Mr. Brooke: An official of the Department, Mr. J. H. Thompson, visited St. Martin's school of art on 26 November by arrangement to observe the work of a validation panel which was meeting that day. With the agreement of the principal, he also spoke to members of the college who act as external examiners. The visit and the discussion were in connection with the work of the Lindop committee of inquiry into academic validation in the public sector. Mr. Thompson is the Department's assessor to the committee and his status on the occasion of this visit was made plain to all who spoke to him.

The visit was one of a number being undertaken by all members of the committee to institutions. All visits have the same general purpose. The Council for National Academic Awards, which is co-operating fully with the Lindop committee, is aware that these visits are taking place. My right hon. Friend does not expect external assessors to report to him on their assessments.

Student Funding

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date and at what time he informed the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals about his proposed changes in student funding.

Mr. Brooke: The Government do not inform outside organisations of their decisions before they are announced to Parliament.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what prior consultation he had with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on his proposed changes in student funding.

Mr. Brooke: The Government do not consult on matters concerning the public expenditure survey. They do, however, consult a number of interested organisations, including the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, on possible changes to the awards regulations and have done so this year as in previous years.

A and O-Levels

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) by how much the proportion of children being educated in grammar schools fell between 1969 and 1982;

(2) by how much the proportion of children passing one or more A-levels rose from 1969 to 1982;

(3) by how much the proportion of children obtaining one or more higher grades at O-level increased between 1969 and 1982;

(4) what proportion of school leavers left school with no graded result in O-level or CSE in 1971-72; and what proportion of school leavers left with no graded result in the same examinations in 1982-83.

Mr. Dunn: Between 1969-70 and 1982-83 in England: the proportion of maintained secondary school pupils in grammar schools fell from 19·9 per cent. to 3·1 per cent. (a decrease from 568·5 thousand to 117·1 thousand grammar school pupils); the proportion of young people with one or more A-level passes from schools or further education increased from 16·8 per cent. to 20·4 per cent. (an increase from 103·9 thousand to 161·4 thousand so qualified); the proportion of school leavers obtaining one or more higher grades at O-level/CSE increased from 43·3 per cent. to 54·6 per cent. (an increase from 250·5 thousand to 418·1 thousand).

The proportion of school leavers in England with no graded result at O-level/CSE fell from 43·0 per cent. in

1971-72 to 9·6 per cent. in 1982-83, a fall from 261·1 thousand to 73·6 thousand in those with no O-level or CSE qualification.

ENERGY

European Coal and Steel Community

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what were the total production subsidies to European Coal and Steel Community coal industries in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983;

(2) what was the level of investment finance in European Coal and Steel Community coal industries in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: Details of Community coal investment and production subsidies for the years in question are shown in the *Official Journal of the European Community*, volumes 24-27, which are available in the Library of the House. The figures make it clear that investment in the United Kingdom coal industry has been about twice the level in the rest of the Community put together. Since production of these figures, France has announced a major programme of reduction in coal producing capacity.

Departmental Staff (Overtime)

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many hours' overtime have been worked by employees in his Department not eligible for overtime pay in each of the past three years.

Mr. Peter Walker: No official records of unpaid overtime are kept. I am grateful to those who have on any occasion worked such overtime.

Coal Industry (Denationalisation)

Mr. Marland asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to denationalise the coal mines at some time in the future.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Civil Nuclear Facilities

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy which of the civil nuclear facilities listed in his reply of 19 November, *Official Report*, columns *23-4*, is designated for inspection under article 78(A) of the tripartite United Kingdom/Euratom/international atomic energy agency treaty.

Mr. Goodlad: The commercial gas centrifuge enrichment plants and associated storage areas at British Nuclear Fuels plc. Capenhurst works have been designated for inspection by the international atomic energy agency under article 78(A) of the agreement between the United Kingdom/Euratom/and the international atomic energy agency.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department's energy efficiency office makes grants to a number of voluntary bodies to promote the insulation of the houses of those requiring such assistance. This expenditure is shown in the 1984-85 Supply Estimates (292-IV) for class IV, vote 5 under "Other Support" on the energy efficiency subhead (D6).

Gas and Electricity Prices

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration has been given by Her Majesty's Government to the effects on high energy users in the engineering foundry industry of the recently announced higher gas and electricity charges.

Mr. Goodlad: No announcements have yet been made about specific higher gas or electricity charges.

The Government are well aware that the engineering industry, and United Kingdom industry as a whole, is concerned to maintain and enhance its competitiveness. There has been no significant increase in electricity prices to industry since 1982, and the quarterly increases in contract renewal gas prices introduced by British Gas from April follow a two-year price freeze. The available evidence, including the last CBI survey of European industrial energy prices, suggests that in general United Kingdom electricity and gas prices to industry compare well with those elsewhere in Europe.

Reactor Safeguards

Mr. Benn asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will invite the International Atomic Energy Agency to designate the prototype fast reactor for the application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Mr. Goodlad: Under the terms of the United Kingdom/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement (Cmnd. 6730) the designation of facilities in the United Kingdom is a matter for the IAEA.

The prototype fast reactor and its associated reprocessing plant were designated by the IAEA for inspection over the period November 1980 to November 1982. The agency was responsible for the decision to terminate that designation. However, the facilities continue to be inspected by Euratom and to be subject to the United Kingdom/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement and to the Euratom treaty. All material processed in them is accounted for to both the IAEA and Euratom.

Plutonium

Mr. Benn asked the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government support the proposed United States legislation (HR 5048, Sec 214) in regard to plutonium of United Kingdom civil origin exported to the United States under the provisions of the United States-United Kingdom Mutual Defence Agreement (Cmnd. 895, 1958) as amended.

Mr. Goodlad: We have had repeated assurances from the United States Government that it is not their policy to use plutonium exported from the United Kingdom under the Barter arrangements before 1971 for weapons purposes. The proposed legislation referred to by the right hon. Member is not a matter for Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Benn asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the plutonium held at Sellafield on behalf of the Central Electricity Generating Board and South of Scotland Electricity Board is held under International Atomic Energy Authority safeguards.

Mr. Goodlad: Plutonium held at Sellafield on behalf of CEGB and SSEB is held in facilities which are included in the list of facilities provided to the IAEA under the United Kingdom/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ceuta and Melilla

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if, in negotiations for the entry of Spain into the European Community, the Spanish Government have said that Ceuta and Melilla on the African coast are part of the kingdom of Spain;

(2) if the Commission of the European Communities regards Ceuta and Melilla as part of the kingdom of Spain.

Mr. Rifkind: None of the participants in the accession negotiations, including the Commission, has suggested that Ceuta and Melilla should not be discussed in the negotiations as part of the kingdom of Spain. Under Spanish law they are part of the kingdom of Spain. It is common ground that the terms of the Spanish accession treaty will apply to all parts of the kingdom of Spain.

Lisbon Agreement

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the discussions he has had with the Spanish Foreign Minister in Brussels on 27 November regarding the implementation of the Lisbon agreement.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend on 28 November at column 927.

Gibraltar

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government of Gibraltar were fully consulted before his meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister in Brussels on 27 November when the lifting of all restrictions against the Gibraltarian people by the Spanish Government was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend on 28 November at column 927. As Sir Joshua Hassan has himself made clear, he was fully consulted at all stages.

Dr. Hassan Zafar Arif

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan concerning the detention of Dr. Hassan Zafir Arif, a former President of the Pakistan University Teachers Association.

Mr. Renton: None. We have no consular standing to intervene on behalf of Dr. Arif, who is a Pakistani national. However, we have recently taken steps to make known to the Pakistani authorities the concern felt in this country about certain aspects of the application of martial law in Pakistan.

Hong Kong

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to include in the proposed basic law all the provisions spelled out in annex 1 of the agreement for the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong to China.

Mr. Luce: Article 3(12) of the draft Joint Declaration of the British and Chinese Governments on the question of Hong Kong makes clear that the basic policies of the People's Republic of China regarding Hong Kong, as set out in the Joint Declaration and annex 1, will be stipulated in the basic law.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to secure an input from Hong Kong itself into the drafting of the proposed basic law in the context of the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

Mr. Luce: The drafting of the basic law is a matter for the Chinese Government. Chinese spokesmen have repeatedly made it clear, however, that the people of Hong Kong will be consulted about the content of the basic law.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to include within the proposed basic law for Hong Kong specific provisions for the interests of disabled people.

Mr. Luce: The draft agreement on the future of Hong Kong provides that the current social system in Hong Kong will remain unchanged. That system includes provision for the rehabilitation of the disabled as detailed in the Hong Kong Government's rehabilitation programme plan.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has in the context of the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong to China regarding the position of British subjects resident in Hong Kong.

Mr. Luce: The arrangements which will apply to the British Dependent Territories citizens resident in Hong Kong are set out in the United Kingdom memorandum associated with the draft joint declaration on the future of Hong Kong, which was published in a White Paper (Cmnd. 9352) on 26 September.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what provision has been made with the Chinese Government to preserve the value of the pensions payable in respect of service by officers of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong when the pension is payable outside Hong Kong after 1 July 1997;

(2) if it is intended to apply to members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong the terms similar to those of the public officers' agreements which were applied to members of the service in colonies which have achieved independence in the past 30 years;

(3) if, in the event of premature retirement from Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service resulting from the

proposed constitutional changes in Hong Kong, officers will receive compensation from the Government of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if pensions derived from service after 30 June 1997 in Hong Kong by officers who were members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service will attract a supplementary pension for overseas service payable by the United Kingdom Government;

(5) if those serving officers in Hong Kong who are members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service will continue to be regarded by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom after 30 June 1997 as members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service and as such eligible for consideration for transfer or promotion to any posts which he may be requested to fill;

(6) if, under the terms of the draft agreement with the Chinese Government, he is satisfied that the Hong Kong special administrative region Government after 30 June 1997 will not be able to withhold consent to any officers of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service accepting any offer of transfer or promotion within the service and will preserve his existing pension rights on transfer.

Mr. Luce: The draft agreement on the future of Hong Kong provides satisfactorily for continuity of service by serving officers in the public service in Hong Kong, on terms and conditions, including pay and pensions, no less favourable than before 1 July 1997. These provisions apply to members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service (HMOCS) serving in Hong Kong as well as to other civil servants.

The resumption of soverignty over Hong Kong by the People's Republic of China raises similar issues in respect of HMOCS as independence has in other dependent territories. It is not possible, however, to define now, 12½ years in advance of constitutional change, all the arrangements which will apply to members of HMOCS serving in Hong Kong and to the payment of their pensions by the Hong Kong special administrative region Government after 1 July 1997.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why no provision has been made in the draft agreement with the Chinese Government for the pensions of retired officers to be paid outside Hong Kong at the option of the pensioner after 1 July 1997 in the currency of another country.

Mr. Luce: Hong Kong pensions are paid in Hong Kong dollars by the Hong Kong Government. Section VII of annex 1 to the joint declaration provides that after 1 July 1997 the Hong Kong dollar shall continue to circulate and remain freely convertible and that no exchange control policy shall be applied in the Hong Kong SAR. Pensioners would therefore be free to have their pensions transferred outside Hong Kong in the currency of another country.

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to sign the law of the sea convention.

Mr. Rifkind: I have nothing to add to the reply which my right hon. and learned Friend gave on 9 of November to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) at column *41*.

NATO (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is seeking to achieve first strike capability with nuclear weapons.

Mr. Stanley: I have been asked to reply.
No.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the organisation Friends of the Earth advocating banning aerial spraying of crops with pesticide; and what reply he has sent.

Mrs. Fenner: I have received no representations from Friends of the Earth advocating banning aerial spraying of crops. Friends of the Earth were consulted in the summer, prior to preparation of the Food and Environment Protection Bill, and indicated that they would be making detailed proposals for stricter controls over aerial spraying to the Ministry later. None has been received.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Jopling: Grants have been paid to the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the National Proficiency Tests Council for a number of years and since 1983 to the Farming Wildlife Advisory Group. Payments in 1983-84 were:

	£
National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	15,300
National Proficiency Tests Council	82,600
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	1,500

Butter (Storage Costs)

Mrs. Beckett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the range of costs for storage per ton of butter over three monthly, six monthly and annual periods for the last convenient period for which figures are available.

Mr. Jopling: The publication of information in the form requested would be a breach of commercial confidence.

Animal Deaths (Falmouth)

Mr. Mudd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports have been made to officials of his Department about incidents of animal deaths in Mawnan Smith, Falmouth, Cornwall; if he will identify the number and types of animal involved; if he will indicate the nature of the presumed cause of death; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: A number of reports have been received by the Ministry's technical staff in the past year in relation

to incidents of animal illness and death in the Mawnan Smith area. Some owners have reported deaths and illness in a number of dogs and cats. Tissue samples have been taken and carcase material examined but except for one case of a dog having died from organophosphorus poisoning the results have been either inconclusive or negative.

Milk

Mr. Spence asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what percentage amount the average or national actual market price for milk has altered in each European Economic Community country including the United Kingdom for each of the years 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: EC member states do not generally administer national retail prices for milk nor are national average retail prices generally available. The table below shows percentage changes in retail prices. In most cases they are based on the month of January compared with the previous January. The figures relate to whole milk but are not all strictly comparable, because of variations in processing, packaging, method of sale and butterfat content. In some instances they include subsidies. No figures are available for Greece.

Changes in retail milk prices

	Percentage change in 1982 compared with 1981	*Percentage change in 1983 compared with 1982*	*Percentage change in 1984 compared with 1983*
Germany	+4·3	+5·0	−1·6
France	+16·5	+16·4	+8·5
Italy	+20·6	N/A	N/A
Netherlands	+6·9	+2·2	N/A
Belgium	+12·5	+10·2	−3·3
Luxembourg	+7·8	+15·7	+8·3
United Kingdom	+8·1	+5·0	No change
Irish Republic	No change	+13·3	+11·8
Denmark	+17·1	+10·3	−4·3

Note: Based on data supplied by the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales.

TRANSPORT

British Airways

31. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans any changes in the arrangements for privatising British Airways.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. It remains the Government's intention to sell the airline early in 1985 if possible.

41. **Mr. Randall** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress towards the sale of British Airways.

Mr. Michael Spicer: On 12 December last year my right hon. Friend announced to the House the Government's intention to proceed with the privatisation of British Airways as soon as possible. Subsequently the business of the British Airways board was on 1 April 1984 vested in British Airways plc. With assistance from our advisers and from the airline we are continuing with detailed preparations for a flotation early next year.

Greater London (Heavy Lorries)

32. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposes to take with regard to the Greater London council's proposed heavy lorry ban in inner London at nights and weekends.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the GLC has now postponed a decision in order to study the thousands of representations that have been made about their proposals, in particular from shops and businesses likely to be adversely affected. No doubt it is also considering whether to hold the public inquiry, for which so many of those making representations have pressed so that the issues can be fully and publicly explored before a final decision is taken.

Bus Services

33. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from local authorities covering rural areas about the implications of his White Paper on buses.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received about 250 representations from non-metropolitan counties and district councils on the White Paper and the consultation documents which my Department subsequently issued. The representations are varied in their content and are being taken into account in the drafting of proposals to lay before Parliament.

36. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has received to the White Paper, "Buses", Cmnd. 9300, and the related consultation papers; what percentage has been favourable and what percentage unfavourable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) earlier today.

39. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to introduce legislation to introduce competition into municipal bus operators.

Mr. Ridley: We will be bringing forward a Bill later this Session to allow competition in local bus services including services operated by municipal bus undertakings.

Mr. Cowans asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many replies he has received to his consultation document on the deregulation of bus services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received some 3,000 responses to the White Paper and the consultation documents which my Department issued subsequently. We are studying those representations as part of the preparation of the forthcoming Bill.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions he will be making to assess regularity of bus services, increases in fare levels on rural routes, maintenance of safety standards and competitiveness of different bus companies in the event of deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: The transport and road research laboratory will be studying the developments following deregulation and the other changes envisaged in Cmnd. 9300, as it has other major developments including those that followed the Transport Act 1980. The licensing authorities will continue to be responsible for the maintenance of safety standards, and will have new powers of oversight over the quality of service provided by bus operators.

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Transport by how much he expects work loads to increase upon those regulating safety standards for buses following the implementation of his proposals in the White Paper, "Buses".

Mr. David Mitchell: I am determined that safety standards will be maintained and we are committed to providing the additional resources as necessary.

17. **Mr. Garrett** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is satisfied with safety standards in the trial areas for buses.

Mr. David Mitchell: Yes. Experience in the trial areas has shown that safety standards in a competitive and deregulated environment can be maintained through the operator licensing system.

21. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek to ensure that the present level of concessions operating throughout the country will be retained if the proposals in the Government's White Paper on buses are implemented.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for individual local authorities to decide what provision to make for concessionary fares in their area. This would remain unchanged under the proposals in the White Paper, except that a local authority would be required to make available for all local bus services the concessions it provides.

24. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from Merseyside county council regarding his recent White Paper, "Buses", Cmnd. 9300.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received a copy of the county council's detailed report responding to the White Paper and the associated consultation papers.

Weighbridges (Commercial Vehicles)

34. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied that adequate weighbridge facilities are available to weigh any heavy commercial vehicles at any time of the day, every day of the week, at all ports of entry to the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: Axle weighbridges have been provided at most major roll-on/roll-off ferry ports and others are either under construction or planned. The Department's traffic examiners regularly check vehicles entering the country at these ports, and at other inland sites.

Inter-city trains (Advertising)

35. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of the British Railways Board, he will raise the matter of advertising on inter-city trains.

Mr. David Mitchell: I am always willing to discuss any matter the chairman wishes to raise at the regular meetings between us. But advertising is a matter for BR's commercial judgment. My hon. Friend may feel it helpful to draw his views on this matter to the attention of the chairman of BR, for his consideration.

Severn Bridge

37. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be publishing the findings of the commissioner who conducted the inquiry into the proposal that tolls on the Severn bridge should be increased.

Mrs. Chalker: The inspector's report has now been received and is being considered. It will be published in the normal way when the decision is announced. I hope to do this as soon as possible.

Manchester Airport

38. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will seek to renegotiate the United States-United Kingdom air transport Bermuda agreement to include Manchester as a gateway for United States passenger-carrying airlines.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery) on 31 October 1984 at column *1111*.

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the future of Ringway airport, Manchester.

Mr. Michael Spicer: A number of representations have been received from individuals and organisations in the north west region urging that increased use should be made of Manchester airport.

West Midlands (Northern Relief Route)

40. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the proposed northern relief route for the west midlands.

Mrs. Chalker: Some 6,000 completed questionnaires have been received in response to the public consultation exercise. In addition about 300 written representations have been submitted together with responses from local authorities and other interested bodies. We are currently considering all these and hope to announce our decision in the new year.

Nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether plans exist to protect reinforcement shipping and aircraft against the effects of nuclear electromagnetic pulses.

Mr. David Mitchell: There are no specific plans to combat the effects of electromagnetic pulse on communications or other electrical equipment in ships and aircraft which may be required for reinforcement purposes. But advice on the phenomenon has been promulgated by the Ministry of Defence to shipowners and by the Civil Aviation Authority to airlines.

British Rail (Safety Standards)

Mr. Ron Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with safety standards on British Rail.

Mr. David Mitchell: In his annual report on railway safety, published in November, the Department's chief inspecting officer points to certain areas where improvements must be sought, but his main conclusion is that the general level of safety has not fallen in any significant way below the excellent—indeed record—levels achieved in recent years.

M25

44. **Mr. Speed** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the most up-to-date estimates of the opening dates of the remaining sections of the M25 motorway.

Mrs. Chalker: We expect to have the whole of the M25 open to traffic by the end of 1986.

The actual opening dates of the remaining sections will depend on the progress made by individual contractors, and these are in turn influenced by factors such as weather and ground conditions. The current formal contract completion dates for the sections still under construction are as follows:

M40—Maple Cross	28 January 1985
M40 interchange	14 April 1985
Leatherhead interchange	15 April 1985
M4—M40	7 July 1985
Wisley—Leatherhead	5 August 1985
Leatherhead—Reigate	26 August 1985
Poyle—M4	15 September 1985
Swanley—Sevenoaks	9 April 1986
M4 interchange	15 June 1986
Bedmond road—A405	21 September 1986
Micklefield Green—Bedmond road	5 October 1986
The "Bell"—South Mimms (including the "Bell" interchange)	26 October 1986
A405—The "Bell"	2 November 1986

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what level of spending he predicts will be devoted to improving the road network system in the London area encircled by the M25 motorway during the next five years.

Mrs. Chalker: Proposals for schemes on trunk roads in London, were set out in Cmnd. 9059 "Policy for Roads in England: 1983."

I shall shortly be announcing the TSG settlement and capital approvals for schemes which the GLC and boroughs have put forward for support in 1985-86.

I cannot predict what further schemes may come forward, but I share the view expressed by the Select Committee on Transport that the GLC has done all too little to remedy the deficiencies of the road network on which the effective functioning and prosperity of London depends.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Ridley: Grants made by my Department to voluntary organisations are shown in the Supply Estimates 1984-85, copies of which are available in the Library.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Ridley: This information is not centrally available. The Department keeps a central record of the number of registered disabled people that it employs but not separately of the number registered blind.

Trunk Routes (Greater London)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport which specific trunk routes he will be administering in the Greater London area after the proposed abolition of the Greater London council.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) at column *47-48* and the associated map that has been placed in the Library.

Dartford Tunnel

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will move to establish appropriate means for providing for relieving future traffic congestion at the Dartford tunnel.

Mrs. Chalker: The Department is meeting the cost of providing additional toll booths at the tunnel and of widening the approach roads, all of which work, when completed, will enable the tunnel to handle the increase in traffic expected over the next few years. I am considering the longer-term implications for the tunnel in the more general context of expected growth rates of M25 and also of local traffic.

School Buses

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider legislation to prevent the overtaking by other traffic of school buses when passengers are boarding or alighting and to require drivers of such buses to display their hazard lights.

Mrs. Chalker: I am doubtful whether such legislation would be practicable or the best way forward. However, the safety of children travelling to and from school is of great importance and we keep this aspect of safety under

close review. We are currently exploring ways in which buses used for school transport might be more easily identifiable.

The most reliable safeguard of all is to ensure that children follow sensible practice in crossing the road and that motorists for their part show extra vigilance at all times when children re about. We shall continue to take every opportunity of putting these messages across.

Channel Link

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on the Channel link.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Sims) on Thursday 22 November at column *280*.

Crash Barriers

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the stretches of dual carriageway, motorway and trunk road at present without a crash barrier between the carriageways and the dates such crash barriers are scheduled for installation.

Mrs. Chalker: The following stretches of motorway in England are without a safety fence between the carriageways:

M5 South of Bristol 8km
M6 Cumbria-Shap 14·5km
M10 St. Albans bypass 5km
M50 Ross Spur 35·5km

I am currently reviewing the traffic and accident records of these stretches to assess whether presence of a crash barrier would be of positive help on these lengths. I will write to my hon. Friend when I have reached a conclusion.

Similar information is not available for all-purpose dual carriageway trunk roads on which such safety fences are provided only as the need arises. There is no programme for the comprehensive provision of safety fences.

British Rail (Privatisation)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the plans to privatise passenger services at present operated by British Rail.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received no proposals from BR for the private operation of rail passenger services.

Trunk Roads (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many sites on trunk roads with high accident rates have been recommended for remedial action by the Greater London council; on how many of those sites his Department has taken the appropriate action; and what is the estimated annual saving in personal injury accidents and financial costs to the community on those schemes which have been completed, and in relation to those schemes which have yet to be begun.

Mrs. Chalker: The Department has worked closely with the GLC for many years on the data provided by the police to identify accident black spots on London's trunk roads. To extract details of all sites identified through these contacts would be costly and difficult. The Department has taken or plans remedial action to reduce accidents wherever a serious problem exists.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport on how many sites on trunk roads in London his Department has initiated small scale accident remedial schemes; and what was the average cost of each scheme.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department operates a rolling programme of special schemes of this sort in London involving 23 locations over the past three years at an average cost per scheme of £75,000.

Road Construction (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much he expects to spend on road construction in London up to the end of 1988.

Mrs. Chalker: Our proposed schemes for London, as elsewhere, are set out in "Policy for Roads in England: 1983" (Cmnd. 9059).

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what strengthening of his London divisions and regional offices have been carried out or are proposed to accommodate the increased use of reserve powers envisaged in the White Paper, "Streamlining the Cities", and his own consultation paper with London boroughs on the allocation of transport responsibilities in London;

(2) what estimate he has made of how many staff will be required in his Department to monitor and evaluate proposals from the London boroughs for the proposed strategic road network in London on which he will have reserve powers as proposed in his May 1984 consultation paper.

Mrs. Chalker: The role proposed for my Department is unlikely to have significant manpower implications, nor is it likely that extensive use of reserve powers will be necessary.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what the proposed capital expenditure of London Regional Transport will be in 1985-86.

Mrs. Chalker: About £250 million, including the docklands light railway and internally funded property development.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what he estimates the rate cost to be for funding London Regional Transport's 1985-86 capital expenditure out of revenue;

(2) what amount of London Regional Transport capital expenditure in 1985-86 will be paid out of revenue and be a charge on the rates.

Mrs. Chalker: To the extent that LRT's capital investment could be funded from internally generated revenues, the requirement for grant, and hence the cost to ratepayers, would be reduced.

18. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what policy instructions he has given to London Regional Transport in respect of general employment policy.

Mrs. Chalker: None.

23. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give his reasons for making changes to the composition of the board of London Regional Transport.

Mrs. Chalker: The London Regional Transport Act made specific provision enabling my right hon. Friend to remove any member of the LRT board without giving reasons, within three months from the appointed day. Before exercising these powers, he invited the relevant members of the London transport executive to come to see him. These meetings confirmed the view that the professional management needed the support of a strong non-executive board which was not hostile to the policy embodied in the Act of removing from the GLC the control of this major transport undertaking.

Urban Traffic Control System, London

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the maintenance of the urban traffic control system in London is currently handled by the private sector.

Mrs. Chalker: As the GLC is currently responsible for the urban traffic control system in London, this information should be sought from it.

Parking (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the Government's policy for the future provision and regulation of parking facilities in London.

Mrs. Chalker: The responsibilities for the provision and regulation of parking in London currently lies with the Greater London council and London borough councils.

Cyclists (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has in hand to establish a team to devise highway improvement and traffic management schemes to assist cyclists in furtherance of his policies following the proposed abolition of the Greater London council's cycling project team.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 19 and 23 November at columns *44* and *338*.

M1 (Incident)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason all traffic was required to leave the northbound carriageway of the M1 motorway at junction 6 between 22.00 hours and 23.30 hours on Tuesday 27 November; why no prior warning to slow down was given to avoid danger; and why no traffic management had been employed to reduce congestion and inconvenience to road users.

Mrs. Chalker: The northbound carriageway was closed between junctions 6 and 7 from 20.00 hours on Tuesday 27 November until 06.00 hours on Wednesday 28 November to permit repairs to the carriageway and to central reserve drainage. There were advance warning signs from a point one mile south of junction 5 and a full traffic management system was in use from one mile south of junction 6 and along the diversionary route via the A405 to the M10.

Palace of Westminster (Helicopter Flights)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken by the Civil Aviation Authority to control flights of helicopters over the Palace of Westminster, especially those circling around for purposes of aerial photography; and what additional noise controls are imposed in hours of darkness.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Palace of Westminster is within the large area notified as the London control zone under rule 21 of the Rules of the Air and Air Traffic Control Regulations 1981. Helicopters require prior permission to enter the zone from Heathrow air traffic control (ATC). Within the zone, helicopters must comply with special visual flight rules which include a requirement to follow the published helicopter routes, one of which follows the Thames alongside the Palace of Westminster. Departures from the special rules clearance for any purpose can be made only with the approval of Heathrow ATC.

There are very few helicopter movements in the zone during the hours of darkness. The main activity around the Palace of Westminster other than normal transit flights by day and night is aerial surveillance by helicopters of the Metropolitan police. Like any other flights in the control zone these must be authorised by air traffic control. No additional noise controls are required.

Midland Rail Line

19 **Mr. Roger Freeman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received advocating further electrification of the Midland rail line.

Mr. David Mitchell: In the last year I have received 10 representations in total from hon. Members, local authorities and members of the public arguing for the extension of electrification of the Midlands main line.

British Rail (Investment)

20 **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of the British Railways Board to discuss investment in British Rail.

Mr. David Mitchell: I frequently meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss matters of mutual interest.

30. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what are his plans for further investment in British Rail.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for British Rail to decide its investment priorities and judge which proposals to bring forward. The Government will continue to support schemes which are worthwhile and soundly based.

Reserved Cabotage

22. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to persuade other European Economic Community member states to cease the practice of reserved cabotage.

Mr. David Mitchell: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the maritime sector.

I have urged the Commission to include measures to open up cabotage traffic among the proposals on shipping policy which it is expected to put before the Council of Ministers shortly.

London Regional Transport and British Rail

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made for the co-ordination of London Regional Transport and British Rail; and what is the date for the extension of travelcards from London Regional Transport to British Rail.

Mrs. Chalker: London Regional Transport and British Rail have a statutory duty under the London Regional Transport Act 1984 to co-operate with each other. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set up the London Passenger Transport Group, in which he and I meet the two chairmen to agree initiatives affecting the common interests of the operators.

The new joint BR/LRT travelcard—to be known as the Capitalcard—will be available from 6 January next year. It will be in addition to, and not in place of, existing LRT travelcards.

Rail Services

26. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received regarding the provision of rail services in passenger transport executive areas.

Mr. David Mitchell: In the last three months I have received a small number of specific inquiries from hon. Members and the public on the future of PTE supported services. I have also received some related comments during consultations on our proposals for abolishing the metropolitan county councils and for the introduction of competition to local bus services.

Transport Subsidies

27. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of local government budgets is accounted for by transport subsidies in the last financial year; and what is the estimate for the current financial year.

Mrs. Chalker: Expenditure on revenue support to public transport and concessionary fares by local authorities in England and Wales is estimated to comprise 3·5 per cent. of total budgeted current expenditure in 1883-84 and 3·6 per cent. in 1984-85.

Passenger Transport Executives

28. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of the ending of section 20 grants on passenger transport executives and their successors.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier this afternoon to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Edwards).

Euston-Birmingham (Rail Services)

29. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent proposals he has received from the British Railways Board for investment in rail services from Euston to Birmingham.

Mr. David Mitchell: None specifically. But we are currently considering a proposal for new electric locomotives for general use on west coast main line services.

SCOTLAND

Wheelchair Users

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he takes to seek to ensure adequate space for wheelchair users in auditoria, sports grounds and concert halls operated by public authorities in Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: The provision of a minimum number of wheelchair spaces in new public buildings, including halls, auditoria and sports stadia, is one of the requirements of the Building Standards (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1984 which were laid before Parliament by my right hon. Friend on 14 November to come into operation on 4 March 1985.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures to show hospital waiting lists in Dundee district for each of the past five years; and if he will also show the numbers treated from the lists in each year in each specialty.

Mr. John MacKay: Details of numbers on hospital waiting lists in the Dundee district as at 30 September in each of the last 5 years are as follows:

Specialty	*1980*	*1981*	*1982**	*1983*	*1984†*
General surgery	737	1,015	—	1,226	1,259
Orthopaedic surgery	743	766	—	1,366	1,181
ENT surgery	752	622	—	1,211	1,099
Ophthalmology	217	160	—	453	558
Urology	287	250	—	348	453
Neurosurgery	31	30	—	32	18
Plastic surgery	60	68	—	105	73
Dental surgery	79	63	—	102	70
General medicine	38	16	—	2	—
Cardiology	36	46	—	47	57
Neurology	4	6	—	12	7
Dermatology	71	23	—	3	9
Rehabilitation medicine	—	—	—	3	2
Chest medicine	2	4	—	—	7
Radiotherapy	44	53	—	7	9
Surgical paediatrics	—	—	—	257	258
Medical paediatrics	4	—	—	—	—
Gynaecology	94	113	—	289	179
Geriatric assessment	26	45	—	61	34
Psycho-geriatric unit	58	63	—	102	98
Total	3,283	3,383	4,334	5,626	5,371

* 1982 data are estimated due to industrial action in the Health Service.

† 1984 data are provisional.

The numbers admitted to hospitals in the Dundee district from waiting lists during the same period are as follows:

Specialty	1980	1981	1982	1983*	1984†
General surgery	4,189	4,110	3,050	4,327	—
Orthopaedic surgery	235	476	606	938	—
ENT surgery	2,415	2,421	1,539	2,031	—
Ophthalmology	1,261	1,178	1,075	1,480	—
Urology	575	1,371	1,155	1,215	—
Neurosurgery	169	257	266	318	—
Plastic surgery	292	456	328	471	—
Dental surgery	526	501	298	518	—
General medicine	640	760	738	763	—
Neurology	88	150	132	169	—
Dermatology	373	361	326	351	—
Rehab/Phys medicine	—	122	109	67	—
Respiratory medicine	269	220	139	37	—
TB respiratory	98	91	52	1	—
Radiotherapy	576	547	686	685	—
Surgical paediatrics	—	—	—	204	—
Medical paediatrics	580	528	469	357	—
Gynaecology	2,593	2,597	1,990	2,695	—
Geriatric assessment	136	125	144	144	—
Geriatric long-stay	8	—	2	9	—
Young chronic sick	21	17	10	9	—
Other	131	164	147	200	—
Total	15,175	16,434	13,261	16,959	—

* 1983 data are provisional.
† 1984 data not yet available.

Island Authorities (Montgomery Report)

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what views he has received since the publication of the Montgomery report regarding the problems of island authorities; and what policy he is formulating over its proposals.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of responses to his invitation to interested parties to submit comments upon the report, including submissions from each of the islands councils. The committee's recommendations, and the views received on them, are now being considered, and we shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Prison Population

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish information on current prison populations in Scotland.

Mr. Younger: Details of the prison population in 1983 were published on 27 November 1984 in the report "Prisons in Scotland" (Cmnd. 9400) and the accompanying statistical bulletin. On 20 November 1984 the total population in Scottish penal establishments was 4,976, made up as follows:

	Total	Male		Female	
		Adult	Under 21	Adult	Under 21
Convicted	3,840	2,848	902	73	17
Convicted awaiting sentence	246	70	175	—	1
Untried	890	546	280	51	13
	4,976	3,464	1,357	124	31

Prison Building Programme

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how the current prison building programme in Scotland compares in scope with other recent programmes.

Mr. Younger: Expenditure on prison building has increased steadily from less than £1 million in 1978-79 to almost £10 million in the current year. The programme provides for substantial expenditure on phase II of Shotts prison, which is due to be completed early in 1987, and thereafter on the new maximum security prison to be built at Peterhead. Apart from major re-development at Greenock prison and Polmont young offenders' institution, the programme includes a broad spectrum of projects designed to increase security and improve accommodation and facilities for inmates and their visitors as well as working conditions and facilities for staff. This substantial programme highlights the priority which the Government attach to improving prison facilities in Scotland.

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the nature and purpose of the building work in progress at Perth and Saughton prisons.

Mr. Younger: The major building projects recently completed at Saughton prison and currently in progress at Perth prison are new gatehouse/administration blocks. Their purpose is to provide the requisite degree of security and control at the entry point to the prison, to provide more modern office accommodation and facilities for staff and to provide greatly improved accommodation and facilities for inmates' visitors, agents and social workers.

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements have been made for consultation on the requirements of the current prison building programme.

Mr. Younger: Detailed consultation is undertaken by my Department on the requirements for all projects at local level with governors and the local prison staff.

Criminal Statistics

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish criminal statistics for 1983.

Mr. Younger: As I said on 21 November in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), I propose to publish criminal statistics from 1983 onwards in statistical bulletins. The first bulletin for 1983, on recorded crime, should be published early in 1985, and others in the series during 1985.

Highlands and Islands (Regional Development Fund)

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether all parts of Scotland covered by the Highlands and Islands Development Board will, following the implementation of the new regional aid proposals on assisted areas, continue to enjoy access to the European regional development fund.

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has assurances from the European Commission that, notwithstanding the changes in the map of assisted areas in Scotland, the whole area within which the Highlands and Islands Development Board has responsibility for development will continue to be eligible for European regional development fund aid.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Yes. It is the board's scheme of assistance which gives the areas covered by it access to the European regional development fund; the scheme is not affected by changes in the new regional aid map on assisted areas.

Legal Aid

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the criteria on legal aid brought to the notice of district courts.

Mr. Ancram: I have today placed in the Library a copy of Scottish Home and Health Department circular No. 2/1982, giving advice to district courts on legal aid.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases arising from the miners' strike have now been dealt with in *(a)* district and *(b)* magistrates' courts; and if he will specify the names of the courts.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not available centrally. I am making inquiries and shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ards Borough District Council

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the revenue from present penny rates per pound net annual valuations in the Ards borough district council area; and what is the total estimated expenditure of the borough for 1984-85.

Dr. Boyson: The estimated product of a one penny rate is £53,800 for 1984-85; estimated expenditure is £3,462,900.

Newtownards Abbatoir

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current annual running cost of and revenue raised from Newtownards abbatoir.

Dr. Boyson: The 1984-85 general rates estimates for Ards borough council show the estimated running cost as £1,522,600, and estimated revenue as £1,160,000

Civil Service

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the proportion of Roman Catholics in the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and how this compares with the proportion in each of the last 10 years.

Dr. Boyson: In the report of an investigation into part of the non-industrial Northern Ireland Civil Service (published in December 1983) the Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland concluded that, in 1980, 30·7 per cent. of staff covered were Roman Catholics. Similar information is not available for other years.

The report recommended that an information system should be established which would indicate the religious balance within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Government accepted the recommendation and appropriate preparatory work has been undertaken.

Social Security

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the total expenditure, broken down by convenient district units, on social security in each of the past six years and in the current year:

(2) what percentage of total public expenditure broken down by convenient district units, in Northern Ireland has been spent on social security in each of the years 1978-79, 1979-80, 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Dr. Boyson: The information is as follows:

Financial year	*Total expenditure on Social Security £ million*	*Social Security expenditure as a percentage of total public expenditure*
1978-79	497	23·3
1979-80	589	24·1
1980-81	716	24·7
1981-82	868	27·0
1982-83	995	28·4
1983-84	*1,107	29·1
1984-85	*1,184	29·4

* Estimated figure.

Information on expenditure broken down by district or other units is not available.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total numbers, by convenient district units, claiming each of the various benefits, supplements and allowances paid by the Department of Health and Social Services including the various additions and single payments under supplementary benefit, for the current year and each of the past six years.

Dr. Boyson: The information requested is extremely detailed, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the total numbers, by district, claiming housing benefit; and how many such claimants are totally dependent on social security.

Dr. Boyson: Information is not available on the number of recipients totally dependent on social security but the table shows the number who are in receipt of supplementary benefit.

District Council Area	*Number of Persons in Receipt of Housing Benefit*	*Number of Housing Benefit Recipients also in Receipt of Supplementary Benefit*
Antrim	4,700	3,000
Ards	6,500	3,700
Armagh	4,800	3,100
Ballymena	5,600	3,300
Ballymoney	2,800	1,700
Banbridge	3,200	1,700
Belfast	46,600	30,200
Castlereagh	5,700	2,900
Carrickfergus	3,400	2,000
Coleraine	6,000	3,800
Cookstown	3,400	2,400
Craigavon	9,300	5,900
Derry	12,300	8,600
Down	5,200	3,000
Dungannon	5,200	3,700
Fermanagh	6,000	4,000
Larne	3,200	2,000

District Council Area	Number of Persons in Receipt of Housing Benefit	Number of Housing Benefit Recipients also in Receipt of Supplementary Benefit
Limavady	3,000	2,100
Lisburn	9,500	6,000
Magherafelt	3,900	2,600
Moyle	1,900	1,300
Newtownabbey	8,400	4,900
Newry	10,700	7,100
North Down	6,300	3,000
Omagh	4,600	2,900
Strabane	5,000	3,600
TOTAL	187,200	118,500

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available, for the current year and each of the past six years, to indicate by convenient district units, the total number of households or individuals in Northern Ireland totally dependent on social security benefits and allowances.

Dr. Boyson: The information requested is not available.

Belfast City Hospital

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing the precise expenditure to date on the new Belfast city hospital tower block, the budget allocation on an annual basis and the shortfall between the Department of Health and Social Services' allocation and the expenditure incurred by the Eastern health and social services board.

Dr. Boyson: The Department of Health and Social Services is directly responsible for the administration and capital funding of major works projects and a budget allocation is not therefore made to Health and Social Services Boards for this purpose. The capital expenditure incurred by the Department to date on the new Belfast city hospital tower block amounts to £54,797,449 including professional fees and expenses. In addition £2,195,521 has been spent on capital equipment for the new hospital.

From 29 February 1984 when the Belfast city hospital tower block was taken over from the contractors, the Eastern health and social services board assumed responsibility for meeting the running costs of the new building which at 30 September 1984 amounted to £632,494. Under present funding arrangements the Eastern board is responsible for meeting these running costs from within its annual allocation of funds.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of *(a)* the marketable wealth, excluding pension funds, *(b)* the total after tax incomes and *(c)* the total personal wealth, including occupational and state pension rights as personal assets, of Northern Ireland were owned or obtained by the richest 1 per cent., the richest 5 per cent., the richest 10 per cent., the richest 25 per cent. and the richest 50 per cent. of the population, respectively, in 1979 and 1982.

Dr. Boyson: The information, so far as it is available, is contained in "The Survey of Personal Incomes for 1979-80". Comparable information for 1981-82 will be available early next year.

DEFENCE

Conventional Forces (Europe)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence what system of measurement is used by his Department to evaluate the relative strength of different national armies and the balance of conventional forces in Europe.

Mr. Stanley: To measure completely the relative strengths of different national armies it is necessary not only to take into account numbers of men and equipment, but also a wide range of other factors such as military strategy, geography, force structures, quality and age of equipment, logistic support, training, leadership and morale.

However, information on the numerical balance of conventional forces on the central front is contained in annex A of vol. I of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984".

Long Range Stand-Off Missile

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what public statements he made prior to 22 October on the long range stand-off missile.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Member to the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983" in the essay "New Technology, New Tactics"; and to the statement made by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the debate on the Royal Air Force in February this year.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a projection has been agreed for the number of cruise missiles to be procured under the long range stand off missile programme in *(a)* the memorandum of understanding with the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America and *(b)* the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation staff target for the long range stand-off missile.

Mr. Butler: Numbers of missiles are not stated in either document.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the anticipated minimum and maximum procurement figures for the long range stand-off missile for *(a)* the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Butler: It is too early in the procurement cycle for estimates of numbers of missiles to be made.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the ground-launched version of the long range stand-off missile will be considered for use by the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Butler: No requirement has been established for a ground-launched version of such a missile.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the projected initial operating capacity date for the long range stand-off missile.

Mr. Butler: No projected date can yet be given, but it is envisaged that, if a joint development and production programme follows on from the collaborative feasibility studies, this could result in a missile entering service in the early 1990s.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence in what year Britain will begin expenditure on research and development for the long range stand-off missile.

Mr. Butler: Some expenditure has already been incurred on the studies being carried out on a national basis, to which I referred in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 November 1984, at column *83*. Expenditure on the feasibility studies under the collaborative memorandum of understanding will begin in 1985-86.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation staff target for the long range stand-off missile includes options for either chemical or nuclear warheads or both;

(2) whether the memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States of America explicitly precludes either a chemical or nuclear option for the long range stand-off missile.

Mr. Butler: The NATO staff target does not include options for chemical or nuclear warheads. Studies under the memorandum of understanding are explicitly related to assessing the feasibility of developing and producing a conventional weapon to meet the NATO staff target.

Porton Down (Poisoning Experiments)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many animals have been used in cyanide poisoning experiments at Porton Down; and if the animals were anaesthetised.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 22 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) at columns *570-72* in which I explained that the disclosure of detailed information about animal usage could in many cases be detrimental to national security. I am, therefore, unable to give the information requested in the first part of the question.

Experiments have been undertaken to improve understanding of the toxiology of cyanide poisoning and with a view to improving treament. Such experiments would not normally be conducted under anaesthesia as the use of anaesthetics would vitiate the purpose of the experiments.

All experiments involving the use of live animals at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, comply fully with the requirements of the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876, including the requirement to obtain a supplementary certificate for the performance of experiments without anaesthesia. If on any occasion an animal were found to be suffering severe pain which was likely to endure, it would at once be painlessly killed.

Noise (RAF Cottesmore)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is not in a position to announce proposals for compensation or assistance with double glazing or other forms of sound insulation for persons affected by noise from RAF Cottesmore.

Mr. Lee: An announcement will be made shortly. Final details are being worked out, but I can confirm that grants will be available for secondary double glazing of a limited number of dwellings most affected by noise from RAF Cottesmore in accordance with my Department's normal policy.

Type 22 Frigates

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the reasons why he was unable to make a decision on the tenders for the two orders for the type 22 frigates before they lapsed, as stated in his reply of 27 November.

Mr. Lee: As I told my hon. Friend in the House on 24 July at columns 814-815, the tenders lapsed before the usual detailed examination of such factors as overheads and productivity had been completed. Further tenders were therefore sought and are now being examined.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the exact date of the destruction of the signals log of HMS Conqueror covering the period of the Falklands campaign.

Mr. Stanley: Destruction records are available only for classified signals, which were destroyed on various dates between 16 June 1982 and 16 February 1983.

Nuclear Weapons System (Procurement)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the procurement process relating to decisions about the procurement of a nuclear weapons system; and at what stage such decisions are considered by *(a)* the equipment policy committee and *(b)* the financial planning and management group of his Department.

Mr. Butler: The procurement process for nuclear weapons systems is essentially the same as that for conventional systems and was most recently described in a memorandum published with the second report of the Defence Committee, Session 1981-82, volume II. Cmnd. 9315 explains the changes to the procedures which are to be made from 2 January 1985 as part of the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence.

Royal Ordnance Factories

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have for the royal ordnance factories at Burghfield and Cardiff in the light of the imminent plans for privatisation of the royal ordnance factories in general; and if he will clarify who will be in control of the day-to-day running of these factories and the control of their security.

Mr. Butler: The royal ordnance factories at Burghfield and Cardiff are unaffected by plans to privatise the other

ROFs. Day-to-day running of both ROF Burghfield and Cardiff, including responsibility for their physical security, will continue to rest with the director, atomic weapons factories.

Intercontinental Missiles

Mr. Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Defence how quickly intercontinental ballistic missiles can be retargeted; and whether this process can be detected by surveillance aircraft.

Mr. Stanley: Generally speaking, modern ballistic missile systems can be retargeted in a matter of minutes. This process cannot be detected by aerial or any other surveillance system.

Falkland Islands (Local Allowance)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the detailed contents of the basket of items priced by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body in assessing whether a local allowance should be payable to service men stationed in the Falkland Islands; and how the costs are assessed in comparison with Belize;

(2) whether the cost of telephone calls to the United Kingdom from the Falkland Islands is included in the basket of costs assessed by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body in deciding whether to recommend payment of a local allowance.

Mr. Stanley: The assessment of a local overseas cost of living allowance does not fall within the terms of reference of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body but is a matter for the Ministry of Defence in consultation with Her Majesty's Treasury.

The following individual elements are used in calculating local overseas allowances:

Food at home
Food in mess
Clothing
Cigarettes
Confectionery
Household cleaning materials
Toiletries
Laundry
Dry cleaning
Hairdressing
Car
Public transport
Stationery
Postage
Telephones
Toys
Newspapers and Magazines
Television
Records and Tapes
Home Entertainment
Meals out
Dances
Drinks at home
Drinks out
Drinks in mess
Cinema and Spectator Sport
Babysitting
Sport
Holidays
Mess subscriptions
Mess functions

The same system is used in all countries outside the United Kingdom where members of the Armed Forces are stationed.

Joint Radar Project

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the status and purpose of the joint radar project with the United States of America known as Cold Witness;

(2) what is the status of the joint programme with the United States of America to install an over-the-horizon radar in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will be answering shortly.

Ground-launched Anti-ship System

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there have been any consultations between the British and American Governments on the question of the ground-launched anti-ship system since January.

Mr. Stanley: I will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of (*a*) fatal, (*b*) major and (*c*) minor accidents on the youth training scheme for the period from 1 July to 30 September, showing the average number of persons in training in each month during that period and the total number of entrants to the scheme for those three months.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is tabled below.

1 July to 30 September 1984

	Youth Training Scheme
Number of entrants (a)	190,013
Average number in training (a) per month	295,226
Number of fatalities (b)	3
Number of injuries (c):	
Major	50
Minor	370
Total number of injuries	423

(a) These figures are provisional and will be subject to change as further information becomes available.

(b) This figure includes two road traffic accidents.

(c) MSC accident figures for the youth training scheme are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed persons. However, the figures quoted in the above table will include a number of accidents, in particular road traffic accidents during scheme time and accidents to trainees in educational establishments, which may not have been reportable to the HSE had the individuals been employed.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the level of allowance which would be paid to young people on the youth training scheme, for each year since 1982, if that allowance had been increased since 1982, by (*a*) the rise in prices and (*b*) the rise in average earnings.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The allowance paid to trainees was set at £25 per week in January 1982. If the allowance

had been increased in January 1983 and January 1984 in line with either the movement in the general index of retail prices or the average earnings index, the revised rates would have been as follows:

	In line with retail prices index	*In line with average earnings index (whole economy, seasonally adjusted)*
	£	£
January 1983	26·23	27·20
January 1984	27·58	29·12

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many places under the youth training scheme for the year 1984-85 have been approved with the company Rank Xerox.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At the end of November, 93 mode A places had been approved under the youth training scheme at Rank Xerox UK and 48 mode A places at Rank Xerox International. A further 26 mode A places had been approved at Rank Xerox Engineering and this company also has 20 approved places under mode B1.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young women are entering women-only training courses within the youth training scheme in 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: To date two training projects under the youth training scheme have been designated under section 47 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 permitting training for young women only. Of the 46 places being offered in 1984-85 on these schemes, 25 are currently occupied.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment how the sum of £78 paid by the Manpower Services Commission to the parents of George McCormack, killed on a youth training scheme in West Lothian on 27 July, was calculated; whether he has any intention of increasing the amount awarded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *539-40*]: The payment by the Manpower Services Commission to the parents of George McCormack was exactly the same as would have been made by the Department of Health and Social Security, under section 71 of the Social Security Act 1975, had he been an employee.

Skillcentre Places

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the number of skillcentre places available per 100,000 work force in Yorkshire and Humberside and West Yorkshire, respectively; and how these figures compare with those for each English region.

Mr. Peter Morrison: For each 100,000 of the work force in September 1984 it is estimated the following skillcentre places were available:

	Number
Yorkshire and Humberside	46
—of which, West Yorkshire	57
Northern region	83
North-West	54
Midlands	42
South-West	56
South-East	39

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make a statement on the timing and location of skillcentre closures, skillcentre annex closures and skillcentre staff redundancies necessary to meet the targets of the skillcentre business plan and on the position in each Manpower Services Commission region;

(2) if he will make a statement on his plans to develop the skillcentre network in Britain and, in particular, in London.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 29 November at column 1108.

Rates of Pay

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action has been taken by his Department and by the Manpower Services Commission following last year's report, a copy of which has been sent to him, by west midlands low pay unit about rates of pay below the legal minimum set by wages councils being advertised in jobcentres in the area.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Instructions issued to jobcentres make it clear that vacancies should not be displayed where it appears that a wages order is likely to be violated and that jobcentre staff should notify the wages inspectorate of any vacancies which offered wages at below the wages council minima.

To reinforce these instructions revised guidance was issued in the early part of this year. In addition, in order to help jobcentre staff identify vacancies where the wage offered falls below the legal minimum, they receive regularly updated information on the minimum rates applying to the majority of workers in the main wages council trades.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many grants have been made through the enterprise allowance scheme in the borough of Kettering since the scheme's creation, expressed both as an absolute number and as a proportion of the total grants made in Northamptonshire.

Mr. Alan Clark: I regret the figures are not available in the form requested. However by 27 November 1984, 482 people in the Northamptonshire area had joined the enterprise allowance scheme since its introduction on 1 August 1983.

Jobcentres

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Employment if the Manpower Services Commission has any plans to open a jobcentre at Westbury.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No. Detailed consideration was given to the feasibility of opening a small jobcentre at Westbury during the recent preparation of proposals for the development of the jobcentre network in the

Manpower Services Commission's south-west region but I understand this was found not to be a cost-effective proposition in the light of the services already available through other jobcentres in the area.

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether any staff cutbacks are planned at the Warminster, Trowbridge and Melksham jobcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The employment manager for the south-west region of the Manpower Services Commission has prepared revised proposals for the development of the jobcentre network in his region, following widespread consultation with interested parties. Copies of these proposals, including details of Warminster, Trowbridge and Melksham jobcentres were sent to my hon. Friend on 9 November. They provide for a small reduction in the overall number of staff employed in the three jobcentres over the next three years. No changes are proposed in the services provided at each of the three jobcentres, and the staff savings will result from the introduction of more effective methods of working including the introduction of a more efficient computerised system for handling employers' vacancies.

The Manpower Services Commission hopes to reach final decisions on these proposals shortly.

Community Programme Places

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Employment what allocation of community programme places has been afforded to Barnsley in the last 12 months, specifying the numbers that have also been allocated to Barnsley district trades council.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Places on the community programme are allocated to the Wakefield area, which comprises Wakefield, Barnsley and Doncaster. The number of filled places over the past 12 months has varied but has been higher than is strictly warranted by its incidence of long-term unemployment. The current allocation is 2,650. Of these, approximately one-quarter are allocated to projects in the Barnsley local authority area. The project run by Barnsley district trades council has 22 places.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions are taking place between his Department and the Manpower Services Commission to increase community programme places, especially in the Barnsley area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend set out our current plans for the development of the community programme in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) on 30 July at columns *121-122*. We have previously guaranteed its future until at least October 1986.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Employment why the Manpower Services Commission is refusing applications from trade councils for an increased share of community programme places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission area manpower boards consider all proposals to fund community programme projects in the light of guidance about the priorities for selection, the number of places available in each area and the needs of local long term unemployed people. No distinction is made between applications from trades councils and those from other organisations.

Industrial Training Boards

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the rubber and plastics processing industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The training arrangements that replaced the rubber and plastics processing industry training board are now undertaken mainly by the plastics processing industry training board and the British rubber industry training organisation.

The British rubber industry training organisation was established by the British Rubber Manufacturers Association. It is concentrating its training efforts in management and supervisory training.

Both the board and the training organisation distribute grants from the Manpower Services Commission to employers in the industry. Good progress is being made towards the objectives of the new training initiative.

The board has just produced its first Open Tech module, "an Introduction to Polymer Materials", and is developing standards of performance and training recommendations for the industry, in addition to managing a 500 place youth training scheme. The British rubber industry training organisation is co-operating with the board in the production of Open Tech materials for the rubber industry and is heavily involved in the assessment of the potential of individuals and their training needs through its assessment centre programme. It is also actively involved in providing information on the youth training scheme in which all the major companies are participating as managing agents. Both organisations are co-operating with the engineering industry training board's work in the development of segmental apprentice training.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the footwear, leather and fur skin industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Responsibility for training in those sectors previously covered by the footwear, leather and fur skin industry training board now rests principally with two non-statutory training organisations, the British Leather Confederation and the British Footwear Manufacturers Federation. The Manpower Services Commission maintains close links with both.

In the smaller sectors previously covered by the board, training needs are identified and met mainly by individual employers with some assistance from their employer associations and chambers of trade and commerce.

The British Leather Confederation has worked closely with the Leather Producers Association to develop a national model for the youth training scheme and is hopeful of carrying forward a five year plan for the industry which would include the other objectives of the new training initiative.

In footwear repair and manufacture, individual firms in various localities have provided places under the youth training scheme.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the paper and products industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Responsibility for training in that sector of industry previously covered by the paper and paper products industry training board now rests principally with two non-statutory training organisations, the British Paper and Board Industry Federation Education and Training Council and the British Fibreboard Packaging Employers' Association.

Good progress is being made in the sector towards the objectives of the new training initiative. For example, the British Paper and Board Industry Federation Education and Training Council has recently signed an agreement with the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union to replace the traditional time-served apprenticeship with one that is standards-based.

Many companies throughout the sector have played an important part in the youth training scheme. Both of the principal training organisations have offered guidance to employers in the area, acting as sponsors or managing agents.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the planned date of publication of the detailed research which has been commissioned by the Manpower Services Commission on training arrangements in sectors where statutory industrial training boards have been abolished.

Mr. Peter Morrison The Manpower Services Commission has not commissioned any detailed research on training arrangements in sectors where statutory industrial training boards have been abolished.

In December 1982, the commission invited the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education to report on training information systems, with particular reference to non-statutory training organisations. I am not aware of any plans for publishing this report.

Women-only Courses

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number and location of women-only work preparation courses funded by the Manpower Services Commission in each year from 1979-80 to 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The number of women-only work preparation courses by region for each year 1979-80 to 1984-85 is as follows

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Scotland	1	4	7	6	2	3
Northern	2	5	6	7	7	9
Yorkshire & Humberside	1	1	4	5	8	4
North-West	0	2	3	3	6	2
Midlands	5	3	2	4	8	7
Wales	6	4	5	8	5	6
South-West	0	3	3	3	7	9
South-East	3	3	3	4	3	5
London	3	4	7	5	6	13
Totals	21	29	40	45	52	58

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number and location of women-only vocational training courses funded by the Manpower Services Commission in each year from 1979-80 to 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: During the period 1979-80 to 1984-85, the Manpower Services Commission has not funded any women-only vocational training courses under the training opportunities scheme, although women-only work preparation courses leading to full skills courses have been supported.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was, in each Manpower Services Commission region, the level of expenditure by Manpower Services Commission on women-only training courses in each year from 1979-80 to 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Expenditure for the first six months of the 1984-85 financial year on women-only courses supported under our training opportunities scheme was as follows:

Region	*£ Expenditure*
Scotland	9,500
Northern	8,400
Yorkshire and Humberside	54,900
North-West	77,700
Midlands	64,500
Wales	45,300
South-West	102,000
South-East	43,800
London	41,000
Total	447,000

Total expenditure under the scheme for women-only training in 1984-85 is expected to be £1·25 million. Comparable figures are not available for earlier years. In addition, we are spending around £1·16 million in support of nationally organised forms of women-only training provision for which regional figures are not available.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement, for each Manpower Services Commission region, on planned expenditure and course capacity, for women-only courses which is envisaged in the current Manpower Services Commission corporate plan.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Plans for the 1985-86 financial year and beyond have not yet been finalised but it is anticipated that total provision for women-only training next year will be at broadly the same level as in 1984-85, around £2·4 million.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the policy of the Manpower Services Commission to local authority initiatives in funding women-only training courses.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Decisions taken by local authorities on particular training which they wish to support are not a matter for the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the number of entrants to women-only training and work preparation courses in London in each year from 1979-80 to 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The number of women entering women-only work preparation courses in the London region for each year from 1979-80 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979-80	40
1980-81	48
1981-82	72
1982-83	84
1983-84	98
1984-85	*170

* Planned.

Adult Training

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress towards recognised standards of competence in adult training in line with the objectives of the new training initiative and on the role of the skillcentre training agency in this.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Apprenticeship Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of recruitment to the first year of engineering, craft and technician apprenticeship, by region, in each year from 1979-80 to 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The following figures show registrations made by the engineering industry training board of first year engineering craft and technician apprentices:

Region	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	**1984-85 to date*
Eastern and Southern	3,626	3,319	2,415	1,812	1,771	1,658
London and South-East	2,599	2,403	1,674	1,162	1,059	857
South-West	1,824	1,680	1,365	981	901	589
East Midlands	2,150	1,987	1,413	981	785	601
West Midlands	3,156	2,603	1,890	1,289	1,150	586
North-East	3,380	2,840	2,055	1,373	1,163	1,178
North-West	3,254	2,915	2,215	1,704	1,300	1,208
Wales	818	724	543	399	371	†402
Scotland	2,015	1,666	1,450	1,156	1,107	838
Total	22,822	20,137	15,020	10,857	9,607	7,917
Number of non-scope company trainees registered‡	3,465	2,976	2,428	1,956	2,237	1,051

* Shows registrations made to date in the 1984-85 training year. Registrations are received from employers throughout the year. The Engineering Industry Training Board's national recruitment target for apprentice trainees in 1984-85 is 8,650.

† Estimated.

‡The engineering industry training board acts as a registering body for some training to comparable standards carried out in industries other than engineering. The national totals for these registrations are shown and are excluded from the main totals.

The number entering traditional apprenticeships will increasingly fail to reflect the extent of skill training being undertaken in industry, due to the reform of existing training arrangements and public funding of first-year training under the youth training scheme.

Training

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his plans for the future of employer-based group training associations and training centres and the role planned for them in the new training initiatives.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government stated in their White Paper, "Training for Jobs" (Cmnd. 9135), that the primary responsibility for training must rest with employers, who can best ensure that training of the right quantity, quality and cost takes place. It is consistent with this policy that all industry training organisations, including industrial training boards, voluntary training organisations and group training associations, should meet their own operating costs.

The Manpower Services Commission has therefore decided that, where funding has been available in the past to support the operating costs of some employer-based group training associations and training centres, this should now be phased out over a period not exceeding three years from April 1984. This will allow such associations time to establish an independent financial basis for their operations. However, while support for operating costs will end, the associations will continue to

be able to apply for funding available under the commission's various training programmes on the same basis as other industry training organisations.

The Government believe that group training associations can continue to have an important role to play in training and a number of them are becoming directly involved in helping to meet the objectives of the new training initiative, for example as managing agents under the youth training scheme and in the reform of skills training and the opening up of training opportunities for adults.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many group training association training centres in each industrial sector have closed down since 1979;

(2) what information he has as to how many employer-based group training associations have ceased to operate in each industry since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: This information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of expenditure by industry on industrial training in the carpet industry, the ceramic, glass and mineral products industry, the chemical and allied products industry, the clothing and allied products industry, the cotton and allied textiles industry, the distributive industry, the food, drink and tobacco industry, the footwear, leather and fur skin industry, the furniture and timber industry, the hotel and catering industry, the iron and steel industry, the knitting, lace and net industry, the man-made fibres industry, the paper and paper products industry, the printing and publishing industry, the rubber and plastics processing industry, the shipbuilding industry and the wool, jute and flax industry, respectively, in 1979-80; and what the figure for such expenditure is likely to be in 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information on total expenditure on training in these industries is not available.

Disabled Persons (Training)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether, during the next 12 months, the Government propose to take any special measures to provide disabled people, for whom education in schools and colleges is inappropriate, with suitable training leading to work in the information technology industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government have well-established arrangements to facilitate access to training for disabled people, including training leading to work in the information technology field. The normal rules governing support for training run by the Manpower Services Commission are relaxed for disabled people. Disabled people who cannot attend information technology courses at colleges may be able to take advantage of the training provided by the network of information technology centres, including a special course at Reading information technology centre, training arranged with suitable employers, or at the four residential training centres for disabled people supported by the commission.

Occupational Cancer

Mr. Norman Hogg asked the Secretary of State for Employment if steps are taken to ensure that Her Majesty's inspectors of health and safety are aware of the trade names of dyes and colours in use in industry in Britain which have the known potential to cause cancer of the bladder in workers using such dyes and colours; and what is the total number and the chemical types of such dyes and colours.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Health and Safety Executive is not aware of any dyes or colours in use in industry in Britain that have a known proven potential to cause cancer of the bladder in workers using them, though suspicions have arisen from time to time about particular groups of dyes or individual dyes and it has not been possible positively to disprove the existence of a risk of bladder cancer among exposed workers.

In particular, suspicion has fallen on dyes produced from benzidine. In the past, these may have contained some free benzidine as an impurity, but the concentrations of this substance have now been reduced to very low levels. Following discussions by the Health and Safety Commission's advisory committee on toxic substances, the Health and Safety Executive issued a guidance note in 1982, "Benzidine-based Dyes — Health and Safety Precautions".

Mr. Norman Hogg asked the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made towards ratification of the International Labour Conference occupational cancer convention, 1974 (No. 139), for the control of all cancer-causing substances at work; and what information he has as to which member states have already ratified the convention; and in which year this was accomplished in each case.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In January 1984, following the consideration by the Health and Safety Commissioner's advisory committee on toxic substances of draft regulations together with a general approved code of practice and a supplementary code of practice produced by a working party on the control of carcinogens, ACTS recommended to the HSC that a draft consultative document should be published for comment. The consultative document was published for comment. The consultative document was published in August and the consultation period ends on 1 March, 1985.

Following the consultation period, I expect that some further work will be needed before the regulations can be put by the HSC to the Government for approval; once the new regulations have been approved I hope that the Government will be in a position to ratify IL convention No. 139.

The information about ratifications of the convention is shown in the table.

States	*Year in which ratification was registered*
Afghanistan	1979
Argentina	1978
Denmark	1978
Ecuador	1975
Egypt	1982
Finland	1977
Federal Republic of Germany	1976
Guinea	1976
Guyana	1983
Hungary	1975
Iraq	1978

States	*Year in which ratification was registered*
Italy	1981
Japan	1977
Nicaragua	1981
Norway	1977
Peru	1976
Sweden	1976
Switzerland	1976
Syrian Arab Republic	1979
Uruguay	1980
Venezuela	1983
Yugoslavia	1977

ENVIRONMENT

New Homes (London)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his assessment, based on the generalised needs index, of the requirement for the building of new homes in London over the next 10 years and of the number of renovations required over the same period.

Sir George Young: The generalised needs index is used to determine the financial allocation for London. It is for individual London authorities to determine how much to spend on new build and renovation, in the light of their assessment of local need.

International Youth Year

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department intends to make towards International Youth Year.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: My Department's main locus in international youth year lies in my responsibilities for sport and the Sports Council. In January, the council is launching a £½ million campaign designed to coincide with international youth year and called "Ever Thought of Sport?" to increase participation in sport amongst the 13 to 24 years age group.

Asbestos

Mr. Marland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to ban the use of asbestos in the construction or improvement of buildings partly or wholly financed by Government or local authority grants.

Sir George Young: Draft regulations have been published to prohibit all use of crocidolite or amosite (blue and brown asbestos), sprayed asbestos and the use of asbestos in thermal and acoustic insulation. The use of chrysotile (white) asbestos is declining, but there are some remaining uses in building materials where alternatives are not yet in general use and where the risk of release of asbestos fibres in normal use is negligible. There are no plans to ban the use of the remaining asbestos materials in the construction or improvement of buildings financed by grant.

Inner London Education Authority

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what costs he estimates will be incurred arising from the removal of the Inner London education authority from county hall after the proposed abolition of the Greater London council in 1986.

Sir George Young: There is no reason to think that there will be any immediate disturbance of ILEA staff when ownership of county hall passes to the residuary body.

Jubilee Park, Southall

Mr. Bidwell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is considering ordering a public inquiry into the London borough of Ealing's decision to build four-bedroomed houses across the entrance to Jubilee park, Southall.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. Ealing borough council, as local planning authority, has now deemed itself planning permission for the proposed development. My right hon. Friend would not therefore be justified in intervening in what is essentially a matter for local decision.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: This information is not centrally available. The Department keeps a central record of the number of registered disabled people that it employs but not separately of the number registered blind.

Local Authority Staff

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of full-time or full-time equivalent employees of local authorities in each year since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information is as follows:—

Employees of local authorities in England (Full-Time Equivalents as at June each year)

	Number
1979	1,975,156
1980	1,951,008
1981	1,923,623
1982	1,890,955
1983	1,889,663
1984	1,892,719

Improvement Areas (London)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many statutory improvement areas are currently managed and funded by the Greater London council; and how many dwellings they encompass.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 October to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) at column *934*, in reply to his identical question.

Greater London Council

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions his Department has sought information from the Greater London council

regarding the abolition of the council; and how many times such requests for information have been met with refusal since Royal Assent of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984.

Sir George Young: We have sought information, under section 5 of the Act, on staffing matters and 1985-86 expenditure. On countless occasions, the Department has sought information about specific applications for consent under sections 7 to 9 where the data supplied by the GLC have been inadequate. In one case we have declined to take any further action towards reaching a decision on whether a consent could be given because, despite repeated requests, sufficient supporting information has not been provided.

Maltby Common

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the deeds he saw from Messrs Allen and Overy, solicitors in relation to Maltby common, were a deed of title to the specific ownership of Maltby far and low common.

Mr. Macfarlane: There was more than one deed and other documentation, examination of which satisfied my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the title to Maltby commons could be traced to the Earl of Scarborough.

Enveloping Schemes

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if local authorities are required to produce photographs to his Department in advance of enveloping schemes.

Sir George Young: No. However paragraph 3 of DOE circular 26/84 says that photographs showing the main house types and the general condition of properties in proposed enveloping schemes are helpful and may be included in support of submissions.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effects on the economies of scale of enveloping arising from his circular 26/84, "The Improvement of Older Housing: Enveloping".

Sir George Young: The economies of scale achieved by enveloping schemes put forward by local authorities and approved under circular 26/84 will depend on their size and nature.

Although the circular allows some flexibility in the size of schemes, it discourages those that are too small, and I would expect economies of scale to be greater than previously.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment by what means he anticipates local authorities will have regard to the social and financial circumstances of owners of property in respect of enveloping schemes as set out in paragraph 12 of circular 26/84, "The Improvement of Older Housing: Enveloping".

Sir George Young: All enveloping schemes fall within housing action areas. In considering enveloping schemes, local authorities should draw on the assessment of social conditions that they are obliged to have made before declaring the HAA, and on the results of subsequent monitoring.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is meant by the term area as a whole in paragraph 7 of circular 26/84, "The Improvement of Older Housing: Enveloping".

Sir George Young: Paragraph 7 reminds authorities that the impact of enveloping schemes will have an effect on property values greater than that brought by isolated improvements to individual dwellings. The area affected will depend on the circumstances but will normally extend beyond the enveloping scheme to the surrounding housing action area.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the extra manpower requirements of his regional offices in monitoring enveloping schemes under circular 26/84, "The Improvement of Older Housing: Enveloping".

Sir George Young: None.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his evidence that the operation of circular 26/84, "The Improvement of Older Housing: Enveloping", will increase the speed of decision making on enveloping schemes.

Sir George Young: The circular, in giving clearer guidelines to local authorities, will eliminate the need for protracted discussion and appraisal which has hitherto been necessary following submission of projects. Where cases fall within the prescribed criteria, decisions will be given within 30 days of acknowledgement of receipt of the completed submission within the Department, unless the authority hears to the contrary.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the new requirements for enveloping set out in circular 26/84, "The Improvement of Older Housing: Enveloping", are to be met without increasing manpower while maintaining the same rate of properties being enveloped.

Sir George Young: Though there may be additional work involved in providing the project information required at the outset this should be readily available to local authorities. I would expect any extra effort normally to lead to offsetting savings by removing the need for local authorities to respond to requests for further information once a project is submitted for approval.

Housing (Brighton)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has received any representations regarding an increase in Brighton council's housing subsidies;

(2) what information he has on the level of council rents and housing subsidies in Brighton.

Sir George Young: Based on information received from the local authority, the average council rent in Brighton is £17·82 per week.

Representations have been received from the council's labour group seeking financial help through the subsidy system. The council has had no entitlement to housing subsidy since 1981-82. The present system of housing

subsidies, introduced by the Housing Act 1980, is designed to channel aid to those authorities most in need of support, having regard to their local needs and resources. Where an authority has no entitlement to housing subsidy, it can reasonably be expected to meet its housing needs from its own local resources. It is for the council to decide how this should be done.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the matters discussed at the meeting on November, between his Department and members of Brighton borough council.

Mr. Waldegrave: I saw a deputation of elected members of Brighton borough council on 21 November to hear their representations about the council's rate support grant position.

Rents

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list each borough, district council and new town still in receipt of housing subsidy to their housing revenue account; and if he will list the average rent for those authorities and indicate which of those authorities fall within the current criteria for high rent status;

(2) if he will list and rank the latest information on the average rent for each housing authority and new town in England and Wales.

Sir George Young: Information on the average rents of local authorities and new towns is included in the chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publication Housing Rents Statistics at April 1983". Statistics for April 1984 will, I understand, be published by CIPFA before the end of the month.

A list of authorities which have claimed an entitlement to main housing subsidy is attached. Those whose reported rents are above the qualifying threshold for high rent status are indicated.

English authorities claiming main housing subsidy 1984-85

Local Authorities:
Isles of Scilly
Manchester
Oldham
Rochdale
Salford
Liverpool*
Newcastle upon Tyne
Birmingham
Greater London Council
City of London*
Camden
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham*
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea*
Lambeth
Lewisham
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Wandsworth*
Westminster*
Barnet*
Brent
Croydon
Ealing*
Enfield*
Haringey
Harrow*
Hillingdon*
Hounslow
Merton*
Newham
Sutton*
Waltham Forest
South Bedfordshire
Bracknell
Reading
Slough
Wokingham*
Langbaurgh
Middlesbrough*
Caradon
Allerdale
South Hams
West Devon*
Bournemouth
Wimborne*
Darlington
Sedgefield
Eastbourne*
Hastings
Lewes
Wealden*
Basildon
Rochford
Tendring
East Hampshire*
Gosport
Havant*
Rushmoor*
Test Valley*
Winchester
Malvern Hills*
Redditch
Broxbourne*
Medina*
South Wight
Ashford
Thanet
Blackburn
Hyndburn
South Ribble
Wellingborough
Castle Morpeth
Selby
Bassetlaw
Broxtowe
Mansfield
West Somerset
Tamworth*
Elmbridge*
Epsom and Ewell*
Woking*
Rugby
Arun*
Horsham

New Towns:
Basildon*
Central Lancashire*
Corby
Milton Keynes*
Northampton
Peterborough
Redditch
Warrington and Runcorn
Skelmersdale
Telford*
Washington*
Hemel Hempstead

* Authorities whose reported average rents are above the threshold for high rent status.

Rate Support Grant (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if rate support grant to individual boroughs will be increased if the Greater London council were to be

abolished, to reflect, pound for pound, current Greater London council obligatory revenue contributing towards deficits on the transferred housing stock.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have announced our intention that the broad financial effect of the payments the GLC is obliged to make should be preserved after abolition, preferably through the rate support grant system. Local governmentwill be consulted about the detailed arrangements.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing authorities have had their notional surplus on the housing revenue account for 1984-85 increased a zero grant-related expenditure; and if he will give an analysis as follows (*a*) the percentage of shire districts receiving this increase, (*b*) the percentage of metropolitan districts receiving this increase, (*c*) the percentage of London authorities receiving this increase and (*d*) for all housing authorities and each class of housing authority, the housing revenue account grant related expenditures before and after the notional surpluses were set at zero and their actual budgeted 1984-85 surpluses/deficits.

Sir George Young: For 1984-85, 317 housing authorities have their notional surpluses on the housing revenue account set to zero for GRE purposes. This comprised 94·6 per cent. of shire districts, 77·8 per cent. of metropolitan districts and 45·0 per cent. of outer London boroughs.

Housing revenue account GRE's with and without notional surpluses set to zero are shown in annex A, for classes of authority, and in table 1 for all individual housing authorities. Actual budgeted 1984-85 surpluses and deficits are shown in table 2. I have placed copies of these figures in the Library of the House.

Planning Permissions

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what research is now in progress in his Department concerning the take-up of planning permissions; whether this research fulfils the commitment made in the interview of 13 September 1983 to the journal *Building Design*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The Department is reviewing the take-up of office planning permissions in accordance with the commitment given in the *Building Design* interview. The need for any additional research is being considered.

Housing Association Schemes (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made an assessment of the total cost of repair work needed on housing association schemes in London originally funded by the Greater London council.

Sir. George Young: No.

Housing (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment who would honour Greater London council warranties in respect of purchasers of ex-Greater London council dwellings after the London residuary body has been wound up in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: This is one of the residual matters for which the London residuary body will be charged with devising appropriate arrangements under clause 63 of the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment who would pay any rate-borne costs if a borough decided to build homes for elderly people outside London, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: The borough council would allocate tenancies, manage the property and, if it wished, bear some costs on the rates wherever the homes are situated.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those London boroughs which have exercised their powers to develop homes outside London; how many homes have been built; and how many were specifically designed for the elderly.

Sir George Young: This information could be obtained from Departmental records only at disproportionate cost. However, according to table 2.1 of "Greater London Housing Statistics 1983", published by the Greater London Council, in March 1983 the following London borough councils owned residential stock outside London:

Borough	*Number of dwellings*
Ealing	17
Enfield	1,069
Haringey	822
Hillingdon	95
Kingston	4
Lambeth	113
Merton	381
Newham	1,087
Sutton	128
Wandsworth	2
Waltham Forest	722
Total	4,440

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the boroughs listed in the answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on 13 June, *Official Report*, column *493*, as having commented favourably on the specific proposal that the London boroughs would take over full responsibility for the Greater London council's housing role in the event of the Greater London council being abolished, did not fully support that proposal.

Sir George Young: All those boroughs listed in the first part of my answer to the hon. Member of 13 June at column *493* fully supported the proposal that London boroughs should take full responsibility for the Greater London council's housing role; their comments on points of details did not affect this overall view.

Local Authorities (Expenditure Targets)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in setting the provisional expenditure targets for 1985-86, he had regard to the increase in target over that set for each local authority in 1984-85 and the individual circumstances of each local authority.

Mr. Waldegrave: The provisional targets for 1985-86 were framed by reference to principles applicable to all local authorities. The principles used were described in the material placed in the Library on 24 July.

"Streamlining the Cities"

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if table 4 (Housing) of part II of the report on the consultation on "Streamlining the Cities" (Cmnd. 9063) includes the responses both of the Association of Metropolitan authorities and the Association of London Authorities.

Sir George Young: Yes.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which authority received the highest housing investment programme allocation in England for 1984-85; and what was the amount of the allocation.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to his earlier question on 26 October at column *749*.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the unsatisfactory dwellings which in 1984-85 constituted 59 per cent. of the general needs index used to distribute housing investment programme allocations were owned by local authorities; and what proportion of the total general needs index is made up of unsatisfactory local authority dwellings.

Sir George Young: Some 13 per cent. of the total dwelling stock found to be unfit, lacking basic amenities or in disrepair, and therefore included within the stock condition indicators of the generalised needs index, was owned by local authorities. Unsatisfactory local authority-owned dwellings accounted for 8 per cent. of the total generalised needs index used for 1984-85 housing investment programme allocations.

Hares (Mortality)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what investigations are being made into the current high mortality rate in the hare population of southern England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The current decline in the hare population follows a higher than average summer breeding rate and is believed to be largely attributable to natural causes. The position is being carefully monitored by the Nature Conservancy Council and by the wildlife incident investigation service of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Nature Conservancy Council will be investigating the status of the species as part of the quinquennial review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and will be considering whether the hare needs special protection.

Water Charges

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about proposed increases in water rates; if he will review the borrowing powers of water authorities in order to effect a stabilisation of water rate levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Some 80 representations, including five questions have been received from hon. Members and others concerning increases in water services charges next year. As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 12 November 1984 in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) at columns *67-69*, the external finance limit for water authorities in England and Wales for 1985-86 will be £203 million. There are no plans to change this.

Acid Rain

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response the Government are making to the current concern regarding acid rain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his answer*, 13 November 1984, c. *183*]: The Government have today published their reply to the report on acid rain by the Select Committee on the Environment in the form of a Command Paper; copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the capital expenditure of local authorities in London for each major service for each of the years 1978-79 to 1982-83.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his answer*, 29 November 1984, c. *560*]:

Following is the information based on outturn returns from local authorities:

Gross Capital Expenditure: Local Authorities in London†*

£ million

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*
Education, Libraries Museums and Art Galleries	53	55	73	54	61
Health and Social Services	16	20	24	19	20
Local Roads and Transport	98	138	174	188	211
Housing	789	902	848	635	741
Other Local Services	142	187	233	222	273

* All capital expenditure charged to capital accounts and amounts of capital expenditure charged direct to revenue or other funds and not capitalised.
† Greater London Council (including ILEA), City of London, and London Boroughs.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what the reduction, measured in 1984-85 prices, has been in the level of local authority capital expenditure in London and the rest of England, respectively, between the years 1978-79 and 1982-83.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *560*]: Local authority gross capital expenditure in London and the rest of England fell by 27 per cent. and 14 per cent. respectively in cost terms (at 1984-85 prices) between 1978-79 and 1982-83.

GLC (Net Revenue Expenditure)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an analysis of the Greater London council's 1984-85 budgeted net revenue expenditure, broken down by service, for each service to be transferred from the Greater London council to the London boroughs and other bodies including the Fire Board, the Thames water authority, the London Planning Commission, the Thamesmead Trust, the Historic Building Commission, the Lee Valley regional park authority, the Residuary Body, the Sports Council, the Arts Council, the Inner London education authority, the shire counties and the shire districts.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his answer*, 29 November 1984, c. *561*]: Following is the available information, by service, of the GLC's and ILEA's 1984-85 budgeted net current expenditures:

			£ million
GLC*	(i)	Fire (including civil defence)	127
	(ii)	Land drainage and flood protection	7
	(iii)	Lee Valley Regional Park Authority†	4
	(iv)	Other‡ (mostly to boroughs)	396
ILEA			900

* Excluding passenger transport revenue support, which becomes the responsibility of London Regional Transport. Under the abolition proposals fire and civil defence would become the responsibility of a London borough joint board, and land drainage and flood protection the responsibility of the Thames water authority.

† Services will not be transferred from the GLC to the Lee Valley regional park authority.

‡ GLC's budget return does not provide sufficient further detail to break down expenditure into the remaining categories requested. Most of this sum relates to functions which would pass to the London boroughs on abolition.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Blood Donations (Screening Tests)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to ensure that regional blood transfusion centres have available to them the resources to carry out HTLV 3 antibody screening tests on blood donated.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 22 November to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) at column *326*.

Death Grant

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will consider measures to increase the death grant to £250; and if he will make a statement on the estimated cost to public funds of such an increase.

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the death grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Department is currently receiving an average of nine letters a week from hon. Members and members of the public concerning the death grant. We have been continuing to give consideration to our policy towards the grant in the light of the response to the consultative document published in March 1982, which revealed no public consensus in favour of any of the options proposed. This consideration will now be carried forward within the context of the wider re-examination of social security which my right hon. Friend has set in hand. The estimated additional cost of increasing the grant to £250 would be £125 million.

Invalidity Allowance

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he proposes to introduce legislation *(a)* to offset invalidity allowance against the additional component and *(b)* to introduce a common earnings rule for dependency additions to invalidity benefit.

Mr. Newton: Yes. As I indicated on Second Reading of the Social Security Bill on 26 November at column 711-2, the necessary amendments will be put down for discussion at the Committee stage of that Bill.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many invalidity pensioners receive *(a)* no invalidity allowance, *b)* lower-rate invalidity allowance, *(c)* middle-rate invalidity allowance and *(d)* higher-rate invalidity allowance; how many in each category receive an earnings-related additional component with their invalidity pension; what, in each case, is the average additional component; and how many in each category receive an additional component which exceeds their invalidity allowance.

Mr. Newton: The following table provides the information requested as at 2 April 1983, the latest date which information is available.

	(a) No IVA	*(b) Lower-rate IVA*	*(c) Middle-rate IVA*	*(d) Higher-rate IVA*
Number of IVB beneficiaries by entitlement to IVA	119,000	281,000	153,000	184,000
Number of IVB beneficiaries receiving AC	89,000	147,000	60,000	69,000
Average amount of AC	£2·98	£2·88	£2·46	£1·80
Number of IVB beneficiaries receiving AC which equals or exceeds IVA	89,000	82,000	11,000	1,100

Notes:
IVA = Invalidity Allowance
IVB = Invalidity Benefit
AC = Additional Component

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates to be the net savings from his proposal to offset invalidity allowance against the additional component; and what the savings would be but for the transitional arrangements for existing invalidity pensioners.

Mr. Newton: It is estimated that the net savings in a full year in 1985-86 terms will be in the region of £25 million. Without transitional protection for existing beneficiaries, savings in the first year would amount to an estimated £50 million.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether transitional protection for existing invalidity pensioners, receiving both invalidity allowance and additional component, will preserve the real value or the cash value of their benefit.

Mr. Newton: The transitional arrangements will provide for the cash value of invalidity benefit in payment to existing beneficiaries to be preserved when the proposed change is introduced.

Low Income Families

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* data from the family expenditure survey on the numbers on low income along the same lines as for 1979 and 1981.

Mr. Whitney: The latest available estimates are those for 1981. Similar estimates for 1983 will become available during the course of next year.

Trent RHA (Funding)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the funding of the Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Trent has been a major beneficiary from our policy of distributing health resources more fairly throughout the country. Over the past six years Trent has consistently received a higher rate of growth than the national average. Between 1978-79 and 1983-84, revenue spending by the region has increased by over 18 per cent. compared with general inflation. Nationally, revenue spending has increased by about 15 per cent. As a result the region has moved closer to its target allocation. It is now some 4½ per cent. below its RAWP target compared with 7½ per cent. in 1978-79. The short term growth assumptions we gave the region in September show this trend continuing.

Merrell-Dow Corporation

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the products purchased by his Department from the Merrell-Dow Corporation during the last financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 19 July at columns *332-3*.

Warnock Report

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received regarding the findings of the Warnock report, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received over 300 letters from hon. and right hon. Members, 24 from organisations and over 230 from the general public. The Government will consider very carefully all the comments received in response to the report before announcing conclusions.

Local Offices (Overtime)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hours of overtime have been worked per month at Heron house and Arpley house benefit offices in Stockport in the current year; what is the monthly cost; and how much it would have cost to work these hours with extra permanent staff.

Mr. Whitney: Overtime working falls into two categories: that which, because of its nature, can only be done outside normal office hours (for example evening visits to people who are not available during the day); and that which could be done during office hours, but due to other factors needs to be undertaken as overtime in order that it can be carried out on time (for example peaks of work at seasonal times, or unpredictable peaks of work).

I assume the hon. Member is concerned with the second category because it is in this category that some attempt at comparing costs can be made with the cost of employing additional staff during normal working hours. However, as will be evident from the table, overtime is being done at the local offices to which the hon. Member refers to cope with a peak of work and it would be uneconomic to have permanent staff who would be without work for the rest of the year.

The number of hours worked in the second category, together with the cost (which is available only for four weekly periods) is set out in the table.

4 Week Periods in 1984 Ending	*Stockport North (Arpley House)*			*Stockport South (Heron House)*		
	Number of Hours of Overtime	*Cost of Overtime*	*Cost of Extra Permanent Staff*	*Number of Hours of Overtime*	*Cost of Overtime*	*Cost of Extra Permanent Staff*
		£	£		£	£
17 January	—	—	—	—	—	—
14 February	—	—	—	—	—	—

4 Week Periods in 1984 Ending	Stockport North (Arpley House) Number of Hours of Overtime	Stockport North (Arpley House) Cost of Overtime	Stockport North (Arpley House) Cost of Extra Permanent Staff	Stockport South (Heron House) Number of Hours of Overtime	Stockport South (Heron House) Cost of Overtime	Stockport South (Heron House) Cost of Extra Permanent Staff
		£	£		£	£
13 March	—	—	—	—	—	—
10 April	—	—	—	—	—	—
8 May	—	—	—	—	—	—
5 June	—	—	—	—	—	—
3 July	—	—	—	—	—	—
31 July	—	—	—	—	—	—
28 August	—	—	—	—	—	—
25 September	1,015	7,450	4,913	668	4,903	3,233
23 October	1,949	14,306	9,433	2,247	16,493	10,875
20 November	2,548	18,702	12,332	1,568	11,509	7,589
Totals	5,512	40,458	26,678	4,483	32,905	21,697

Average costs which cover all locations and grades have been used.

Pharmaceutical Exports (Code of Practice)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what preparations are being made by Her Majesty's Government for the World Health Organisation meeting in 1985 which will discuss a code of practice for multinational companies exporting pharmaceutical products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At the World Health Assembly in Geneva in May, the United Kingdom supported a resolution on the rational use of drugs. This included a request to the Director-General of the World Health Organisation to arrange a meeting in 1985 of experts (including Governments, pharmaceutical industries, patients' and consumers' organisations) to discuss the means and methods of ensuring the rational use of drugs through improved knowledge and flow of information and to discuss the role of marketing practices especially in developing countries.

The World Health Organisation is at present planning the conference but has not yet agreed the agenda. In response to a request from the World Health Organisation the United Kingdom Government have offered $50,000 towards conference costs.

Depo Provera

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence is available to him about the risks to women of the injectable contraceptive Depo Provera.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Evidence on the possible adverse effects of Depo Provera was considered by a panel of persons appointed to hear an application by Upjohn Ltd. for a product licence to market Depo Provera as a long-term contraceptive. The panel's report was submitted to us in April this year and copies were placed in the Library.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which recommendations of the Greenfield report on generic prescribing he has accepted; which rejected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I gave to the House on 8 December 1983, at columns 477-79, in which I said that the Government had rejected a scheme of generic substitution as proposed in the Greenfield report on effective prescribing. We are however continuing to encourage doctors themselves to prescribe drugs of all kinds by generic name whenever possible. This recommendation was but one of fourteen. All the others were accepted when the report was published in February 1983.

Home Care Allowances

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the availability of readily comprehensible information to the general public regarding allowances payable to them when being cared for at home and needing 24 hours per day attention and surveillance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am satisfied that the leaflet FB18, which is published by the Department for the use of people who are housebound and disabled, is readily available. The leaflet describes allowances payable to people who are disabled and includes a coupon for ordering forms on which claims to those benefits can be made.

The FB18 leaflet is distributed through social services departments and health authorities to those people who work in the community and are most likely to come into contact with housebound disabled people — social workers, district nurses, general practitioners. Copies are freely available from the Department's leaflet unit, and are also held by local social security offices.

Diabetics (Central Register)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will finance the setting up of a central register and recall system to alleviate present difficulties that arise in the standard management of diabetic problems and complications; and if he will set up a limited pilot scheme.

Mr. John Patten: The organisation of treatment for diabetic patients is a matter for each district health authority and we have no reason to believe that a central system is required. I understand that some districts already have computerised district records.

Carbon Monoxide

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will fund a campaign to alert and to protect householders from the health-damaging effects of low-grade carbon monoxide intoxication.

Mr. John Patten: The Department of Trade and Industry, British Gas, the Health Education Council and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents have all publicised this topic. Our Department is currently collecting further data related to the health effects and these will help us form a view on whether any further action is required.

Family Practitioner Committees

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will agree to remunerate chairmen of the family practitioner committees soon to be created.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No.

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of family medical practitioners he envisages will occupy the posts of family practitioner committee chairmen.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no percentage in mind. The calibre of people, including family practitioners, willing to serve as chairmen is high. We shall appoint the people best suited to the job.

Ambulance Station, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Mr. Golding asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will refuse permission for the closure of the ambulance station in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that agreement with the community health council on the closure has not been reached, and that the proposal is consequently likely to be referred to us under the established consultation procedures. We shall consider the arguments carefully before making a final decision.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services approximately how much his Department has had to spend in advertising in order to inform pensioners and other claimants how they can collect their money during the social security staff strike in Newcastle.

Mr. Newton: To date, the Department has spent £1,239,500 on advertising the emergency payment procedures during the social security staff strike in Newcastle.

Benefits

Mr. Critchley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total sum in unemployment and other benefits paid to the unemployed and the sum paid to those under 20 years, 20 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, 41 to 50 years, 51 to 60 years and 61 to 65 years, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: The main benefits payable to unemployed people are unemployment benefit, supplementary benefit and housing benefit. The estimated total cost in 1984-85 is £6·5 billion. A breakdown of this total by the age-bands requested is not readily available.

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will consider seeking to give local officers of his Department discretion to continue payment of unemployment benefit without interruption when claimants report income from other sources of less than £4 per week.

Mr. Whitney: Unemployment benefit is paid on a daily basis and the earnings limit is £2 a day. If claimants earn less than this figure, payment of benefit is unaffected. If they earn above the limit, benefit will be adjusted. In either case the flow of payments should not normally be interrupted. There are no plans to change this limit, which has applied since March 1982. Other resources of less than £4 a week do not affect unemployment benefit.

Pensionable Age

Mr. Critchley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost to the Exchequer of lowering the pensionable age for males from 65 to 60 years and from 65 to 64 years.

Mr. Whitney: Estimates provided for the Social Services Committee indicated that at 1981-82 benefit rates, the net costs to central Government funds were £2½ billion a year and £0·4 billion a year respectively. Details of the underlying assumptions are in the third report from the Social Services Committee, Session 1981-82 (HC 26 — II) pages 14-16, 407-409 and 457-461. These estimates are currently being updated.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much is to be spent in cash terms and real terms on the National Health Service in 1984; and how that compares with 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: NHS expenditure in Great Britain will have increased from £7·7 billion in 1978-79 to £16·6 billion in 1984-85; an estimated increase of 21 per cent. over general inflation. These figures demonstrate the Government's commitment to the NHS.

Dentists

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps he is taking to enable dentists to acquire more up-to-date equipment;

(2) if he will increase the incentives to dentists to encourage them to acquire more up-to-date equipment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Dentists are paid by means of a scale of fees which is set in such a way that the average dentist will earn the target average net income set by the Government and have his practice expenses met. The latter include expenses incurred as a result of the purchase of new equipment. We are satisfied that the fee scale makes a reasonable provision towards the cost of any essential new equipment and no additional incentive is required.

Youth Training Schemes

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if 16-year-old school leavers in the year 1984-85 will have their supplementary benefit withdrawn if they refuse a place on the youth training scheme.

Mr. Whitney: If a claimant, without good reason, refuses a suitable youth training scheme placement, or

leaves prematurely, supplementary benefit may be reduced for a period not exceeding six weeks under regulation 8 of the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Regulations. This provision applies to school leavers during the current year in the same way as to any other claimants.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children live in families with incomes *(a)* below supplementary benefit levels, *(b)* at the supplementary benefit level, *(c)* 10 per cent. above the supplementary benefit level and *(d)* 20 per cent. above the supplementary benefit level compared with 1979.

Mr. Whitney: The latest information is contained in the tables "Low Income Families — 1981" a copy of which is lodged in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many wrongful refusals of single payments for furniture were found in the course of the Social Security Policy Inspectorate's inquiry on this subject; and what action was taken to correct any such errors found.

Mr. Whitney: We have not yet received the report of the social security policy inspectorate's inquiry into single payments for furniture, although I understand it is nearing completion. Decisions to refuse claims for single payments are made by independent adjudication officers, subject to a right of appeal to social security appeal tribunals and (on a point of law) to the social security commissioners.

Social Workers

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* all those local authorities which under the Mental Health Act 1983 have not so far appointed an approved social worker under the Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are aware of only one, the London borough of Hackney, and appointments in that authority are understood to be imminent.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has anything to add to his reply of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *959*, about housing benefit high rent schemes.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on 16 November 1984 at column *381-2*, we are also considering whether action needs to be taken to curb a possible abuse of joint tenancy arrangements for housing benefit purposes and are tomorrow referring proposals to the local authority associations.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the hon. Member for Derby, South may expect to receive the letter on the effects of the housing benefit uprating promised in his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, columns *960-1*.

Mr. Newton: I regret that some delay has occurred as a result of operational difficulties with the relevant computer, but expect to be able to write to the hon. Member very shortly.

Social Security Reviews

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what subjects the Social Security Policy Inspectorate has undertaken inquiries but not yet finalised its reports; and on what date each of these inquiries commenced.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to his answer of Wednesday 21 November, *Official Report*, columns *203-43*, which Government Departments have provided information and evidence to the social security reviews; from which Departments officials have attended meetings of the review teams; and which Government Departments have been afforded the right to be present at meetings of the inquiry teams into housing benefit, supplementary benefit and benefits for children and young persons.

Mr. Newton: Information relating to other Departments is fed into the social security reviews in a variety of ways: in some cases it is already held in the Department; in others it is supplied by other Departments to the review team secretariats for incorporation in papers; and in some cases review teams have requested papers on specific subjects. Other Departments have also been kept in touch, through normal official machinery, with the progress of the reviews. Officials from other Government Departments, including those listed as follows, attend review team meetings at the discretion of the chairman of the review teams:

Department of Employment
Department of Environment
Government Actuary's Department
Inland Revenue
Department of Health and Social Services — Northern Ireland
Department of Trade and Industry
Treasury

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those voluntary organisations which have received a cut in real terms in their funding under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The general scheme of grants under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 is used for two main purposes. One is to support specific projects for a specific period, perhaps on a pump-priming basis; this includes experimental or innovative local schemes of potential wider significance. The other is to help with a national organisation's general costs, taking account of developing policy interests and the organisation's ability to fund its activities in other ways; grants of this kind sometimes reflect an understanding that the amount or proportion of grant will reduce over time as the organisation's ability to find other sources of funding grows. Thus there can be no simple presumption that the sizes of grants to an organisation in different years are directly comparable. Since 1978-79, total expenditure on these section 64 grants has risen by £5,777,000 (35 per cent. in real terms.)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total funding to the voluntary sector under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 for each quarter since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The table shows payments to voluntary organisations each quarter under the general scheme of grants under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968. The proportion of the annual total paid in the last quarter of the financial year reflects among other things the fact that grants are approved continuously throughout the year but revenue grants are generally paid in up to four instalments depending on the date of approval. Since 1978-79, the total expenditure on these grants has risen by 35 per cent. in real terms.

	June (£000)	*September (£000)*	*December (£000)*	*March (£000)*	*Total (£000)*
1978-79	690	1,049	1,025	1,681	4,445
1979-80	970	1,173	1,334	2,467	5,944
1980-81	1,166	1,599	1,693	2,796	7,254
1981-82	1,514	1,880	1,809	3,691	8,894
1982-83	1,258	1,955	2,128	3,622	8,963
1983-84	1,309	2,246	2,772	3,895	10,222

"Helping the Community to Care"

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those organisations with which his Department liaised in the earlier "supporting the informal carers initiative", indicating which were directly consulted before setting up the new "Helping the Community to Care" scheme.

Mr. John Patten: Hundreds of organisations, voluntary and statutory, were involved with the "supporting the informal carers" exercise. The 10 reports produced, copies of which I have placed in the Library, explain and illustrate the scale and scope of the exercise. All these organisations accordingly played a part in the development of those elements of the "Helping the Community to Care" programme that are aimed at improving support for informal carers and which flowed from the exercise.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what proportion of the £10·5 million of the "Helping the Community to Care" scheme has now been allocated; to which organisations; and for which purposes;

(2) if he will list all voluntary organisations working directly with his Department on the "Helping the Community to Care" scheme.

Mr. John Patten: The "Helping the Community to Care" programme is made up of 12 distinct elements which have the common purpose of assisting volunteers, families and others to care for people who need support.

The table lists these elements. Discussions are still in progress with a large number of voluntary interests and where particular bodies have accepted an invitation to participate in management of a part of the programme their names are included. For most elements only limited sums have been committed so far to meet initial expenditure. Allocation of the total sum between the various elements will depend on settlement of the detailed arrangements in each case.

Helping the Community to Care Programme

Name of Element	*Organisations which have agreed to manage part of the programme*
1. Home from hospital schemes for elderly patients	Age Concern British Red Cross Society
2. Information and training for careers of elderly people suffering from incontinence	Kings Fund Age Concern
3. Support for elderly members of ethnic minorities	*
4. Development officers for self help/mutual aid groups	NCVO Volunteer Centre
5. After-care for patients with chronic schizophrenia	Southampton, Salford and one other health authority
6. Industrial therapy advice unit	British Institute for Industrial Therapy
7. Open university Course on community care for mentally handicapped people	MENCAP
8. Community resource centre for mentally handicapped people	*
9. Information and training for informal careers	Kings Fund
10. Demonstration districts for services for informal careers	*
11. Family self-help centres	*
12. Asian mother and baby campaign	Save the Children Fund Small number of health authorities

* Discussions still in progress.

Paediatric Medicines (Sweeteners)

Mr. Charles Morrison asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards the use of sweeteners in paediatric medicines; what sweeteners are currently approved by his Department and used in manufacture; and how their use is reviewed.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

NHS (Managers)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why it is necessary for Ministers to approve draft short lists before appointment of regional and district managers in the National Health Service can proceed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our guidance to health authorities makes clear that, in discharging our responsibility to oversee the appointments process, Ministers should have an opportunity to consider all health authorities' proposals for the identification of a suitable person to carry responsibility for the general management function.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people applied for the post of general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: So far I understand that about 20 applications have been received. All information about individual candidates for general manager appointments must remain confidential.

Limited List Prescribing

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the medical bodies he has consulted and proposes to consult regarding his proposals for a limited list prescribing on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are now consulting with the following medical bodies:

British Medical Association
General Medical Services Committee
Joint Consultants Committee
Community Medicine Consultative Committee
Central Committee for Hospital Medical Services
Hospital Junior Staffs Committee
Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal College of Physicians

Expenditure Cuts (Greenwich)

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from the Greenwich borough council and the Greenwich district health authority about the effect of cuts in local health and social services in relation to the planned redevelopment of services for the mentally handicapped and the mentally ill; and what action he proposes to take to enable the agreed programme to go ahead and targets set by his Department to be reached.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment have received letters sent jointly by Greenwich health authority and the London borough of Greenwich. Revenue allocations for Greenwich HA are a matter for the South East Thames regional health authority. The RHA has been concerned to ensure that its RAWP redistribution policy does not prevent the development of priority services. It has introduced funding policies for mental illness and mental handicap which apply to all districts and are designed to encourage the development of locally based services. In addition it has made capital allocations to Greenwich HA to develop services for the mentally handicapped and is presently awaiting further proposals from Greenwich for these and for services for the mentally ill.

Mobility and Attendance Allowances

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applicants for *(a)* mobility and *(b)* attendance allowances have appealed to medical appeals tribunals in each of the last five years; how many have been successful; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: As regards mobility allowance, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 21 November at column *201-2*. As regards attendance allowance, cases are considered not by medical appeal tribunals but by doctors on behalf of the Attendance Allowance Board. On this the information is as follows. The figures of successful reviews include cases where the condition of the claimant has deteriorated as well as cases where the claimant is dissatisfied with the outcome of his claim.

Attendance Allowance

	Reviews	*Decided in claimant's favour*
1980	21,598	16,288
1981	20,816	14,849
1982	25,150	17,443
1983	29,843	19,819
*1984	24,118	16,758

* To 28 September.

Essential Needs Grants

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received in relation to his revised policy regarding essential needs grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: Our broad policy on single payments of supplementary benefit for exceptional needs has not been revised since introduction of the regulated supplementary benefits scheme in 1980, although detailed changes have been made from time to time. The policy is being considered as part of the current review of the supplementary benefit scheme as a whole. The review has received evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals.

NHS (Lithotripter)

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has plans to introduce the lithotripter into general service in the National Health Service; and what is his estimate of the numbers of population which can be served by each such machine.

Mr. John Patten: It is estimated that the lithotripter shortly to be installed at St. Thomas' hospital will enable 1,200 patients to be treated annually. Three quarters of these will be National Health Service patients. Arrangements are in hand for this service to be evaluated, and the findings of the study will be taken into account in deciding whether lithotripsy should be made more widely available within the NHS.

Health Services (Bolton)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received in each of the last five years from *(a)* the North-West regional health committee, *(b)* Bolton regional district health committee and *(c)* Bolton community health council, about the level of health service provision in Bolton.

Mr. John Patten: [*pursuant to his reply*, on 19 November 1984, c. *69*]: The hon. Member will be aware that I and my right hon. and learned Friend have visited Bolton health authority to hear at first hand about Bolton's needs. A careful search of our records has revealed no direct representations from the health authorities or the community health council. This is hardly surprising as representations should be made to the regional health authority, which is in close contact with Bolton district health authority about its strategy for the future.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 December 1984

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

ILEA (Budget)

53. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Inner London education authority about its budget.

Sir Keith Joseph: Mrs. Morrell, the leader of the ILEA, came to see me with a few of her colleagues on 19 November to discuss a number of issues. They told me of their intention to set a budget for 1985-86 on 20 November. They claimed that it would not be possible to make reductions sufficient to meet the expenditure level of £900 million determined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment without causing severe damage to the service. I emphasised that they would not be able to decide a level of expenditure for 1985-86 without regard to the Rates Act 1984. I noted that ILEA's budget in recent years had increased at twice the rate of inflation despite falling school rolls, and said that there should be plenty of scope for economies. I expressed concern that ILEA's expenditure was disproportionate to its results. The greater part of the money raised by the ILEA came from business and had an effect on jobs in London. If ILEA had thought its case good enough it should have approached my right hon. Friend for a redetermination of its expenditure level.

49. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the Inner London education authority's budget proposals for 1985-86.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have received a substantial number of letters both directly and through right hon. and hon. Members. In addition, ILEA has given me a copy of the responses to its consultation document on the 1985-86 budget. I met a delegation from the ILEA on 19 November and discussed with them, among other subjects, their proposed action on a budget for 1985-86.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

8. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of the technical and vocational education initiative.

Sir Keith Joseph: The first 14 projects in the technical and vocational education initiative have just entered their second year. Forty-eight additional projects commenced this term in England, Wales and Scotland, and authorities not at present participating in the Initiative have been invited to join in 1985 or 1986. Arrangements have also been made for the monitoring and evaluation of the initiative over future years.

19. **Mr. Haselhurst** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the implications for secondary education of the technical and vocational education initiative.

Sir Keith Joseph: The 14 pilot projects which began in September 1983, and the further 48 which began this term, are still at an early stage of development. As the students normally take part for four years, it will be some time before the implications of the initiative for secondary education can be fully assessed.

Teachers

16. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he has been sent by the advisory committee on the supply and education of teachers on the number of teachers required to put into practice current educational policies by 1993.

41. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the advisory committee on the supply and education of teachers on the number of teachers needed by 1993.

Mr. Dunn: The committee has advised that, on the Department's principal projection of pupil numbers, the primary and secondary schools of England and Wales would in 1993 require a total of 416,000 full-time teachers for this purpose.

Educational Maintenance Grants

33. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schoolchildren have received educational maintenance grants for each of the last five years; and what has been the value of those awards in each of the local authorities.

Mr. Dunn: Information on the number of pupils who receive educational maintenance allowances is not collected centrally. The value of awards in each local authority for the last five years available is as follows:

LEA expenditure on EMA's in Seconddry Schools

	1978-79 £	*1979-80* £	*1980-81* £	*1981-82* £	*1982-83* £
Barking	5,589	5,363	4,141	5,990	12,033
Barnet	5,675	8,590	9,065	12,054	15,644
Bexley	7,826	9,056	9,068	8,902	11,981
Brent	35,160	27,447	27,320	36,062	32,523
Bromley	10,488	14,217	14,620	13,008	6,766
Croydon	10,744	16,455	10,857	11,326	19,870

	1978-79 £	1979-80 £	1980-81 £	1981-82 £	1982-83 £
Ealing	43,223	39,548	35,603	57,541	1,664
Enfield	0	1,238	3,691	7,490	8,609
Haringey	30,085	39,368	30,653	43,794	57,490
Harrow	8,955	11,605	14,307	19,997	33,766
Havering	0	7,000	8,000	10,071	0
Hillingdon	0	0	0	11,604	6,683
Hounslow	0	0	0	7,918	14,659
Kingston-upon-Thames	6,065	7,572	8,333	6,830	7,066
Merton	6,681	8,618	7,704	8,354	11,634
Newham	23,167	20,606	17,050	13,520	28,307
Redbridge	7,715	5,769	4,798	6,078	12,533
Richmond	738	518	784	896	0
Sutton	0	0	0	0	0
Waltham Forest	0	0	0	22,141	0
Inner London	706,242	678,496	1,759,034	2,442,600	1,683,907
Birmingham	42,618	54,260	51,966	56,147	0
Coventry	17,174	15,890	23,301	49,461	82,793
Dudley	0	0	0	0	0
Sandwell	0	10,799	14,588	21,351	0
Solihull	67	0	0	0	0
Walsall	41,150	57,835	46,428	80,876	0
Wolverhampton	13,272	13,732	24,583	43,841	59,244
Knowsley	46,451	47,075	45,077	74,800	110,743
Liverpool	92,960	124,246	164,916	245,303	324,531
St. Helens	7,004	8,212	8,573	14,672	27,525
Sefton	0	0	0	0	23,655
Wirral	27,573	25,684	37,278	60,901	90,892
Bolton	38,573	36,942	48,254	71,462	101,671
Bury	11,645	15,847	20,083	36,369	69,905
Manchester	154,021	286,994	209,064	250,309	295,581
Oldham	8,698	12,676	17,029	28,840	52,959
Rochdale	17,360	16,116	22,314	35,670	53,753
Salford	26,500	30,000	29,895	39,462	0
Stockport	12,427	13,203	15,198	25,432	34,704
Tameside	13,235	16,285	16,743	24,338	0
Trafford	13,534	11,416	21,604	0	0
Wigan	16,919	29,832	25,993	28,324	76,439
Barnsley	9,956	0	11,525	6,478	11,649
Doncaster	13,869	18,313	15,911	16,509	0
Rotherham	14,073	15,715	12,209	18,804	0
Sheffield	74,544	69,232	103,562	236,622	401,438
Bradford	41,466	54,491	37,824	86,863	155,920
Calderdale	8,399	7,569	13,126	19,344	37,205
Kirklees	32,399	0	0	76,273	97,656
Leeds	0	0	0	0	0
Wakefield	32,481	32,950	12,118	12,399	7,716
Gateshead	5,309	7,841	12,129	0	0
Newcastle	38,454	61,515	51,367	64,840	86,781
North Tyneside	13,257	26,149	33,879	46,687	79,158
South Tyneside	6,357	0	15,996	23,267	28,778
Sunderland	39,165	71,504	69,673	155,487	185,688
Isle of Scilly	0	0	0	0	25,048
Avon	85,532	84,939	96,112	194,626	205,455
Bedfordshire	19,101	16,364	22,072	68,486	104,219
Berkshire	8,232	6,487	5,234	5,831	9,772
Bucks	9,041	11,599	10,921	14,526	29,904
Cambridge	72,319	45,555	39,246	41,188	31,574
Cheshire	33,761	18,109	3,374	101	0
Cleveland	21,974	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	5,255	5,517	6,028	4,967	9,007
Cumbria	12,135	48,410	13,593	20,038	0
Derby	17,295	18,250	24,635	38,556	57,098
Devon	33,759	36,070	44,779	56,790	72,556
Dorset	55,953	61,020	46,320	57,146	80,398
Durham	0	0	0	47,946	72,710
East Sussex	29,431	24,242	33,399	36,842	34,463
Essex	51,029	68,060	72,118	95,330	141,537
Gloucester	10,562	10,060	7,551	16,062	28,454
Hampshire	209,242	224,872	231,113	306,499	415,449
Hereford and Worcester	19,720	2,124	492	2,849	390
Herts	53,306	51,271	41,228	56,746	51,238
Humberside	58,008	56,269	39,572	59,950	150,177
Isle of Wight	1,055	4,142	1,803	0	4,210
Kent	22,950	0	0	0	0

	1978-79 £	1979-80 £	1980-81 £	1981-82 £	1982-83 £
Lancashire	84,764	132,015	102,843	163,102	310,075
Leicester	8,234	7,182	4,986	3,872	2,239
Lincoln	16,587	18,516	15,780	12,105	17,334
Norfolk	2,068	0	1,863	2,236	0
North Yorkshire	40,245	34,234	25,039	46,130	64,309
Northampton	11,460	11,726	3,969	0	17,868
Northumberland	8,185	9,072	14,977	26,116	34,446
Nottingham	74,749	90,800	101,275	143,418	0
Oxford	6,833	11,585	0	0	0
Salop	9,521	16,122	16,613	20,392	33,392
Somerset	11,066	15,051	14,377	9,610	0
Stafford	3,162	0	2,513	4,024	3,916
Suffolk	10,540	16,154	16,359	55,490	36,357
Surrey	18,576	25,489	21,308	29,000	42,933
Warwick	444	225	0	0	0
West Sussex	0	0	0	15,453	0
Wiltshire	30,309	31,752	30,578	37,675	52,073

Educational Maintenance Allowance

17. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the cost of providing educational maintenance allowances for 16 and 17-year-olds in full-time education at the rate of £25 per week, 52 weeks per year.

Sir Keith Joseph: About £550 million for England only.

Research Councils (Budgets)

18. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with the Medical Research Council and the Science and Engineering Research Council about the level of their budgets for next year.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend met the chairman and the secretary of the Medical Research Council on 23 July and discussed that council's financial position. He has had no discussions with the Science and Engineering Research Council about the level of their budget for next year.

Secondary School Places

20. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is satisfied that the statutory appeal procedure on the allocation of secondary school places affords parents a fair hearing.

Mr. Dunn: Yes.

Chenet and Sherbrook Schools, Cannock

21. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce his decision concerning the proposal to amalgamate Chenet and Sherbrook schools in Cannock.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend will announce his decision at the earliest practicable date commensurate with a full and careful consideration of all circumstances of the cases.

Student Awards

22. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received from individuals and public bodies concerning the proposed changes in student grants.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend has received some 1,730 representations from individuals and some 70 from public bodies.

28. **Mr. Gould** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the question of students' grants.

42. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many letters he has received about the level of student grants for 1984-85 and 1985-86.

48. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the revised system of parental contributions to student grants.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend has received some 2,010 representations about the changes in student grants in 1984-85 and some 1,800 about the proposed changes in 1985-86.

30. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will estimate how many students will receive, through the travel component of their grant, more than they need to spend; and how many will receive less than they need to spend.

Mr. Brooke: It is too early as yet to estimate students' travel expenditure under the new arrangements introduced on 1 September this year.

34. **Mr. Hind** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the maximum amount a parent can be asked to contribute next year towards one student at university outside London, grants and fees taken together; and at what income level that maximum becomes payable.

Mr. Brooke: The maximum amount of the parental contribution will vary according to the individual circumstances of the student and his family; but in the academic year 1985-86 no family will be asked to contribute more than £4,000. The parents of a student studying outside London and receiving an average amount

of allowance in addition to his basic grant will next year be expected to contribute a maximum sum, to include fees, of about £2,400. This level of contribution will apply to a family with a residual income of about £19,500.

37. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the National Union of Students and the National Union of Students, Scotland, on the Government's proposal to abolish the minimum grant and to charge tuition fees to some parents.

61. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met leaders of the National Union of Students to discuss grants and fees for higher education.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend met the president of the National Union of Students yesterday.

39. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received advocating the introduction of student loans for those receiving higher education.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have received no representations solely on the subject of the introduction of a loans scheme. A number of correspondents may have made this point in letters which were principally about other matters, but the records kept by the Department are not sufficiently sensitive to identify these.

40. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied that the level of educational grants available for higher and university education are adequate to ensure that no young person who can benefit from such education is debarred from doing so because of a lack of financial resources.

Mr. Brooke: Yes.

50. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the number of parents who do not pay the full parental contribution towards the student maintenance grant.

Mr. Brooke: This information is not available. My right hon. Friend has received 1,610 representations about the changes in the parental contributions in 1984-85 and 1985-86, a number of which made reference to parents who do not pay their contributions in full.

54. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he proposes to take to provide assistance to those students in higher education whose parents refuse to sign their grant assessment forms and are thus liable to pay fees and not to receive a grant.

Mr. Brooke: The Government very much hope that all parents will co-operate with the grant assessment procedure and will pay their assessed contributions in full. Any formal measures to protect students whose parents do not do so would inevitably be open to abuse.

59. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received following his announcement of changes in the arrangements for student grants.

64. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on parental contributions to student maintenance and tuition fees.

Mr. Brooke: I would refer the hon. Members to the answer my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Berkshire East, (Mr. MacKay), for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

60. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will monitor the effect of the new arrangements for student loans with a view to determining the number of undergraduates whose parents are not willing to pay their assessed contribution towards fees.

Mr. Brooke: No arrangements have been made for student loans. There are no plans to collect information about the number of parents who fail to pay their assessed contribution in full.

Unemployment

23. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his Department's contribution to Lord Young's review of schemes to assist the unemployed.

Sir Keith Joseph: Within his remit to promote policies for the growth of enterprise and job creation, the Minister without Portfolio is looking at provision for the 14 to 18 age group. The Department of Education and Science is playing its part in the necessary discussions.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

24. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average pupil-teacher ratio in Somerset as compared to the national average.

Mr. Dunn: In January 1984 the overall pupil-teacher ratio for primary and secondary schools in Somerset was 19·4 : 1, compared with 17·9 : 1 in England.

Information Technology

25. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to encourage increased information technology content in the curriculum of secondary schools.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government are already taking steps to increase the information technology content in the secondary curriculum through initiatives such as the micro-electronics education programme and the technical and vocational education initiative.

Education Act 1981

26. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress on implementation of the Education Act 1981.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is satisfied that the authorities are making good progress towards implementing the Education Act 1981. It is inevitable that full implementation will take time and that progress in some areas will be quicker than others.

Adult Education (Civil Defence)

27. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department has

issued any guidelines for the inclusion of courses for civil defence volunteers in part-time or whole-time adult education.

Mr. Brooke: The Department has issued no such guidelines. The training of civil defence volunteers is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Deaf Persons (Teachers)

29. **Mr. Stern** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has yet reached any conclusion in connection with the recommendation by the advisory committee on the supply and education of teachers that the mandatory requirement of a specialist qualification for teaching the deaf be removed.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales are considering the recommendations of the report and will announce their decisions in due course.

Secondary Education Examination

31. **Mr. Key** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the proposed distinction and merit awards will be in operation in connection with the new general certificate of secondary education examination.

Sir Keith Joseph: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I intend to bring forward proposals for distinction and merit certificates shortly. Subject to consultation, I would expect these certificates to be available to qualifying candidates in the first GCSE examinations in summer 1988.

Students (Travel Costs)

32. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with universities, polytechnics and higher education colleges where students have particularly high travel costs, about steps to ameliorate the problem.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Teachers (Pay and Appraisal)

35. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made towards the appraisal of teachers and restructuring of teachers' pay.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Burnham joint working party on salary structure meets tomorrow to resume consideration of the employers' proposals for a reformed pay structure for school teachers.

Maintained Schools (Surplus Places)

36. **Mr. Sims** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number of surplus primary and secondary school places that remain in English maintained schools.

Mr. Dunn: Between January 1981 and December 1983, it is estimated that local education authorities took out of use some 265,000 primary and 135,000 secondary school places; and that this left some 1,200,000 surplus primary and 500,000 surplus secondary places in use in January 1984. Authorities continue to make significant savings through the removal of surplus places and my right hon. Friend has agreed with the local authority associations that fresh targets should be set for the removal of places by 1987 and for future years.

Nursery Education

38. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much it would cost in capital and recurrent expenditure to provide *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time nursery education for all three and four-year-olds.

Mr. Dunn: An estimate would require detailed information on a number of matters—for example, the location and numbers of those in the age group not now provided for, the location and availability of spare capacity and the extent of new building provision required—which could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

"Teaching Quality"

43. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what responses he has received to the White Paper "Teaching Quality", and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: Eighteen organisations and a number of individuals made comments on the White Paper "Teaching Quality". The Government are pursuing vigorously the policies which it outlined. Achievements to date include the promulgation of criteria for the approval of initial training courses for teachers, the establishment of a council for the accreditation of teacher education, and the introduction of grants to local education authorities for the further training of serving teachers in designated areas of national priority. Her Majesty's inspectors are now engaged in an extensive programme of visits to all teacher training institutions.

Further Education

44. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the participation rate of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds staying on in full-time education.

Sir Keith Joseph: Forty-five per cent. of 16-year-olds and 32 per cent. of 17-year-olds in England were in full-time education in January 1984.

Institute of Information Technology

45. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he plans to discuss his proposed establishment of an institute of information technology with local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: Plans have recently been announced to establish a private institute with support from a number of companies engaged in the field of information technology. Discussions about this development would be a matter in the first instance for those involved.

School Curriculum

46. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement as to his general intentions regarding development of the school curriculum.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government will continue, in discussion with their partners in the education service, to seek broad national agreement on the objectives of the curriculum in the primary and secondary phases; and to encourage the formulation and implementation within that framework of curricular policies at LEA and school level.

Expenditure

47. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what level of spending the Government plan by local authorities on education, including meals and milk, in 1985-86.

Mr. Dunn: In its plans for local authority current expenditure in 1985-86, the Government have allocated £10,259 to education, including meals and milk. This represents an increase of about 6 per cent. in cash over the sum allocated to education in 1984-85, after allowing for the abolition of the national insurance surcharge and the transfer of some funding within non-advanced further education to the MSC. In addition, it is likely that, as in previous years, authorities will choose to devote to education some of that part of total current expenditure which is not allocated between services.

Pupils (Special Educational Needs)

51. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Education Act 1981 regarding the integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools.

Mr. Dunn: There is an increasing demand from parents of children with special educational needs, particularly those with young children, for admission to ordinary schools and a growing trend for LEAs to make the first placement for such children in ordinary nursery schools or classes, or ordinary primary schools, where this is consistent with an efficient use of resources. Where such a placement would be more expensive than a place in a special school or unit, the authority is under no obligation to meet the parent's wishes.

Open University

52. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about discussions he has had with the Open University about its future level of funding.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend yesterday met the chancellor of the Open University, together with senior officers of the Open University's council. He noted the views expressed and agreed to consider the representations made.

Bradwell and Trinity High Schools, Newcastle-under-Lyme

55. **Mr. Golding** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to be able to make an announcement on the proposed closure of Bradwell high and Trinity high schools in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend will announce his decision at the earliest practicable date commensurate with a full and careful consideration of all the circumstances of the case.

Peace Studies

56. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about Government policy concerning the teaching of peace studies in schools.

Sir Keith Joseph: I set out our views on peace studies in the speech I made at a conference organised by the National Council of Women on 3 March 1984, a copy of which is in the Library.

Higher Education (Access)

57. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is currently considering any specific proposals for widening access to higher education without excessive cost to the taxpayer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the future development of higher education generally in the light of the advice he has received from the University Grants Committee and the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education, and plans to bring forward his proposals early next year.

London (Further and Higher Education)

58. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement concerning policy for further and higher education in London.

Mr. Brooke: The Government expect that further and higher education opportunities in London will be provided as cost-effectively as possible in order that all students who have the ability to benefit can be accommodated within current limits on resources. The National Advisory Body for Higher Education (NAB) has an important role in advising on student numbers and resource allocations. Following receipt of NAB advice, my right hon. Friend will be making a considered response to the ILEA's proposals on their advanced further education provision, taking account of other provision for further and higher education in the London area and elsewhere as appropriate.

Parental Contribution (Statistics)

62. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set up investigations into the proportion of families deemed to be paying parental contributions which have other dependent children.

Mr. Brooke: No.

School Closures

63. **Mr. Cockeram** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether, when a local education authority proposes to close a school, it is the practice of the Secretary of State to obtain an up-to-date report on the school from Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

Mr. Dunn: Where proposals made by local education authorities under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 to close schools fall to my right hon. Friend to decide, one of the factors he has to consider in reaching his decision is where the balance of educational advantage lies for the pupils involved. In order to make this judgement, he takes account of all the available information, including that which can be supplied readily by members of Her Majesty's inspectorate in the area. In view of the volume of proposals to close schools, the lead times involved, and the other demands on the time of Her Majesty's inspectors, it would not be practicable for my right hon. Friend to ask for formal inspections, leading to published reports, on all schools which LEAs were proposing to close.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Civil Service

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking in response to the report of an investigation by the Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland into the non-industrial Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Dr. Boyson: A comprehensive policy statement enunciating the principles underlying the Government's approach to the promotion of equal opportunity for all will be published later today. The trade unions have been fully consulted in its preparation.

The statement affirms our commitment to equal opportunity, on the basis of individual merit, and without regard to religion, sex or any other factor which should be irrelevant to the treatment or assessment of any individual. Appropriate monitoring arrangements are being put in place in respect of 1985 onwards.

Copies of the statement have been placed in the Library.

Local Government Elections

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what date in 1985 will be polling day for local government elections in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: 15 May. This follows from schedule 5, paragraph 1 of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, as substituted by schedule 2, paragraph 8 of the Northern Ireland (Local Elections) Order 1977, which sets the date as the third Wednesday in May in an election year.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Spearing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the categories of, and the actual commodities or services concerned or referred to directly or indirectly, in the reasoned opinion he has received from the Commission of the European Communities in respect of article 169 of the treaty of Rome, referred to in the reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *476;* and if he will place a copy of the communication and any reply by Her Majesty's Government in the Library.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to the answer*, 3 December, Col. *17*]: The goods and services which form the subject of the reasoned opinion are listed fully in the press release issued by the Treasury on 15 October, the text of which I will with permission annex to this answer.

In my reply to the hon. Member on 28 November (Col. *476*) I said that the United Kingdom Government do not accept the Commission's views. A reply to the reasoned opinion has been sent to the Commission. This questions the basis on which the Commission allege that the zero rates in question are not permitted under article 28 of the sixth VAT directive. In the United Kingdom Government's view the Commission's interpretation of the term "final consumer" is not supported either by the second or sixth VAT directives.

In the reply, attention has also been drawn to two errors of fact. The first concerns sewerage and water; the second concerns construction and associated services, where the Commission has failed to take account of the changes in the 1984 Finance Act.

While I am anxious to keep the House fully informed about this matter, it has not been the practice to deposit in Parliament documents such as the reasoned opinion and the reply, which are confidential to the Commission and the Government.

Following is the press release:

15 October 1984

VALUE ADDED TAX: THREATENED INFRACTION PROCEEDINGS ON ZERO RATES

The EC Commission has taken the formal step of sending the UK Government a 'Reasoned Opinion' under Article 169 of the Treaty of Rome alleging that certain aspects of the VAT zero rates in force in the United Kingdom are contrary to the provisions of the Sixth VAT Directive which established Community rules for the structure and coverage of VAT.

The Reasoned Opinion is not a general attack on the UK zero rating system. It questions the application of specific zero rating groups to goods or services frequently supplied to the business sector.

The United Kingdom Government was given until early November to consider the Reasoned Opinion. A full response will be given after detailed consideration of the arguments but it is the view of Treasury Ministers that our zero rates accord with the provisions of the Directive which was adopted in 1977. We therefore cannot accept the views expressed in the Opinion.

Under the Directive Member States were permitted to retain zero rates in existence at the end of 1975 provided that they had been implemented 'for clearly defined social reasons and for the benefit of the final consumer'. Insofar as zero rates cover supplies made to businesses and not to the general public, the Commission considers that they are not in accordance with the Sixth Directive, a view which the UK Government does not accept.

The items which are under challenge are as follows:

(i) Live animals of a kind used for food; animal feeding stuffs, food producing seeds and plants;

(ii) Sewerage services and water, but only where a specific charge is involved—services provided through a water rate are outside the scope of VAT;

(iii) Newspaper advertisements and news services (but not newspapers);

(iv) Fuel and power (coal, gas, electricity, oil) when supplied to businesses, ie domestic consumption is not under challenge;

(v) Construction of buildings and associated services, other than housing 'within a social policy' a term which the Commission does not define;

(vi) Protective boots and helmets for industrial use insofar as sold to businesses and not private persons.

DEFENCE

Military Exercises (Land Use)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the arrangements by which his Department negotiates with landowners for the use of their land for military exercises; and at what stage in this process local authorities are consulted.

Mr. Lee: It is the practice in Wales for the Property Services Agency to make arrangments with landowners for the use of their land for military training. There is no requirement to consult the local authorities unless the military use of land for training exceeds 28 days in any one year.

5 Airborne Brigade

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether 5 Airborne Brigade has conducted any exercises outwith the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: Since its formation from 5 Infantry Brigade in November 1983, 5 Airborne Brigade has taken part in Exercise Lionheart in the Federal Republic of Germany during September 1984.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Butler: I refer my hon. Friend to the full list of grants-in-aid payable by the Ministry of Defence which appears in Vote 1, section K of the defence Estimates 1984-85, and also to the same section of the revised estimates (14 June 1984). As recently announced by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, it is our intention, subject to parliamentary approval, to introduce an additional grant-in-aid for the Royal British Legion in 1985-86 with the object of financing visits by war widows to their husbands' graves overseas.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Butler: The Department does not identify and record the specific disabilities of registered disabled staff. The figures requested are therefore not available.

Pirbright Ranges

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Defence on whose authority an improvised close quarter battle range was first established on Pirbright ranges.

Mr. Lee: All close quarter battle facilities on military ranges are established in accordance with range standing orders. Targets and firing positions can be varied by the officers running the training within certain established guidelines.

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Defence when there was last a qualified full-time range officer responsible for the supervision of all Army ranges in the Pirbright area.

Mr. Lee: A full-time range officer has been in post at Pirbright ranges since 1969. A similar appointment was made at Ash ranges in February 1984.

Equipment Suppliers

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the cost criteria with particular reference to overhead margins laid down by the Procurement Executive in relation to suppliers of defence equipment and components.

Mr. Butler: The elements which are allowed into overhead costs for Government non-competitive contracts are established by accounting conventions recommended by the Review Board for Government Contracts. The last Report from the review board was received in January this year and certain changes were made to the conventions. It would not be appropriate therefore to institute another review at this time.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he is satisfied that all signals recorded as having been transmitted *(a)* from HMS Conqueror to Flag Officer Submarines and *(b)* from Flag Officer Submarines to HMS Conqueror were properly authorised during the period 1 to 4 May 1982;

(2) if, from the records now available to him, there is any evidence of unauthorised signals being sent *(a)* from HMS Conqueror to Flag Officer Submarines or *(b)* from Flag Officer Submarines to HMS Conqueror during the period 1 to 4 May 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I will answer shortly.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions an order was transmitted to the Captain of HMS Conqueror to sink the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November, c. 416]: I cannot add to what was said on this matter in paragraph 10 of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's letter to the hon. Member of 19 September. It is not possible to say how many times the original order conveying the change in the rules of engagement on 2 May was rebroadcast.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Luce: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office employed registered blind people during each of the last four years as follows:

1980 - 2
1981 - 3
1982 - 3
1983 - 4

Exporting Companies

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what surveys have been undertaken by his Department to ascertain the level of support given by other industrialised countries through the commercial sections of their embassies and consulates to their exporting companies.

Mr. Rifkind: No surveys have been undertaken. The character, scale and organisation of export services provided by our major competitors vary so widely according to their political and administrative systems that it is difficult to draw fair comparisons and to assess the relative merits or values. The Federal Republic of Germany, for example, provides most of its export services overseas through its chambers of commerce, to which all businesses in the Federal Republic are required by law to belong.

The British Overseas Trade Board, which directs and develops our export promotion services, collects a certain amount of information about other countries' services. Indications are that the net effects of these are broadly similar to our own.

Diplomatic Immunity (Car Accidents)

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in each year since 1964 a British subject in the United Kingdom has suffered personal injury or damage to property as a result of a car accident involving another party whose diplomatic immunity prevented the British subject taking a civil action for damages in the courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Claims arising from motoring offences are settled by the diplomat's insurance company. Persons entitled to immunity are not exempt from the obligation to carry third party insurance, and insurance companies gave us specific assurances some years ago that they would not attempt to invoke the immunity of diplomatic clients in this context. The assurances have been carried out.

We have no means of knowing how many times diplomatic immunity has been claimed in civil cases, whether or not such cases arose out of a motoring accident.

ENERGY

Power Stations

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the cost of making available the information referred to in the answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, (Mr. Nellist) *Official Report* 19 November, column28, about numbers of power stations in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Goodlad: About £600.

Coal Stocks (Report)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his response to the proposals made in the report by the Industry and Employment committee of the Greater London council on transfer of coal stocks to power stations.

Mr. Goodlad: I see absolutely no need to contemplate the measures advocated in this report. Stocks of fuel at power stations, together with continuing supplies, should be sufficient to meet full electricity demand well into next year.

TRANSPORT

Edinburgh-Aberdeen Railway Line

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will support a feasibility study by British Rail into electrification of the railway line between Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Mr. David Mitchell: Any such study would be a matter for BR, which is responsible for planning railway investment.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Soley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information in relation to the mining dispute: (i) the charges laid, and the number of persons charged with each offence listed and (ii) the number of persons charged against whom evidence was not offered, or who have been acquitted.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The information to 28 November 1984 on the nature and number of charges brought by procurators fiscal as a result of incidents arising from the current mining dispute is set out in the table; of the 238 persons whose cases have been disposed of, 30 persons have been acquitted.

Nature of charges	*Number of charges*
Breach of the peace	690
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 section 41	319
Bail etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 section 3	45
Vandalism and malicious mischief	27
Possession of an offensive weapon	10
Roads (Scotland) Act 1970 section 24	10
Assault	7
Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875	5
Theft	3
Careless driving	1
Reckless conduct	1
Urinating	1

Mr. Soley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the following

information in relation to the mining dispute: (i) the number of persons convicted, and the offences they committed, for each police force area and (ii) the number of persons remanded in custody for each police force area.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The most readily available information on persons convicted of offences arising out of the mining dispute in each police force area is set out in the tables.

The first table details, to 16 November 1984, the nature of the charges brought by procurators fiscal in those areas which have resulted in convictions; the second table details, to 28 November 1984, the number of persons convicted of such offences in each area: as at 3 December 1984, out of the total number of persons proceeded against for such offences, 18 persons were remanded in custody prior to trial; two persons were subsequently released on bail and one immediately changed his plea to that of guilty.

TABLE 1

Police force area and nature of the charge	*Number of persons convicted*
Strathclyde	
Breach of the peace	27
Possession of an offensive weapon	3
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 section 41	2
Vandalism	2
Urinating	1
Lothian and Borders	
Breach of the peace	38
Bail etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 section 3	21
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 section 41	12
Assault	3
Vandalism	2
Possession of an offensive weapon	1
Fife	
Breach of the peace	15
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 section 41	9
Bail etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 section 3	2
Tayside	
Breach of the peace	15
Vandalism	2
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 section 41	1
Dumfries and Galloway	
Vandalism	4

TABLE 2

Police force area	*Number of persons convicted*
Strathclyde	110
Lothian and Borders	46
Fife	34
Central	1
Tayside	15
Dumfries and Galloway	2

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Jopling: On 1 April in each year the numbers were as follows:

	Number
1981	10
1982	11
1983	10
1984	11

Wetlands and Marshlands (Drainage)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much grant has been paid over any recent convenient annual period to drain wetlands or marshland designated as sites of special scientific interest.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that this information could not be provided in the form requested. As far as I can ascertain no grant has been paid in recent years on a scheme for the drainage of wetlands or marshland in a site of special scientific interest to which the Nature Conservancy Council has objected.

Butter

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he took into account the health implications and the recent report by the committee on medical aspects of food policy before agreeing to the provision of EEC butter to consumers at subsidised prices.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that it is right that as an element in tackling the Community surplus our consumers should have the same opportunity as consumers in other member states to obtain butter at reduced prices if they wish. However, the present sale of EEC butter stocks is likely to be disruptive of the market and was introduced by the Commission in the face of opposition from several Member States including the United Kingdom.

The recent report by a panel of the committee on medical aspects of food policy did not rule out the consumption of any particular foodstuffs. I am sure that consumers will want to decide for themselves on the balance of their diet in the light of advice available to them.

Pesticides

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the next annual report of the advisory committee on pesticides.

Mrs. Fenner: The decision has only recently been taken to provide an annual report of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides following the recommendation of the Seventh report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. The intention is to provide a greater public understanding of the committee's work. The first report will be published in 1985 relating to the calendar year 1984.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to the introduction of a common national framework for improving standards of competence among all who apply pesticides; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: The Government have felt it appropriate to delay discussions on the creation of a common national framework for improving standards of competence in pesticide application until the present enabling legislation

is in place, since it may have some effect on the status to be awarded to certificates of competence and other matters.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the advisory committee on pesticides has completed its examination of the usage of organochlorines in the non-agricultural sector; and what conclusions it has reached.

Mrs. Fenner: The remaining uses of persistent organochlorine pesticides are kept under continuing review so that, in keeping with Government policy, they can be phased out when satisfactory alternatives become available.

It has not yet been possible for the Advisory Committee on Pesticides to undertake a comprehensive review of all the non-agricultural uses of persistent organochlorines, but individual pesticide uses have been reviewed and are withdrawn where appropriate. Thus all the wood preservation uses of dieldrin other than for industrial pre-treatment are being withdrawn with effect from 31 December 1984.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each of the commodities covered by the common agricultural policy, including rapeseed, olive oil and so on *(a)* the amounts currently in surplus, *(b)* the target/intervention/threshold price in the United Kingdom, *(c)* the corresponding central price for the European Economic Community, *(d)* the corresponding price for West Germany, *(e)* the levy in the United Kingdom at the latest available date and *(f)* the world price.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *267*]: Table 1 shows on the basis of the best available information the level of self-sufficiency in the Community for those products where this exceeds 100 per cent. Information on fish and a number of other minor products is not readily available and can be produced only at disproportionate cost. Meaningful figures are not available for fresh fruit and vegetables.

Table 2 sets out the institutional prices requested.

Table 3 shows the levy applicable and the notional world price on 21 November 1984 for the main traded agricultural commodities. The "world prices" shown are generally the estimated lowest offer prices at the Community frontier underlying the Commission's calculations of the variable import levies. I remind the hon. Member that these are the lowest prices recorded and it is highly likely that on average higher prices would have to be paid if larger quantities were to be purchased on world markets.

Table 1

Product	*Per cent. Self-Sufficiency*	*Reference Period*
Common Wheat	150·1	1984-85 marketing year
Durum Wheat	163·9	1984-85 marketing year
Barley	131·8	1984-85 marketing year
Oats	103·3	1984-85 marketing year
Rye	120·8	1984-85 marketing year
Sugar	118	1983-84 marketing year
Wine	124·6	1983-84 marketing year
Processed peeled tomatoes	104·6	1983-84 marketing year
Tomato paste	142·4	1983-84 marketing year
Milk: Butterfat*	127	1983
Solids—non-fat*	123	1983
Beef and Veal	106	1984
Pigmeat	102·2	1984
Poultrymeat	110	1983
Eggs	103	1983
Seeds for sowing of the following species:		
Cockfoot	137	1983-84 marketing year
Red Fescue	134	1983-84 marketing year
Perennial Ryegrass	102	1983-84 marketing year
Wood Meadow Grass	180	1983-84 marketing year
Field Peas	137	1983-84 marketing year
Field Beans	144	1983-84 marketing year
Lucerne	105	1983-84 marketing year

* Excluding Greece

Table 2

Institutional prices applicable at the beginning of the 1984-85 marketing year

	United Kingdom £/tonne#	*ECU/tonne*	*DM/tonne#*
Common wheat			
Target Price	160·28	259·08	655·15
Reference Price for minimum quality breadwheat	120·96	195·52	494·42
Intervention Price	113·05	182·73	462·08
Threshold Price	157·17	254·05	642·43

	United Kingdom £/tonne#	ECU/tonne	DM/tonne#
Durum wheat			
Target Price	221·29	357·70	904·53
Intervention Price	193·07	312·08	789·17
Threshold Price	218·18	352·67	891·81
Barley			
Target Price	146·19	236·30	597·54
Intervention Price	113·05	182·73	462·08
Threshold Price	143·08	231·27	584·82
Rye			
Target Price	147·47	238·37	602·78
Intervention Price	114·19	184·58	466·76
Threshold Price	144·36	233·34	590·06
Maize			
Target Price	146·19	236·30	597·54
Intervention Price	113·05	182·73	462·08
Threshold Price	143·08	231·27	584·82
Rice			
Target Price for husked rice	333·76	539·49	1,356·59
Intervention Price for paddy rice	194·38	314·19	790·05
Threshold Price for husked rice	330·13	533·63	1,341·85
Sugar			
Target Price for white sugar	348·18	562·80	1,415·20
Intervention Price for white sugar*—United Kingdom and Ireland	338·28	546·80	—
—Italy	—	554·10	—
—Other member states	—	534·70	1,344·54
Threshold Price for white sugar	410·42	663·40	1,668·17
Olive Oil			
Production Target Price	1,956·37	3,162·30	7,951·82
Intervention Price	1,408·18	2,276·20	5,723·66
Threshold Price	1,210·96	1,957·40	4,922·02
Colza and Rape seed			
Target Price	292·38	472·60	1,188·39
Basic Intervention Price	265·53	429·20	1,079·25
Sunflower seed			
Target Price	360·18	582·20	1,463·98
Basic Intervention Price	329·56	532·70	1,339·51
Soya beans			
Guide Price	352·70	570·10	1,433·56
Minimum Price	310·38	501·70	1,261·56
Linseed			
Guide Price	339·39	548·60	1,379·49
Peas and field beans			
Minimum Price	178·79	289·00	726·71
Sweet Lupins			
Minimum Price	196·67	317·90	799·38
Activating Price	295·84	478·20	1,202·47
Cotton			
Guide Price	582·40	941·40	2,367·22
Minimum Price	553·33	894·40	2,249·03

	United Kingdom £/hectolitre#	ECU/hectolitre	DM/hectolitre#
Wine			
Guide Price—Type RI	†2·12	†3·42	†8·60
—Type RII	†2·12	†3·42	†8·60
—Type RIII	32·97	53·30	134·03
—Type AI	†1·96	†3·17	†7·97
—Type AII	43·94	71·02	178·58
—Type AIII	50·18	81·11	203·96
Activating Price—Type RI	†1·97	†3·19	†8·02
—Type RII	†1·97	†3·19	†8·02
—Type RIII	30·83	49·84	125·33
—Type AI	†1·81	†2·92	†7·34
—Type AII	40·29	65·13	163·77
—Type AIII	46·01	74·37	187·01

	United Kingdom £/tonne#	ECU/tonne	DM/tonne#
Tobacco			
Norm Price‡	11·41-101·52	18·44-164·10	46·37-412·64
Intervention Price‡	9·69-86·30	15·67-139·49	39·40-350·76
Cauliflowers‖			
Basic Price	117·98	190·70	479·53
Buying-in Price¶	50·92	82·30	206·95
Tomatoes‖			
Basic Price	134·43	217·30	546·42
Buying-in Price¶	56·48	91·30	229·58
Reference Price	234·72	379·40	954·03
Sweet oranges‖			
Basic Price	239·91	387·80	975·15
Buying-in Price¶	159·49	257·80	648·26
Reference Price (Class I)	131·09	211·90	532·84
Mandarins‖			
Basic Price	273·14	441·50	1,110·18
Buying-in Price¶	178·92	289·20	727·21
Reference Price	159·12	257·20	646·75
Lemons‖			
Basic Price	235·77	381·10	958·30
Buying-in Price¶	143·84	232·50	584·64
Reference Price	218·88	353·80	889·65
Table grapes‖			
Basic Price	201·12	325·10	817·49
Buying-in Price¶	123·24	199·20	500·90
Reference Price	252·72	408·50	1,027·20
Apples‖			
Basic Price	164·01	265·10	666·61
Buying-in Price¶	83·58	135·10	339·72
Reference Price	230·51	372·60	936·93
Pears‖			
Basic Price	158·50	256·20	644·23
Buying-in Price¶	85·00	137·40	345·50
Reference Price	222·53	359·70	904·49
Peaches‖			
Basic Price	284·52	459·90	1,156·45
Buying-in Price¶	175·51	283·70	713·38
Reference Price	317·56	513·30	1,290·73
Apricots‖			
Basic Price	275·98	446·10	1,121·75
Buying-in Price¶	165·61	267·70	673·15
Reference Price	468·51	757·30	1,904·28
Aubergines‖			
Basic Price	107·71	174·10	437·79
Buying-in Price ¶	43·18	69·80	175·52
Reference Price	270·79	437·70	1,100·63

	United Kingdom £/tonne#	ECU/tonne	DM/tonne#
Cherries‖			
Reference Price	493·56	797·80	2,006·12
Plums‖			
Reference Price (Class I)	341·37	551·80	1,387·54
Cucumbers‖			
Reference Price	270·23	436·80	1,098·36
Artichokes‖			
Reference Price (Class I)	357·03	577·10	1,451·16
Cabbage lettuces‖			
Reference Price	395·20	638·80	1,606·31
Endives‖			
Reference Price	335·43	542·20	1,363·40
Clementines‖			
Reference Price	299·68	484·40	1,218·06
Courgettes			
Reference Price	223·33	361·00	907·76
Milk			
Target Price	169·70	274·30	697·47
Butter (82 per cent. fat)			
Intervention Price	1,977·84	3,197·00	8,129·11
Threshold Price	2,215·34	3,580·90	9,105·26
Cheese			
Intervention Price●	—	3,817·50-5,216·10	—
Threshold Price (Emmenthal)	2,415·17	3,903·90	9,926·56
(Blue veined)	1,993·06	3,221·60	8,191·66
(Parmigiano Reggiano)	3,705·31	5,989·30	15,229·17
(Cheddar)	2,168·82	3,505·70	8,914·05
(Gouda—whole cheese 6-8 weeks)	1,987·24	3,212·20	8,167·76
Skimmed Milk Powder			
Intervention Price	1,026·22	1,658·80	4,217·88
Threshold Price	1,153·30	1,864·20	4,740·16
Whey Powder			
Threshold Price	346·38	559·90	1,423·67
Wholemilk Powder			
Threshold Price	1,689·24	2,730·50	6,942·92
Unsweetened Condensed Milk			
Threshold Price	628·86	1,016·50	2,584·69
Sweetened Condensed Milk			
Threshold Price	826·89	1,336·60	3,398·61
Lactose			
Threshold Price	575·78	930·70	2,366·52
Beef (adult cattle)			
Guide Price	1,268·37	2,050·20	5,155·37
Intervention Price	1,141·54	1,845·20	4,639·88
Pigmeat			
Basic Price	1,257·91	2,033·30	5,112·88
Lowest Intervention Price	981·19	1,586·00	3,988·11
Sluicegate Price (carcases or half-carcases)	949·39	1,534·60	3,858·86
Sheepmeat			
Basic Price	2,648·09	4,280·40	10,763·37
Intervention/Guide Price	2,250·85	3,638·30	9,148·76
Poultrymeat			
Sluicegate Price (cocks, hens and chickens)	737·25	1,191·70	2,996·61
Eggs			
Sluicegate Price (eggs in shell, other than for hatching)	655·28	1,059·20	2,663·43

Fish

	£/tonne#	ECU/tonne	DM/tonne#
Herring			
Guide price	207·87	336	844·90
Withdrawal price	88·47-149·71	143-242	359·58-608·53
Sardines (Atlantic)			
Guide price	332·22	537	1,350·32
Withdrawal price	45·78-240·04	74-388	186·08-975·65
Reference price■	204·77	331	832·32
Sardines (Mediterranean)			
Guide price	264·78	428	1,076·24
Withdrawal price	78·57-191·16	127-309	319·35-777·00
Reference price■	204·77	331	832·32
Dogfish (Squalus acanthias)			
Guide price	517·20	836	2,102·18
Withdrawal price	82·90-310·56	134-502	336·95-1,262·31
Dogfish (Scyliorhinus spp)			
Guide price	498·64	806	2,026·74
Withdrawal price	99·60-319·23	161-516	404·85-1,297·52
Redfish			
Guide price	483·79	782	1,966·39
Withdrawal price	330·98-391·61	535-633	1,345·29-1,591·72
Reference price■	442·96-1,153·79	716-1,865	1,800·43-4,689·67
Cod			
Guide price	651·44	1,053	2,647·84
Withdrawal price	98·98-468·94	160-758	402·33-1,906·04
Reference price■	524·62-1,464·36	848-2,367	2,132·35-5,951·99
Saithe			
Guide price	374·90	606	1,523·83
Withdrawal price	89·70-269·73	145-436	364·61-1,096·35
Reference price■	336·55-865·50	544-1,399	1,367·92-3,517·88
Haddock			
Guide price	487·50	788	1,981·48
Withdrawal price	144·15-350·78	233-567	585·89-1,425·76
Reference price■	423·78-1,364·75	685-2,206	1,722·48-5,547·14
Whiting			
Guide price	448·52	725	1,823·06
Withdrawal price	82·28-287·06	133-464	334·44-1,166·76
Ling			
Guide price	536·37	867	2,180·13
Withdrawal price	171·37-365·01	277-590	696·54-1,483·60
Mackerel			
Guide price	171·37	277	696·54
Withdrawal price	75·48-123·73	122-200	306·78-502·91
Reference price■	193·64-376·14	313-608	787·06-1,528·86
Anchovies			
Guide price	334·07	540	1,357·87
Withdrawal price	82·28-241·28	133-390	334·44-980·68
Plaice			
Guide price	603·81	976	2,454·22
Withdrawal price	247·46-445·43	400-720	1,005·83-1,810·49
Hake			
Guide price	1,432·80	2,316	5,823·74
Withdrawal price	381·71-1,096·26	617-1,772	1,551·49-4,455·82
Reference price■	392·85-820·96	635-1,327	1,596·75-3,336·83
Shrimps (Crangon crangon)			
Guide price	866·74	1,401	3,522·91
Withdrawal price	233·85-507·30	378-820	950·51-2,061·95
Tuna (fresh chilled or frozen intended for canning)			
Reference price ■	289·53-812·91	468-1,314	1,176·82-3,304·14

	£/tonne#	ECU/tonne	DM/tonne#
Sea Bream (Dentex Dentex and Pagellus spp)			
Reference price■	619·27	1,001	2,517·08
Squid			
Reference price■			
Loligo spp	1,226·17	1,982	4,983·88
Todorodes Sagittatus	605·04	978	2,459·24
Illex spp	605·04	978	2,459·24
Cuttlefish (Sepia Officinalis Rossia, Macrosoma, Sepiola Rondeleti)			
Reference price■	790·64	1,278	3,213·62
Octopus			
Reference price ■	588·96	952	2,393·87

Notes:

* Payable net of storage levy (£26·29/tonne, ECU 42·50/tonne, DM 106·87/tonne).

† Per degree alcohol.

‡ Range of prices, according to variety.

‖ Prices vary seasonally and, in some cases, to take account of other factors such as variety and presentation. The prices shown are the lowest seasonal figure for the standard presentation.

¶ Producers' organisations voluntarily withdrawing produce from the market receive compensation at the buying-in price plus 10 per cent. of the basic price.

● Intervention prices for cheese apply only to certain varieties manufactured in Italy.

■ Reference prices for frozen fish only. Reference prices for imports of fresh and chilled products are equal to the withdrawal prices.

▪ Range of prices according to variety, presentation and quality factors.

Converted from ECU at the appropriate current representative rate.

Table 3

Levy applicable in the United Kingdom and notional "world" price on 21 November 1984 for the main traded agricultural commodities*

	United Kingdom levy† £/tonne	Notional "world" price £/tonne
Common wheat	39	123
Barley	46	102
Maize	43	106
Rice	303	186
Sugar	●279	132
Olive oil	377	836
Butter	¶1,221	996
Skimmed milk powder	676	478
Beef and veal	‡1,442	957
Pigmeat	246	952
Sheepmeat	‖—	1,761
Poultymeat	137	739
Eggs	397	393

* "World" prices have been calculated by subtracting the levy applicable on 21 November from the threshold/guide price. The beef price is also adjusted for duty. In the case of pigmeat, poultry meat and eggs, the "world" price has been taken as the sluicegate price, less supplementary levy where appropriate. The resulting estimate has been converted from ECU/t at the appropriate market rate of exchange £0·620128 = 1 ECU.

† The rates of levy vary for different tariff headings. The rates quoted are: beef and veal—carcase; pigmeat—carcase; poultrymeat—70 per cent. chickens; rice—wholly milled long grain; olive oil—virgin lampante; eggs—in shell including supplementary levy.

‡ Most imports of beef from third countries are subject to special arrangments allowing entry at reduced levy rates.

‖ Imports of lamb under voluntary restraint agreements with principal suppliers and related agreements are subject to a reduced charge of 10 per cent. ad valorem. Any imports outside these arrangements are subject to levies which cannot exceed the 20 per cent. tariff rate bound in the GATT.

¶ A special lower rate of levy is applicable to imports of butter from New Zealand.

● In practice the United Kingdom's imports from third countries are normally covered by the Lome Convention and enter the Community levy-free.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Rates

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the estimated level of water rates in *(a)* the West Midlands county and *(b)* the London and Thames Valley region, in each of the next three years.

Mr. Macfarlane: The level of charges will not be known until the water authorities concerned finalise their budgets for the years in question. However, as the Government intend to set higher financial targets for all water authorities over this period it is to be expected that charges increases will be above the general rate of inflation.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the revised financial targets for the Ordnance Survey for the financial year 1985-86 onwards.

Mr. Gow: Following recent discussions on the OS plan and its estimates I expect to consult the ordnance survey advisory board and other Government Departments soon. Updated guidelines will be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the detailed response to the recommendations of the ordnance survey review committee.

Mr. Gow: Shortly.

River Thames (Freight Handling)

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what instructions or directions he has given to the British Waterways Board concerning its freight handling services in the River Thames, Lea, and Brent.

Mr. Macfarlane: None.

Coliform Bacteria

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has initiated any negotiations with the Commission of the European Communities with a view to introducing a better sampling and analysis regime for coliform bacteria.

Mr. Macfarlane: The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution has recommended, in its tenth report, that the Government should initiate negotiations with the Commission of the European Communities with a view to introducing a better sampling and analysis procedure for coliform bacteria.

So far no action has been taken in respect of the Royal Commission's recommendation. This report is being studied and the Government's response will be published next month.

Sewage Discharges

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will set a date by which the recommendation of the working party on sewage disposal relating to discharges of crude sewage is to be implemented in full.

Mr. Macfarlane: No.

Water Authorities (Financial Targets)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial targets have been fixed for the English regional water authorities for 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Macfarlane: The English water authorities were set financial targets (expressed as a rate of return on net assets) as follows:

Water authority	*Financial years 1983-84 Rate of return Percentage*	*1984-85 Rate of return Percentage*
Anglian	2·06	1·36
Northumbrian	1·87	1·25
North West	1·26	0·95
Severn-Trent	1·25	1·25
Southern	1·25	0·91
South West	1·47	1·26
Thames	1·25	0·50
Wessex	1·50	0·61
Yorkshire	1·25	1·00

Footnote:

The financial targets for the two years are not directly comparable, because of various technical adjustments effected in the 1983-84 Accounts.

Merseyside (Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Merseyside.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I was prevented by injury from attending the opening of Lime Street Station and Concourse and the Liverpool freeport by Her Royal Highness The Princess Anne on 29 November 1984. My noble Friend Lord Skelmersdale attended on my behalf.

Following the ceremonies, my noble Friend joined the royal party for lunch at the offices of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. He later visited the Albert dock and maritime museum complex.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls (Disposal)

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the tonnage of polychlorinated biphenyls due for disposal in 1984 due to scrapped transformers; and how this disposal is likely to take place.

Mr. Gow: My Department estimates that approximately 150 tonnes of polychlorinated biphenyls from scrapped transformers will have been disposed of in 1984 in the United Kingdom. The PCBs were contained in up to 1,000 tonnes of other materials. The method used for disposal is high temperature incineration.

Avon Structure Plan

Mr. Wiggin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if, in his consideration of the Avon county structure plan, he will take steps to reduce the total number of new houses planned for Woodspring; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received proposing a reduction in the total number of new houses planned for Woodspring under the Avon county structure plan; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The provision and broad distribution of new housing in the Avon county structure plan are matters currently before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Before my right hon. Friend approves the structure plan in its final form, the proposed policies relating to housing provision (including that in Woodspring) will be very carefully considered in the light of national planning policies; the submitted structure plan; the report of the panel which conducted the examination in public; and all the representations made on my right hon. Friends proposed modifications to the plan. A substantial number of representations on the proposed modifications were from those seeking a reduction in the proposed level of housing in Woodspring; but I must make it clear that my right hon. Friend's decision in relation to any one area can be only in the context of his consideration of the structure plan as a whole.

Mr. Wiggin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in his consideration of the Avon county structure plan, he will take steps to prevent further development of green field sites within the Woodspring district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The actual location of housing development in Woodspring, as elsewhere, is in the first

instance for determination by the relevant local planning authority through the local plan process and planning control procedures, taking account of the broad guidance in the Avon county structure plan, when it is approved.

Mr. Wiggin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if, in his consideration of the Avon county structure plan, he will take steps to ensure the development of land within the city of Bristol for housing purposes rather than green field sites in rural areas; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he is taking to evaluate whether the draft Avon county structure plan complies with the guidance given in circular 15/84 regarding land use in existing urban areas; what conclusions he has reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The proposed level of housing development in Bristol, and other existing urban areas, in Avon will be considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when he approves the county structure plan. In determining that level, my right hon. Friend will have regard to the need to make the fullest possible use of existing urban sites, in accordance with Government policy — including that set out in Department of the Environment Circular 15/84. The Avon structure plan, as submitted, made provision for 9,900 dwellings in the city of Bristol. My right hon. Friend accepted the view of the panel which conducted the examination in public that this provision was of the right order and represented a fair assessment of the land either available or likely to become available during the plan period. His proposed modification set the figure at 10,100.

Housing

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase the percentage of his budget currently allocated to housing.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend's plans for his public expenditure programmes for 1985-86 were set out in answer to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) on 12 November at column *68-69*.

Property Services Agency

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has asked the Metropolitan police to undertake further investigations into the Property Services Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: In an article in the *News of the World* on Sunday 11 November it was reported that PSA staff had been on holidays arranged by, and accepted other favours from, contractors with whom they had dealings.

The five staff concerned were interviewed and it is clear that their relationships with the contractor require investigation. All five were therefore suspended from duty on Monday 12 November, and all the contractors mentioned by the *News of the World* precluded from bidding for further PSA work without the express approval of the PSA director of contracts. The newspaper made a number of items of evidence available to PSA; the agency immediately contacted the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Housing Associations (Accounting Requirements)

Sir Michael Shaw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about relaxations to the statutory accounting requirements for small housing associations.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend, in conjunction with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales, has today laid the Registered Housing Associations (Limited Accounting Requirements) Order 1984, made under section 124 of the Housing Act 1980. It provides relief to those small housing associations with not more than 100 units of accommodation that are not undertaking grant-aided development or improvement by reducing the accounting information otherwise required under the provisions of the Registered Housing Associations (accounting Requirements) Order 1982. It is anticipated that the exemptions provided will reduce significantly the work necessary in submitting their accounts to the Housing Corporation in a form which will continue to provide full accountability. The provisions of the Order will apply to accounting periods beginning on or after 1st January 1985.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which London local authorities would gain and which would lose from his proposals that the collective funding of voluntary bodies should be met by contributions based on population rather than rateable value; and what would be the percentage change in the contribution for each authority.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his answer*, 29 November 1984, c. *557*]: Our proposals are designed to ensure as far as possible that ratepayers in each borough make an equal contribution in rate poundage terms to the collective scheme, as they do at present to the cost of GLC grants through its precept. The proposals therefore would minimise changes to ratepayers — whether gains or losses—in comparison to the present situation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Offices (Closure)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance he has issued to the Post Office on the subject of the post office closures in line with the requirements of section 59(2) of the British Telecommunications Act 1981 to have regard to the industrial, commercial and, in particular, the social needs of the United Kingdom in the provision of postal services.

Mr. Pattie: It would be unnecessary and inappropriate to issue such guidance to the Post Office. The duty imposed on the Post Office by section 59(2) of the British Telecommunications Act 1981 is a statutory one of which the Post Office needs no reminder.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Post Office Users Council concerning the social aspect of the current closure programmes of a percentage of sub-post offices.

Mr. Pattie: I have had no discussions with the Post Office Users' National Council on the Post Office's

proposals to reduce the number of post offices in urban areas. However, I am aware of the council's views about the proposals, and that the Post Office has consulted the council fully about the proposals.

Mr. Golding asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give a general direction to the Post Office under section 62 of the British Telecommunications Act 1981, to refrain from its major programme of closing Crown and sub-post offices in view of its obligations under section 59(2)*(b)* of the Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie [*pursuant to the reply*, 24 November, c. *551*]: No. My powers under section 11(1A) of the Post Office Act 1969 to give the Post Office directions of a general character as to the exercise of its powers are exercisable only when it appears to me to be "requisite in the national interest". I am not satisfied that it would be so requisite in the present instance. Indeed, I am satisfied that the Post Office's proposals to reduce the number of post offices in urban areas are consistent with the duty of the Post Office laid down by section 59(2) of the British Telecommunications Act 1981.

Regional Aid

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish a system of positive vetting when considering applications for regional grants for projects which involve a high import value content relative to employment created; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Regional grants can not be made conditional on the purchase of United Kingdom goods without breaching international treaty obligations. However, applicants for regional selective assistance are expected to give every opportunity to United Kingdom suppliers to compete.

Clothing, Footwear and Textile Investment Scheme

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the EEC to approve funding of the clothing, footwear and textile investment scheme.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend is not yet in a position to say when the European Commission will reach a decision on the request we made in April for approval of the proposed scheme of investment support for small and medium sized firms in the clothing, footwear, knitting and textile industries. Discussions are continuing, and we remain committed to seeking an early positive conclusion.

Post Office (Lost Mail)

Mr. James Hill asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints have been received from users of the postal service regarding mail which has gone astray whilst in the possession of the Post Office over the last 12 months.

Mr. Pattie: Complaints about mail which has gone astray are an operational matter and are therefore forwarded to the Post Office. We do not keep records of the numbers.

Electrical Imports (Complaints)

Mr. Pollock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what proportion of complaints relating to electrical goods received by the trading standards authorities and the consumer safety unit concern goods imported from the eastern bloc, the Indian sub-continent and the far east, respectively;

(2) what proportion of complaints relating to electrical consumer goods received by the trading standards authorities and the consumer safety unit concern goods imported from the eastern bloc, the Indian sub-continent and the far east, respectively.

Mr. Fletcher: No information is available on the proportion of complaints received by trading standards authorities and the consumer safety unit which involve imported electrical goods.

The evidence from recent successful prosecutions by the enforcement authorities shows that the great majority of consumer electrical goods found by the courts to be unsafe are imported, and that most of these imports are from the eastern bloc and the far east.

Trading standards authorities and the consumer safety unit have responsibility for the safety of electrical goods for use in the home. The safety of electrical goods for professional and workplace use is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive.

United States (Steel Imports)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the United States market for steel was allocated to imports from the EEC in the informal agreement negotiated between the EEC and the United States of America in 1982.

Mr. Channon: The informal agreement, by exchange of letters in October 1982, on steel pipe and tube exports did not establish any binding limit but provided for consultations in the event of EC exports exceeding the 1979-81 average share of United States apparent consumption, which was 5·9 per cent.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the actual percentage of the United States steel market which was taken up by imports from the EEC in 1983 and in 1984 to date, respectively.

Mr. Channon: In 1983, United States imports of all steel mill products from EC countries accounted for about 5 per cent. of the United States market. Comparable figures for 1984 are not yet available, but in the first three quarters of 1984 the average level of Community exports of ECSC steel products to the United States was about one-fifth higher than the average level in 1983.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why EEC exports of steel to the United States of America have exceeded the percentage agreed in the 1982 informal agreement; and what steps were taken by Her Majesty's Government and the other members of the EEC to ensure that the arrangement was adhered to.

Mr. Channon: Since the 1982 informal agreement did not establish a binding limit on EC exports for steel pipes and tubes to the United States, there was no question of Her Majesty's Government or the Government of any other EC member state seeking to impose a limit on its producers' exports.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the United States market for steel has been allocated to the EEC under the

regulation made in November 1984 by the United States Department of Commerce; and how this percentage compares with the percentage agreed between the EEC and the United States of America in 1982.

Mr. Channon: The action announced by the United States Administration on 27 November implemented a binding restriction on United States imports of steel pipes and tubes from the EC of 5·9 per cent. of the United States market. This is the same percentage as the indicative, non-binding figure, referred to in the 1982 EC-United States exchange of letters on pipes and tubes.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what restrictions, by way of quota, tariff and price limitation, are imposed by the EEC on imports of steel from countries outside the EEC; and if any special provision is made for imports from the United States of America.

Mr. Channon: The customs duties applicable to iron and steel products imported into the Community are set out in chapter 73 of the common customs tariff. Information about these rates is also available in Her Majesty's customs and excise tariff and overseas trade classification, a copy of which is in the Library. Anti-dumping or coutervailing duties are in force against a number of products from third country suppliers: part 13 of the tariff and overseas trade classification gives details of these duties. Voluntary restraint arrangements by which major suppliers to the Community undertake to limit their exports to traditional levels were negotiated in 1984 between the Community and Sweden, Finland, Norway, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Japan, Australia, Spain, South Korea, South Africa and Brazil. These voluntary restraint arrangements incorporate a number of autonomous quotas on products from the CMEA countries of eastern Europe imposed by individual member states prior to establishment of the European Communities, and still maintained. In addition, the United Kingdom has quotas on certain products from the USSR and the German Democratic Republic: details of these are set out in notice to importers No. 1995 published in *British Business* on 17 February 1984.

Imports from countries not subject to quotas and with whom VRAs have not been negotiated—of which the US is one—are subject to no quantitative restrictions. Such imports are monitored against import reference prices published by the European Commission. These prices are intended to serve as a benchmark for the application of the Community's dumping regulations.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Her Majesty's Government support the statement made by the Common Market Commission on the restrictions on steel imports imposed by the United States Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The Government entirely share the Community's concern and disappointment that the United State's authorities rejected out of hand proposed terms for a binding restraint arrangement on EC exports of pipes and tubes, and proceeded to unilateral action without further consultations. The Community has fully reserved its GATT rights. The Government will keep the House informed of developments.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps have been taken by the EEC since 1982 to reduce the restrictions on the import of steel from non-EEC countries.

Mr. Channon: The basic principle of the steel voluntary restraint arrangements is to allow the signatory countries to maintain their traditional trade with the Community, taking account of the development of the Community market. This is in line with the OECD consensus in 1977 that anti-crisis measures should be on the basis of burden-sharing. To achieve this, the Community has sought to renew annually the quantitative aspects of the arrangements on the basis of forecast Community steel consumption. The depressed state of the market in 1982, 1983 and 1984 meant that it was not possible to increase access levels in these years.

However, in line with improvments in demand in 1984 and the Government's policy of reducing barriers to trade, we have supported increased access levels under the 1985 regime. Negotiations between the Commission and our partners are continuing on this basis. There have been no major changes in the non-quantitative aspects of the arrangements since 1982.

Advertising (EC Directive)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have for implementation of the European Community directive on misleading advertising adopted by the Council of Ministers on 10 September last.

Mr. Fletcher: The Government propose to implement the directive by regulations under the European Communities Act 1972, following consultation with the relevant interests.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect for Manchester international airport of the decisions on regional aid announced by the Minister of State on 28 November and, in particular, on whether aid from the European regional development fund will still be available for the further development of the airport.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 3 December]: Manchester international airport is located outside the part of the Manchester TTWA which has been designated an assisted area and would not qualify for the regional aid announced on 28 November nor, normally, for ERDF aid. However, under the terms of article 18 paragraph 2, of the ERDF Regulation 1787/84 which comes into force on 1 January 1985, aid may be granted for all or part of infrastructure investment projects which although not located in an eligible region or area, are situated in an area adjacent to such a region or area and are an essential complement to its infrastructure. In such cases, the ERDF's aid will cover only that part of the project which is necessary to the development of the region or area in question. The amount of the resources allocated for finance of the investment projects referred to in this paragraph may not exceed 4 per cent. of the ERDF's resources. The Department of the Environment, in consultation with the Department of Transport, is now considering an application from Manchester international

airport for European regional development fund aid towards the further development of the airport. If approved this would be forwarded to the EEC for further assessment from 1 January 1985, but no guarantee can be given that the Commission will support the application.

Merseyside

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how he envisages the changes in the Government's regional industrial policy will affect Merseyside over the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 3 December]: The changes in regional policy announced on 28 November are intended to relate grants more closely to job creation and to concentrate resources on those areas with the most severe problems. They are thus aimed at improving the long-term employment opportunities in areas such as Merseyside, which will continue to enjoy the highest category of regional assistance.

Knowsley

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list all financial aid from central Government and the European Commission direct to industry in the borough of Knowsley during 1984-85 showing the amount involved in each category.

(2) what is the value of regional development grants and selective financial assistance to Knowsley in 1984-85; what was their value in 1983-84; what their estimated value will be in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what form this assistance will take following his statement of 28 November to the House.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 3 December]: Information about expenditure on regional industrial assistance is kept by reference to employment office areas, but in the case of regional development grants only payments over £25,000 are allocated in this way. The borough of Knowsley is not conterminous with any EOA but covers parts of several. Information about payments of regional development grant and offers of regional selective assistance is as follows:

£'000

	1983-84		1984-85*	
EOAs (parts of which are in Knowsley)	*RDG: total of payments of over £25,000*	*Selective Financial Assistance Offers*	*RDG: total of payments of over £25,000*	*Selective Financial Assistance Offers*
Kirkby	4,000	1,687	1,855	325
Widnes	2,659	932	915	36
Huyton	244	1,058	134	28
Prescot	1,017		245	

* To 30 September 1984.

It is not possible to produce reliable estimates of regional development grant expenditure and of selective financial assistance offers for 1985-86 and 1986-87 in respect of these areas.

Under the new map of assisted areas, Knowsley is a development area. Eligible projects undertaken in Knowsley will therefore be eligible for grant under the new RDG scheme. Selective assistance will also be available for projects which create jobs or which protect existing employment, but which otherwise may not go ahead. Payments of RDG will also continue to be made under the transitional arrangements relating to the old RDG scheme. Information about other financial aid to industry in Knowsley from central Government or direct from the EC Commission is not available.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Power

Q32. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Prime Minister what percentage of Britain's energy needs will be supplied by nuclear power by the year 2000.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

Nuclear electricity production in the year 2000 will depend on many factors, including the outcome of the Sizewell inquiry.

Supplementary Benefit

Q62. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister how many people are on supplementary benefit.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

The number was 4·3 million at December 1983, the latest date for which information is available.

Wales (Regional Development Aid)

Q117. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister if she will ensure that regional development aid to Wales will not be diminished as a result of Cmnd. 9111.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's new regional industrial policy arrangements announced last week ensure that Wales will continue to be able to compete fully and effectively for mobile investment and jobs. Some 89 per cent. of the working population of Wales will be within the assisted areas and parts of Wales in most need will receive the maximum available level of support.

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Q119. **Mr. Carter-Jones** asked the Prime Minister if she will make personal representations to the leaders of the countries in the European Economic Community regarding the Commission decision to buy untried aircraft for the Leeward Islands Air Transport; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that discussions are continuing between LIAT and the Commission. We expect the rules for approving contractors to be fully and fairly applied by the Commission and shall continue to make this clear.

Engagements

Mr. Beith asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Freeman asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend is attending a meeting of the European Council in Dublin.

European Community (Purchasing Policies)

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Prime Minister if, in her next communications with the heads of the European Economic Community countries, she will indicate Her Majesty's Government's intention to withhold payment to the European Economic Community pending an inquiry into the purchasing policies of the Commission; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. The British contribution to the European Community is fixed by treaty obligations.

Multi-Department Scrutiny

Mr. Eggar asked the Prime Minister whether she will publish the report on the multi-department scrutiny of consultancy, inspection and review services in Government; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Yes. I have today arranged for a copy of the efficiency unit's report to be put in the Library. The report points to a further stage in the Government's financial reforms begun in 1982. I endorse its recommendations and look to the leadership of the Civil Service to implement them.

Crown Appointments Committee

Mr. Frank Field asked the Prime Minister if she will list the membership of the Crown Appointments Committee at the time of the appointment of the present Archbishop of Canterbury and its composition at each subsequent appointment.

The Prime Minister: The Crown Appointments Commission consists of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, three members elected by the house of Clergy of the General Synod, Three members elected by the House of Laity of the General Synod, my private secretary for appointments, and the Archbishops' appointments secretary (these last two being non-voting members). To these are added, on the occasion of each vacancy, four members elected by the Vacancy in See Committee of the Diocese concerned.

The elected representatives are the responsibility of the Church of England.

When the Archbishopric of Canterbury is vacant, the Prime Minister appoints a lay person to chair the Commission for that vacancy. When the See of Canterbury was last vacant Sir Richard O'Brien was appointed to undertake this responsibility.

Franco-British Council

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Prime Minister why she appointed the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to attend the current year's conference of the Franco-British Council.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was invited to attend the conference by the Franco-British Council, and has attended previous conferences organised by the Council. The Secretary of State for Employment, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and my noble Friend the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, also attended the conference.

National Heritage Memorial Fund

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Prime Minister if she will list the trustees of the National Heritage memorial fund, stating in each case their profession or, where retired, former profession and other information relevant to their trusteeship of the fund.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is as follows:

Lord Charteris of Amisfield: (Chairman). Private secretary to the Queen and Keeper of HM's Archives 1972-77; Trustee of the British Museum since 1979.

Baroness Airey of Abingdon: Trustee of the Dorneywood Trust and Stansted Park Foundation.

Lord Anglesey: Vice-Chairman of the Welsh Committee of the National Trust; Chairman of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales; Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery.

Sir Robert Cooke: The Government's Special Adviser for Palace of Westminster; Board member of the British Tourist Authority nd Chairman of its Heritage Committee.

Professor F. Holliday: academic; Vice President of the Civic Trust for the North East; Trustee of the Scottish Civic Trust.

Mr. Martin Jacomb: barrister and banker.

Mr. Clive Jenkins: trade union leader; member of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.

Mr. Charles Kinahan: brewer; Chairman of the Northern Ireland Historic Buildings Council since 1973.

Mr. Michael McCrum: academic; the Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

Sir Norman Macfarlane: industrialists; President of the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts; Governor of the Glasgow School of Art; Patron of the National Art-Collections Scottish Fund.

Professor B. Morris: academic; member of the Museums and Galleries Commissions; Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Television (Concessionary Licences)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures for the numbers of licences granted under the concessionary television licence scheme in the following categories: *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* the disabled, *(c)* hotels and *(d)* others.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A single accommodation for residential care licence covers all retired and disabled people in a particular residential home or sheltered housing scheme and so the number of licences issued does not

correspond with the number of beneficiaries. At the end of September 1984, we know that about 567,000 retired people and 1,000 disabled people benefited from the concession. Under separate arrangements, some 42,000 registered blind people received a reduction in their licence fees. There is no formal concession for hotels, and licensing practice is to be changed on 1 January to require all except small hotels to pay higher fees according to the number of guest rooms they equip with television.

Embarkation and Arrival Cards

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the reason for the decision to abandon the requirement for the public to complete embarkation and arrival cards under the Prevention of Terrorism (Supplemental Provisions) Order 1984 at Heathrow airport; and if these cards are still issued for completion at Gatwick airport.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The use of these cards is at the discretion of the examining officer, under the direction of the chief officer of the police force concerned. I understand that at Gatwick airport all passengers are required to complete cards; at Heathrow the requirement is normally imposed selectively but, from time to time and for limited periods, it is applied to all passengers.

Isle of Man

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the composition of his Department's delegation to the Isle of Man on 4 December and state the purpose of the visit.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A delegation of officials, headed by an assistant under-secretary of state, will represent Her Majesty's Government at a meeting of the Joint Standing Committee on Common Interests of the Isle of Man and the United Kingdom, which is to be held in the Isle of Man on 5 December. These meetings are held from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest. It will include officials from the Home Office, Her Majesty's Treasury and Inland Revenue, but it has yet to be decided whether other Departments need to be represented.

Public Disorder (Circulars)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* Home Office circular 26, 5 March 1982, on national reporting centre, mutual aid and police support units and *(b)* Home Office circular 39, 26 March 1982, on monitoring the potential for serious public disorders.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. These are confidential circulars to chief officers of police.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all grants made by his Department to voluntary organisations, giving both the recipient and the amount, together with the date a grant was first made.

Mr. Waddington: The grants made to voluntary bodies in the 1983-84 financial year are as follows. The dates on which grants were first made are not readily available, but I will endeavour to supply the information to my hon. Friend in due course.

	1983-84 £
Grants Administered by the Voluntary Services Unit	
Action Resource Centre	27,000
Association of Researchers in Voluntary Action and Community Involvement	10,000
Birmingham Settlement	21,500
Bristol Courts Family Conciliation Service	25,000
British Association for Counselling	6,250
British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres	25,500
British Council of Churches, Community Work Resource Unit	14,250
Community Development Exchange UK Symposium	7,500
Community Education Training Unit	32,945
Church Army Inner Cities Unit	15,000
Community Projects Foundation	811,250
Community Service Volunteers	502,000
Community Service Volunteers (Grant for Young Offenders by Prison Department)	76,960
Community Transport	36,000
Councils for Voluntary Service—National Association	7,000
Drake Fellowship	15,000
Fair Play for Children	25,900
Federation of Community Work Training Group	21,000
Festival Welfare Services	20,000
Gamblers Anonymous General Services Board	1,000
Hammersmith and Fulham Race Relations Project	3,675
Horticultural Therapy Land Use Volunteers	4,800
International Voluntary Service	19,000
Leicestershire Race Awareness Consortium	1,000
Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service	15,000
Midlands Group of Volunteer Organisers	13,500
National Association of Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services	25,200
National Council for Voluntary Organisations (Grant-in-aid)	797,000
National Federation of City Farms	25,000
National Federation of Community Organisations	86,000
National Playing Fields Association	84,500
Northern Association for Community Care (Bendrigg Lodge)	41,500
Pensioners' Link Association (previously Task Force)	93,000
Princedale Trust (for Release)	68,000
Retired Executives Action Clearing House	15,085
Sefton Community Resource Action Project	7,000
Standing Conference of Women's Organisations	3,500
Stonebridge (Harlesdon) Bus Garage Project	10,000
Student Community Action Development Unit	23,000
Time for God	9,500
Trinity overnight shelter, Birmingham	1,360
Turning Point (Lewisham)	4,700
United Funds (Hampshire Development Project)	4,750
Volonteurope	2,500
Volunteer Centre	602,000
Warrington Workshop for Voluntary Action	9,900
West End Coordinated Voluntary Services	107,550
Women's Royal Voluntary Service (grant-in-aid)	4,185,000
Young Volunteer Resource Unit	112,500
Grants for the Development of Local Voluntary Action Scheme Special Programme	
Hull Community Resources Development Project	18,320
NE Training for Community Work	25,000
Newham Parents Community Resource Programme	18,250
Salford Community Involvement Project	19,200
Social Care Assembly for Normanton, West Yorkshire	12,825
Training for Voluntary Organisations (Southampton)	13,000

	1983-84 £
Waveney Project (Suffolk)	14,400
Wiltshire Information Resource Exchange	31,036
Small Grants Scheme	
Cornwall	10,000
County Durham	10,730
Sandwell Met Borough	16,200
Wrekin District	10,000
Scotland and Wales	40,000
Charity Reviews	
Lancashire	15,200
Norfolk	300
Voluntary Services Unit—Grants for Refugees	
British Refugee Council:	
Vietnamese Refugee Programme	232,398
Refugees from other parts of world	355,812
Ockenden Venture	237,091
Refugee Action	211,498
Grants (or Grants-in-aid) to other bodies	
International Social Service of Great Britain	163,033
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	10,000
United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service	778,000
Grants Administered by Criminal Department	
Anchor Club, Leicester	8,760
Apex Trust	1,627
Birmingham Committee for Night Shelter	16,700
Birmingham Prisoners Visitors Centre	3,560
Bristol Prisoners Visitors Centre	1,500
Brixton Prisoners Visitors Centre	4,000
Bulldog Manpower Services Ltd.	347,000
Burnbake Trust	11,800
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (grant-in-aid)	103,700
Circle Trust	35,000
City Roads (Crisis Intervention) Ltd.	19,000
Dartmoor Accommodation Scheme	6,055
Family Welfare Association (grant-in-aid)	15,950
HACRO Crisis and Support Centre	4,954
Hampshire Care Trust	750
Hull Prison Visitors Centre	870
Institute of Marital Studies (grant-in-aid)	253,350
Jewish Marriage Education Council (grant-in-aid)	5,000
Leeds Detoxification Centre	20,199
Leeds Prisoners Visitors Centre	1,200
Lewes Prisoners Visitors Centre	110
Lifeline Day Centre	8,652
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (grant-in-aid)	531,000
NACRO—Education Advisory Service	23,894
National Association of Voluntary Hostels Ltd.	36,123
National Association of Victims Support Scheme	39,500
National Marriage Guidance Council (grant-in-aid)	788,000
New Bridge	12,000
North-East London St. Leonards Society	1,468
North Eastern Prison After-Care Society	800
Preston and District Lodgings Scheme	2,200
Prisoners Wives and Families Society	3,700
Prisoners Wives Services	6,700
St. Giles Day Centre	4,300
Society of Voluntary Associates (SOVA)	30,993
South Yorkshire DACRO	6,955
York ACRO	8,511

Additionally, an amount of grant is allocated each year to the deficit funding of more than 300 hostels and similar accommodation schemes, administered by some 200 voluntary organisations, providing places for ex-offenders. In 1983-84 such grants amounted to £3·528 million.

A further allocation is made in respect of once-for-all grants to voluntary organisations providing day facilities and other services for ex-offenders. These grants amounted to £501,356 in 1983-84.

Association of Chief Police Officers

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will give a full breakdown of the cost of the secretariat of the Association of Chief Police Officers of which 90 per cent. is met from Class IX, Vote 7, of the 1984-85 Supply Estimates;

(2) what information he has as to the numbers of staff employed by the secretariat of the Association of Chief Police Officers; and if he will provide such information as he has on its work.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The estimated expenditure of £157,938 in 1984-85 includes £127,250 for the salaries and related costs of the general secretary and his eight executive and clerical staff, £29,625 for office accommodation and £1,063 for office expenses.

The task of the secretariat is to collate and disseminate information of potential interest to members of the association and to service and co-ordinate the work of its specialist committees.

Wormwood Scrubs Prison

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently in D wing at Wormwood Scrubs prison; and how many of these are serving life sentences.

Mr. Mellor: On 28 November 1984, there were 264 prisoners in D hall at Wormwood Scrubs prison. Of these 223 were serving life sentences.

Prisons (Statistics)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison cells on the most recent convenient date *(a)* had integral sanitation, *(b)* had night time access to sanitation and *(c)* had neither integral sanitation nor night-time access to sanitation.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that the information readily available does not distinguish between places with integral sanitation and others affording night access to sanitation. On 30 June 1984, a total of 17,311 places in prison department establishments had some means of night access to sanitation and 21,722 places had none.

Data Protection Act

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the appointed day for registrations under the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Waddington: An order will be made under section 42(1) of the Data Protection Act 1984, appointing the day on which applications for registration may begin to be made, as soon as it is clear when the data protection registrar's office will be ready to begin receiving applications. The registrar, who took up office on 20 September, is at present engaged in wide-ranging consultations with interested groups and organisations with a view to devising appropriate registration procedures and is also in the process of recruiting staff. Good progress is being made and current indications are that preparations may be completed by the end of summer 1985. The order under section 42(1) will be made in good time before the "appointed day" to give users adequate opportunity to prepare their applications.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Brittan: Central records of registered disabled persons employed by the Home Office do not include the nature of the disability. The number of registered disabled persons employed at 1 June in each of the past four years is as follows:

	Number
1981	217
1982	204
1983	186
1984	198

Liquor Licensing

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans and the time scale of considering the introduction of flexible liquor licensing hours in England and Wales.

Mr. Mellor: We have no immediate plans for legislation on this matter. However, my right hon. and learned Friend is keeping the matter under review, and he will consider carefully the results of a survey, commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, into the working of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976, which introduced the facility for extended permitted hours in Scotland. The results of the survey are expected in mid-1985.

Unconvicted Prisoners (Food)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 21 November, *Official Report*, column 179, whether an unconvicted prisoner on remand in prison may share such food with any friends who are also unconvicted prisoners on remand.

Mr. Mellor: This is a matter for the discretion of the governor.

Probation and After Care Service

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons were receiving after care by the probation and after care service in each metropolitan county area at 31 December in each year since 1974 by sex and type of contact and type of after care;

(2) how many persons were supervised by the probation and after care service in each metropolitan county area at 31 December in each year since 1974 by sex and type of supervision.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 November, c. 302]: Summary information from 1978 is given in the following table; corresponding information is not readily available for earlier years. To provide a more detailed breakdown, including an analysis by sex, would involve disproportionate cost.

*Persons supervised by the probation service in metropolitan county areas at 31 December by area and type of supervision**

Number of persons

*Area and type of supervision**	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Greater Manchester						
Criminal supervision						
Court orders	3,650	3,700	4,620	4,800	4,750	5,110
Statutory after-care†	2,240	2,160	2,510	2,760	2,700	2,100
Voluntary after-care†	1,640	1,610	1,640	1,420	1,320	1,440
Domestic supervision‡	630	660	690	700	660	620
Total	8,010	7,870	9,110	9,350	9,090	8,990
Merseyside						
Criminal supervision						
Court orders	3,030	3,220	3,770	3,940	3,840	3,930
Statutory after-care†	1,680	1,830	1,940	1,900	1,770	1,180
Voluntary after-care†	1,230	1,290	1,250	1,220	1,230	1,310
Domestic supervision‡	520	550	570	550	580	600
Total	6,320	6,660	7,310	7,340	7,190	6,830
Northumbria‖						
Criminal supervision						
Court orders	2,350	2,390	2,610	2,660	2,700	2,830
Statutory after-care†	1,140	1,050	1,120	1,220	1,260	840
Voluntary after-care†	700	840	920	950	940	940
Domestic supervision‡	550	560	540	500	470	430
Total	4,620	4,690	5,010	5,160	5,200	4,910
West Midlands						
Criminal supervision						
Court orders	4,210	4,170	4,900	5,580	5,720	5,730
Statutory after-care†	2,380	2,180	2,300	2,450	2,270	1,940
Voluntary after-care†	1,980	2,090	2,010	2,140	1,790	2,060
Domestic supervision‡	1,460	1,520	1,510	1,480	1,400	1,340
Total	9,850	9,710	10,410	11,290	10,880	10,780

Area and type of supervision*	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	¶1983
South Yorkshire						
Criminal supervision						
Court orders	2,200	2,440	2,870	3,350	3,440	3,460
Statutory after-care†	860	780	900	990	1,000	720
Voluntary after-care†	780	890	920	930	880	880
Domestic supervision‡	310	330	370	380	400	420
Total	4,000	4,310	4,840	5,450	5,550	5,340
West Yorkshire						
Criminal supervision						
Court orders	4,060	3,880	4,790	5,250	5,180	5,160
Statutory after-care†	2,070	1,810	1,880	1,880	2,020	1,420
Voluntary after-care†	1,220	1,340	1,320	1,230	1,220	1,260
Domestic supervision‡	840	870	870	760	800	800
Total	7,960	7,680	8,590	8,880	8,940	8,480

* Each person is counted once for each type of supervision to which they were subject. Individual figures do not add to the total because each person is counted only once in the total irrespective of the number of types of supervision to which they were subject. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

† Pre- and post-release.

‡ Matrimonial proceedings, wardship, guardianship and Children Act 1975 supervision.

‖ Shire county of Northumberland and metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear: separate figures are not available.

¶ Figures relate to 30 June and may be subject to a wider margin of error than earlier figures; figures for 31 December are not available because of industrial action by some members of the probation service.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to how much grain has now been promised by each developed country to Ethiopia over the next 12 months; how far this is short of Ethiopia's needs; and also which month each country's promised delivery is likely to arrive in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: Recent commitments to Ethiopia as reported to a meeting of the food aid committee of the International Wheat Council in London on 29 November are set out in table I. These do not cover all commitments likely to be made for 1985, since donors will review their contributions in the light of changing circumstances. In addition, the Indian Government announced a pledge of 100,000 tonnes of grain for Africa, also on 29 November. The table does not include pledges of food by voluntary organisations, for which statistics are not available.

We expect to receive this week a revised forecast for Ethiopia's food import needs from the Food and Agriculture Organisation, following a crop assessment mission. Some of these will be met by commercial purchases. Information on arrivals of food aid in Ethiopia from December to March, obtained from the World Food Programme on 27 November is set out in table II. It is provisional only, since donors frequently change arrangements at short notice.

Table I
Outstanding firm commitments of food aid to Ethiopia by country

Country	Quantity
Australia	27,000 tonnes cereals
Belgium	8,000 tonnes cereals
Canada	80,000 tonnes cereals
EEC	60,000 tonnes cereals
Finland	11·5 million marks (£1·44 million) emergency—relief, including food
Netherlands	11,000 tonnes cereals
Japan	5,600 tonnes cereals plus additional aid from—$50 million pledge for Africa
Sweden	10,000 tonnes cereals
United Kingdom	21,500 tonnes cereals
United States	210,000 tonnes cereals
West Germany	14,000 tonnes cereals

Notes:
1. These commitments do not all cover the same periods.
2. The European Commission has indicated that it will propose deliveries of 10,000 tonnes a month to Ethiopia in 1985.

Table II
Arrivals of food aid in Ethiopia by month and country of origin (tonnes)

	December	January	February	March
World Food Programme	45,500	6,000	15,000	2,000
United States of America	16,000	46,000	23,000	2,500
European Economic Community	35,000	23,000		12,000
Canada	3,000	2,000		
Australia		16,000		
United Kingdom	6,500			

	December	January	February	March
Netherlands	6,000		5,000	
West Germany	6,000			
France		1,000		

Note:
These figures include only shipments notified to the World Food Programme by 27 November.
Arrivals do not in every case form part of the commitments shown in Table I. No firm information is available on shipments after March.

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the preferences of type of aircraft expressed by the Governments of the 10 nations involved in the area of operation by the Leeward Islands Air Transport, the Caribbean Development Bank and the airline; if he has sought the reasons why the European Economic Community has gone against the Lomé convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The Governments of the Caribbean Islands, the Leeward Islands Air Transport and the Caribbean Development Bank favour the immediate purchase of four British Aerospace super 748 aircraft. I have no proof that the European Commission has acted in any way contrary to the Lomé convention.

World Bank (Executive Director)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who has been appointed by Her Majesty's Government as executive director of the World Bank; when this executive director was appointed; and how often he has met the Minister for Overseas Development to discuss the World Bank report on population.

Mr. Raison: Mr. Nigel L. Wicks, formerly of Her Majesty's Treasury, was appointed as United Kingdom executive director to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank with effect from 2 May 1983. Since he is resident in Washington, Mr. Wicks has not had direct discussions with me about the bank's 1984 world development report, which focused on population matters. However, the Overseas Development Administration did provide briefing on this aspect of the report to Mr. Wicks prior to its publication.

Lomé Convention

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the negotiations on a third Lomé convention.

Mr. Raison: As anticipated in the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) on 22 November (Col. 235) negotiations were concluded at a meeting between EC and ACP Co-Presidents on 22 November. The way was thus clear for signature of the new Convention in Lomé on 8 December.

The main features of Lomé III are as follows:

(a) The basic trade arrangements will remain substantially unchanged. ACP countries will continue to be allowed unlimited duty free access — subject to a safeguard clause — for all industrial products and the large majority of their agricultural exports to the EC. The Community has also agreed to reply within 6 months to any ACP request for improved access for agricultural products, with particular reference to concessions granted to developing third countries.

(b) The rules of origin will be somewhat relaxed and simplified, making it a little easier for ACP countries to develop industries for the processing of materials originating in third countries.

(c) The special arrangements for ACP exports of beef, bananas, and rum have been consolidated or improved. The Sugar Protocol, which is of indefinite duration and was thus not up for renegotiation, will be incorporated unchanged in the new Convention.

(d) There will be an increased amount of Community aid under Lomé III. It will come to 7,400 mecu (about £4,405 million) as against 4,627 mecu under Lomé II. There will also be European Investment Bank lending of up to 1,100 mecu (£655 million) bringing the total finance available to the ACP under the Convention to 8,500 mecu (£5,060 million). Additionally, the Overseas Countries and Territories of Member States will receive 100 mecu (about £60 million), bringing the total figure for the Sixth European Development Fund to 7,500 mecu (£4,465 million). The United Kingdom share of this will be a maximum of 1,243 mecu (£740 million).

(e) The new Convention will provide for enhanced dialogue between the Community and each ACP state to ensure that Community aid is put to the best possible use in the context of the recipient countries' own policies. There is also provision for better coordination between Community aid and the bilateral aid of individual Member States.

(f) A number of changes to the Stabex scheme were agreed, including the extension of the scheme to dried bananas, mangoes and Karite oil. It was also agreed that, in future, ACP states will give full and satisfactory information on the use of transfers. If they fail to do so future transfers may be withheld.

(g) The Sysmin scheme, which is designed to help ACP mineral producers whose production and income suffers as a result of factors beyond their control, is to be amended in such a way as to enable more ACP states to benefit.

(h) It has been agreed that, in the next Convention, there is to be a clear priority given, where appropriate, to agriculture in ACP states, notably to food production.

(i) A new chapter has been agreed for Lomé III which stresses the priority to be given within national and/or regional indicative programmes, to measures to combat drought and desertification.

(j) The chapter on Industrial Cooperation has been carried over largely unchanged, although there will be some tightening up of the management structure.

(k) There will be a new chapter on Socio-Cultural Cooperation, to stress the cultural dimension of development.

(l) The Investment Chapter in Lomé III will be much more substantial than that in the two predecessor Conventions. This should make it easier to conclude effective bilateral investment promotion and protection agreements.

(m) The Preamble to the next Convention will contain a reaffirmation of the Contracting Parties' adherence to the principles of the UN Charter and their faith in fundamental human rights. There will also be a separate Joint Declaration reiterating the deep attachment of the Contracting Parties to human dignity and their reaffirmation of their commitment to work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

As soon as the final text of the new Convention becomes available I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Library. The certified text will in due course be presented

training boards are also discussing with a range of bodies (including the Skillcentre Training Agency) the provision of test centres for a locality.

WALES

Skillcentres

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the number of skillcentre places per 100,000 work force in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: For each 100,000 of the work force in September 1984 it is estimated that 80 skillcentre places were available in Wales. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement about skillcentres made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment on 29 November at c. 1108-16.

Manpower Services Commission

Mr. Rowlands asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will estimate the number of people financed at present by the Manpower Services Commission in Wales; and what is his estimate for 1985-86.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: At the end of October it is estimated that 36,450 people in Wales were taking part in MSC schemes for which information is available. Plans for 1985-86 have yet to be finalised.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The Welsh Office has not employed any registered blind persons during the last four years. However, there are three registered partially sighted staff currently employed by our Department.

Welsh Water Authority

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales what financial target has been fixed for the Welsh water authority for 1984-85.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A financial target of 1·25 per cent. (expressed as a rate of return on net revalued assets) was set for 1984-85.
(The Welsh Water Authority (Return on Assets) Order 1984 SI1984 No. 1470.)

Job Creation

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs have been created in Wales in general, and Dyfed in particular, during the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Comprehensive information is not available. However, since 1 December 1983 projects for which offers of selective financial assistance were accepted or which were allocated Government financed factories promised to provide 17,700 jobs in Wales as a whole. For the same period the figure for Dyfed is over 1,000.

Hill Farming

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union about the profitability of hill farming in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales met representatives of the Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union on 31 October and had discussions with them on the state of the hill and upland economy. Rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances to be paid in 1985 were announced on 29 November.

West Wales Hospital (Renal Dialysis Unit)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the tendering for the contract for the proposed renal dialysis unit at the West Wales hospital, Carmarthen.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Proposals have been invited for submission to the Department by 10 December. Adjudication and final decision will be by the Welsh Office. We hope to announce the decision by the end of the year.

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the visit to the United States of America to the headquarters of private companies seeking to tender for the contract for the proposed renal dialysis unit at the West Wales hospital, Carmarthen, of the chairman and chief administrator of the East Dyfed health authority.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. This matter is a question for East Dyfed health authority in the first instance.

SOCIAL SERVICES

AIDS

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what funding his Department has made available for the development of an effective screening test for AIDS virus in the national blood bank; and what extra measures he intends to take following the recent incident at Newcastle upon Tyne Royal Victoria infirmary.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Government financial support for AIDS research has been provided through the Medical Research Council for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is responsible.

We are strengthening our efforts to dissuade people from donating blood if they are at high risk of transmitting AIDS virus. A revised version of our leaflet "AIDS and how it concerns blood donors" is to be given individually to each donor or potential donor.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new guidelines his Department will be issuing on the donation of blood in relation to acquired immune deficiency syndrome disease.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The new guidelines comprise a revision of the leaflet "AIDS and how it concerns blood donors", first issued in 1983. It will contain advice,

updated in the light of recent medical evidence, about groups at high risk of AIDS who should not volunteer to give blood. We will ask regional transfusion centres to ensure that the leaflet is received on an individual basis by every blood donor within the National Blood Transfusion Service.

Dentists

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the average earnings of National Health Service dentists in general practice; and what proportion of these earnings is left after staff costs, running cost of premises, rent, heat, and so on, have been deducted.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Principals working in the general dental service earned an average of £43,200 from that source in 1983-84. Information is not yet available on the average practice expenses incurred during that year. However, the dental rates study group's estimate of this figure was £26,100 and on this basis, net earnings would represent about 40 per cent. of gross earnings. These figures exclude some GDS dentists who did not work for the whole year and a small number in other groups.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to investigate more thoroughly claims and expenses submitted by dentists employed by the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The recently published report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the general dental service indicated that known fraud and irregularity were insignificant in relation to overall expenditure and that there seemed to be no reason to assume that undiscovered fraud existed to any significant extent. The report also indicated that the Dental Estimates Board's authorisation and payment arrangements had shown generally satisfactory results but that there were a number of problem areas. Substantial progress has already been made in dealing with many of these including initial arrangements for the purchase of a new computer for the Board.

Dentists do not submit claims for expenses to the board since these are reimbursed on an average basis through the fee scale.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence is available to him of the risks to women whose male partners work in heavy industry of contracting cancer of the cervix.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The most recent information available was published in the registrar general's decennial supplement for England and Wales for the years 1970-72 on occupational mortality; a copy is in the Library. This information includes data on deaths of married women by cause and by husband's occupation, and was published at the occupation order level; it does not specify the industry in which the husband worked. More recently there has been discussion in the medical press of occupational risks of cervical cancer. I refer the hon. Member to a paper by Mrs. Jean Robinson "Cancer of the Cervix: Occupational Risks of Husbands and Wives and Possible Preventive Strategies" published in "Pre-clinical Neoplasia of the Cervix. Proceedings of the 9th study group of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists October 1981"; and to correspondence in *The Lancet* for 24-31 December 1983 and 3 March 1984.

NHS (Drugs Budget)

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the percentage of the National Health Service budget devoted to drug expenditure in 1983-84, 1973-74, 1963-64, and 1954-55.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The proportion of total National Health Service expenditure attributable to the cost of drugs (excluding the cost of dispensing) was:

	Per cent.
1954-55	9·1
1963-64	9·8
1973-74	8·5
1983-84*	10·9

* Provisional.

Note:

Over the period there were small differences in the way the basic information was assembled.

Rural Dispensing

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement as to his Department's conclusions on the effectiveness of the Crowther rural dispensing regulations; how much general practitioner applications to dispense are outstanding; and how many successful applicants are involved giving a service to *(a)* less than 50 patients and *(b)* between 51 and 100 patients.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The first annual report of the rural dispensing committee was published on 8 November and copies have been placed in the Library. The report reflects the growing co-operation between the medical and pharmaceutical professions on regulating significant changes in the arrangements for dispensing medicines in rural areas in England and Wales. The report also shows that the professions have found, in this Committee, a formula for achieving the provision of sensible and suitable pharmaceutical services for patients living in rural areas.

I understand that at 29 November, the Committee had 15 applications from general practitioners awaiting determination.

Since the Committee started its work 72 applications have been granted wholly or in part and in 25 of these it was estimated that the maximum number of patients immediately involved would be less than 50 and in 17 it was estimated that the number of patients involved would be from 50 to 100. It is not possible to state how many of the estimated numbers of patients will receive pharmaceutical services from their general practitioners because some may prefer to continue to receive their medicines from a pharmacy.

Drugs (Generic Prescribing)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how he ensures that the quality of generic drugs both home produced and imported are controlled and maintained at the level of purity and efficacy of the original proven brand product; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: For any medicinal product, including a generic product, to be marketed in the United Kingdom, the licensing authority has to be satisfied that the product is safe, efficacious and of good quality under the Medicines Act 1968. The licensing authority also has to be satisfied that the product has been manufactured to acceptable standards under United Kingdom (or European Community) licensing arrangements.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how his Department intends to monitor the way in which prescriptions are issued after the introduction of generic or limited list prescribing; and what consultations are planned with medical associations.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will continue, for the time being, with the present system of prescription monitoring, which is undertaken by our Department in conjunction with the Prescription Pricing Authority. As well as statistical analysis it includes, where necessary, visits to individual general practitioners by doctors of the Department's Regional Medical Service to discuss their prescribing habits and prescribing matters in general. Full consultation with the medical profession on implementation of the limited list proposals is now under way.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if Her Majesty's Government regard persons living at the supplementary benefit level as living in poverty.

Mr. Whitney: As I explained to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 23 November at c. *325*, there is no generally accepted definition of poverty. The purpose of the supplementary benefit scheme is to bring a person's resources up to his or her requirements as laid down in regulations approved by Parliament.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the weekly fixed sum for heating above which a household in receipt of supplementary benefit will receive additional housing benefit where their landlord makes a fixed charge for the provision of full space heating within their rent;

(2) what is the weekly fixed sum for heating currently available to households, in receipt of the long term basic scale rate of supplementary benefit, excluding any additional requirements, where there is no fixed charge in their rent for heating, comprising *(a)* one adult, *(b)* two adults and *(c)* two adults and one child aged under 10 years.

Mr. Whitney: There is no specific amount for heating or any other item in the supplementary benefit scale rates. It is generally for claimants themselves to decide how to spend their benefit. Where, however, householders receiving supplementary benefit are obliged to pay a fixed charge with their rent for full space heating, they are entitled to a rebate or allowance for the amount, if any, by which the charge exceeds £6·25 a week.

Family Practitioner Committees

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will comment on the Andersen report "Computerisation of Family Practitioner Committees."

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: When we published the Arthur Andersen report on the use of computers in the family practitioner services, I made it clear that the Government welcomed the report's emphasis on the use of new technology to reduce administrative costs and improve patient care at column *324-5*. Having satisfied ourselves that the report points in the right direction, we have been looking at the questions that arise in implementing it and we intend to make a further statement shortly.

Salford AHA (Submission)

Mr. Sumberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the North-West regional health authority will reply to a submission by the Salford area health authority relating, inter alia, to the future of Prestwich hospital, Manchester.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I understand that the North Western regional health authority, having met representatives of Salford health authority, are urgently considering proposals in preparation for a discussion at the regional health authority's meeting on 19 December. My hon. Friend may care to contact the chairman of the regional health authority for any further information.

General Practices (Prescription Policies)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for officials from his Department to visit general practices with a view to ascertaining prescription policies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our Department's regional medical officers regularly discuss prescribing policies in the course of their visits to general practices.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants and how many children will be affected by the decision to cancel the increase in the housing benefit children's needs allowance next April; what will be the average loss; and what will be the saving to the Government.

Mr. Whitney: The decision not to proceed with the proposed increase in the child's needs allowance in April will affect about 650,000 households containing about a million children. Where income is above the needs allowance, the weekly gain for each child would have been 29p in rent rebate or allowance cases and 9p in the rate rebate cases. Where income is below the needs allowance, the weekly gain per child would normally have been 25p in rent rebate or allowance cases and 20p in rate rebate cases. The cost of increasing the child's needs allowance would have been £12 million in 1985-86.

GP Surgery, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Mr. Golding asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to make it possible for a general medical practitioner to open a surgery in Knutton, Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are at present considering an appeal against a decision of the Staffordshire family practitioner committee on this matter.

Drugs (Parallel Imports)

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the level of scrutiny given to applications for product licences for parallel imported pharmaceutical products is identical with that given to abridged applications for product licences originated in the United Kingdom;

(2) whether he will indicate the level of medical or pharmaceutical scrutiny now being given to applications for product licences for parallel imported pharmaceutical products.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All applications for product licences under the Medicines Act 1968 are subjected to the level of scrutiny necessary for the licensing authority to be satisfied of the safety, quality and efficacy of the product. This varies from case to case depending upon the nature of the product and the quality of the application and the supporting data. In the case of an application for a licence to cover a parallel import from within the European Community and already licenced there, our medical and pharmaceutical advisers concentrate upon establishing that the product concerned is the same as or not therapeutically different from one already licensed in the United Kingdom but their scrutiny may extend to other matters and involve inquiries of the marketing authority in the EC exporting country if necessary. We also ensure that the product fully satisfies the labelling requirements of the Medicines Act and regulations.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, in each month since the start of the youth training scheme until the latest available date, how many young people have had their supplementary benefit reduced for *(a)* refusing a place on the youth training scheme and *(b)* leaving the youth training scheme prematurely; by how much their benefit has been reduced; and how much is the total sum withheld by the Government in this way.

Mr. Whitney: The numbers of young people who have had their supplementary benefit reduced because they have, without good cause refused or left prematurely a place on the youth training scheme are shown in the table.

The normal weekly rate of reduction for a claimant of YTS age during the period in question was £6·60, though different rates may have applied in a very small number of cases depending on individual circumstances. It is estimated that the total sum withheld between December 1983 and September 1984 inclusive was about £275,000.

	Refusal of place	*Premature leaving*
For the 4 weeks ending:		
20 December 1983	175	783
17 January 1984	178	731
14 February 1984	226	1,360
13 March 1984	156	1,223
10 April 1984	87	1,087
8 May 1984	63	895
5 June 1984	47	862
3 July 1984	56	804
31 July 1984	36	627
28 August 1984	27	462
25 September 1984	25	502

Notes:

1. Records of supplementary benefit reductions for this reason were not kept prior to December 1983.
2. The numbers for the period ending 8 May 1984 are corrected figures from those quoted in the reply of 3 July to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) at c. *139*.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many jobs will be lost in the British pharmaceutical industry as a result of the introduction of limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The extent of any job losses will depend on how well companies are able to recoup in other ways lost sales to the National Health Service.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why there was no prior consultation on the limited list proposals with the pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend's statement on 8 November, at columns 226-228, conveyed the Government's commitment to the principle of a limited list. We are, however, consulting on the practical application of that principle.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what prior evaluation was made of the effect of the announcement of a limited list on the investment plans of pharmaceutical companies;

(2) which pharmaceutical companies are affected by the limited list; and what is the anticipated saving from each;

(3) what calculations have been made of the likely reduction in research and development by pharmaceutical companies arising from his limited list proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Any decisions we take about the purchase of medicines by the National Health Service are bound to affect companies' sales and the various activities dependent on those sales. From information available to us we were able to indentify the companies whose sales were most at risk as a result of our decision to introduce a limited list of medicines prescribable under the NHS. The actual impact on each company will, however, depend on a number of factors, including the final shape of the proposals and the extent to which the company is able to recoup its lost NHS sales revenue from over-the-counter sales and other sources.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make arrangements to allow companies with excluded products under limited list prescription to increase prices on other products covered by the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Not automatically or as a matter of course. The profit allowed to a company under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme is based on a return on capital employed in producing medicines for the National Health Service. If a company loses NHS sales because of the limited list proposals, its capital employed, costs and allowable profit will all be reduced. In some cases this may result in actual profit falling below target, and price increases may be sought. If so, we will consider those applications in the usual way.

We are, of course, intending to make further savings as a result of our review of the PPRS, over and above the savings which will be achieved by the introduction of the

Name of property	Area (ha)	County/Region
Whitlaw Plantations	16·0	..
Greenside	5·0	..
Trabrown Hill	4·3	..
Craigburn	16·0	..
Scarce Rig I	12·0	..
Scarce Rig II	10·0	..
Westloch I	7·0	..
Westloch II	13·0	..
Eastloch	8·0	..
Marchwood	17·0	..
Fala Steel	33·0	..
Fernichurst	27·0	..
Spottiswoode (part)	192·9	..
Quixwood Blocks	48·0	..
Swinnie Plantation (part)	4·6	..
Rachan (West)	63·8	..
Stronslaney (part)	22·0	Central
Boquhan and Myreton Woods	69·5	..
Aberdona Wood	13·0	..
Starton Wood	7·5	..
Lochar Moss	1,096·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Kennels Wood and Grazings	9·0	..
Glenlaggan	50·0	..
Barclosh Sand Quarry and Plantation	5·8	..
Boreland of Girthon	21·0	..
Craigs Moss	63·0	..
Annandale Estate Woodlands	202·0	..
Twiglees Plantation (part)	0·6	..
Wood of Cree	159·4	..
Knocknarling	4·2	..
Lawesknowe	14·5	..
Land at Bush Park (part)	25·5	..
Redbank	12·0	..
Low Lochbank Plantation	1·2	..
Dalavan Plantation	1·3	..
Craigieland Wood (part)	1·3	..
Stiddrigs (part)	22·5	..
Glenmaid	10·0	..
Glenling Plantation	4·0	..
Crungie Wood (part)	3·0	..
Cove Wood	16·0	..
Fairyrow Wood	29·0	..
Shaw Rig	22·0	..
Roundfell (part)	9·5	..
Daiskairth (West)	14·5	..
Blawearie and Moss Woods	13·0	..
Auchencastle (part)	4·5	..
Heathery Brae	5·0	..
Auchenlosh	4·5	..
Land at Kilquhockadale	11·1	..
High Valleyfield	28·3	Fife
Warroch	105·0	..
Rhodders Plantation	78·5	..
Land at Rires	3·8	..
Burrowine Belt (part)	6·5	..
Carnock Moor	48·0	..
The Wilderness	47·5	Fife/Central
Waulkmill (part)	17·5	Grampian
Brideswell	5·4	..
Wind Hill	20·5	..
Auchlossan	2·4	..
Norham Wood	28·5	..
Hospital Wood	15·8	..
Smiddy Rough	10·4	..
Avochie Parcel	78·8	..
Mearns:		
Craigies Wood	10·5	..
Berrybrae etc.	100·0	..
Carron and Carmon Woods	88·0	..
Kirkson Hill	24·0	..
Hill of Canterland	94·0	..
Crosspoles Plantation	10·0	..
Hatton Mains Wood	13·0	..
Balmakewan Wood	32·5	..

Name of property	Area (ha)	County/Region
Dunnotar Woods	32·5	..
The Royal Estate of Balmoral	913·0	..
Glenlivet	3,518·5	..
Cairds Hill	142·0	..
Rora Moss and Cairntawie Wood	165·0	..
Balbithan	131·0	..
Stonehaven By-pass (part)	13·8	..
Boghead Wood	20·0	..
Drumtochty Glen	11·0	..
Hill of Maud Picnic Site	0·3	..
Balnamoon (part)	4·4	..
Tilliefourie	3·0	..
Pitfichie (part)	7·8	..
Kirkhill, Cpt 31 (Road Improvement Works)	4·7	..
Bielack Hill	4·4	..
Wood of Orton	25·5	..
Clochan (part)	2·0	..
Scabbed Hill	28·5	..
Land at Gallovie	164·0	Highland
Woodland adjacent to Achnaha	16·0	..
Black Isle Cpt 138	10·4	..
Aigas Loch Plantation	10·0	..
Roshven West	114·0	..
Roshven East	116·0	..
Dunnet Plantation	103·0	..
Cornhill (part)	2·6	..
Land at Affric	342·0	..
Glen Cassley Plantation	641·0	..
Raasay Battery Wood	11·0	..
Culloden (part)	5·0	..
Strathnacro Farm (part)	2·5	..
Kyllachy II (part)	21·0	..
Great Glen Shelter Woods	115·0	..
Glenspean	210·5	..
Kilearnan	53·0	..
Torrish Plantation	472·0	..
Glenloth	96·0	..
Loch Hourn Plantation	205·0	..
South Strathy (part)	605·0	..
Black Wood, Strathmashie	345·0	..
Erchless Plantations	223·0	..
Drumshoreland (North)	11·0	Lothian
Cousland	14·0	..
Highwood and Wakenway	82·0	..
Whittingehame Plantation	9·0	..
Ardbrecknish I and II	32·0	Strathclyde
Glencaple	58·0	..
Barr Farm (part)	4·0	..
Achnacarnan Woods	98·0	..
Land Adjacent to Pony Park, Lochgoilhead	0·1	..
Twechar	83·5	..
Coiregrogain (part)	36·0	..
Land at Cloch (part)	23·0	..
Ardachearanmore Wood	20·0	..
Allanfauld and Drumnessie	46·0	..
St. Catherine's	32·0	..
Greenisland Plantation	42·0	..
Allanton	50·4	..
Common Farm	146·0	..
Gilmilnscroft	41·0	..
Troloss	17·0	..
Sannox Plantations	114·0	..
Arns	179·5	..
South Otter	470·0	..
Rosneath South Package	633·6	..
Cladich Package	534·0	..
Loch Sween Woodlands (part)	169·0	..
Ardtrostan and Gleann Ghoinean	158·5	Tayside
Millearne	31·0	..
Muir of Holm	27·7	..
Dalrulzion (part)	1·2	..
East Shurrach	12·0	..

Name of property	Area (ha)	County/Region
Grantully, Sketewan and Easter Grantully	602·0	..
Balquhandy	17·8	..
Kippen Hill	13·2	..
England		
Land at Oxhouse Batch	3·8	Avon
Odell Castle Estate	35·0	Bedfordshire
Hockett Wood	10·5	Berkshire
Bucklebury Manor Estate (part)	83·4	..
Cold Ash and Westcrop Wood	32·0	..
Great Hazes	19·0	..
Greyfield Wood	15·0	..
Tingewick Wood	36·0	Buckinghamshire
Wilton Park Estate (part)	39·0	..
Chinkwell Wood	36·0	..
Halton Wood (part)	9·1	..
Howe Wood	5·5	..
Broadsprings	29·0	..
Chearsley Furze	8·0	..
Pollards Wood	13·0	..
High Heavens and Linzees Firs	16·0	..
Upton Wood	27·0	Cambridgeshire
Coppingford Wood	25·0	..
Wynard Park Estate	535·0	Cleveland
Trelowarren	138·0	Cornwall
Bodithiel Wood (part)	0·3	..
Bicton Woods	62·0	..
Hopesike	38·0	Cumbria
Bully and Cow Close Woods	2·6	..
Abbey Gills Wood	16·0	..
Sillfield Woods	12·5	..
Stanton Wood	27·0	Derbyshire
Pullabrook	31·0	Devon
Huntsham	55·0	..
Moreton Woods	10·0	..
Priors and Queens Copses	77·0	Dorset
Wynford Woods (East)	37·0	..
Land at Troublefield Cottage	4·3	..
Powerstock Common	95·0	..
Moors River Meadows	12·9	..
Little Burngate Wood	12·9	..
Bracket's Coppice and Birch Common	30·4	..
Stony Down Plantation	54·0	..
The Parke Estate	36·5	..
Land adjoining Oakdene Caravan Site	3·0	..
Newbiggin	267·3	Durham
Hardwick Hall Estate: Sprucely, Knotty Hill and Dog Kennel	11·5	..
Weardale	1,052·5	..
Hamsterley (part)	7·0	..
Stanley Wood (part)	32·8	..
Funnels Wood	2·8	East Sussex
Redbeards and Grassals	22·0	..
Twinstead Hall Wood	21·0	..
Cowley Woods	71·9	Gloucestershire
Colesbourne	88·8	..
Steventon Estate	21·0	Hampshire
West Wood	10·9	..
Peak Copse	13·0	..
The Bordean Estate	45·0	..
Bulls Bushes Copse	26·0	..
Abbotstone Wood	23·0	..
Corhampton Woods	102·0	..
Weston Common (part)	27·5	..
Markwells Wood	83·0	..
The Fairleigh Wallop Estate	222·4	..
Amport Woods	157·0	..
Doles Wood, Rag Copse, Long Copse	132·0	..
Ridges Copse	56·0	..
Hester and Vinneys Copse	53·0	..
Bere Whitley, Round, Berry, Gull Copses	25·0	..
Hazel Copse	2·5	..
The Roundwood Estate	56·0	..
Great Hanger Woods	53·0	..
Hardmoor Copse	6·3	..
Land at Bells Copse	1·4	..
Land at Hicknor Hill	7·5	..
Kyre Park	56·1	Hereford and Worcester
Elmley Castle	70·9	..
Hall Farm (part)	5·8	..
Manor Farm (part)	1·4	..
Dorstone Hill	17·4	..
Tiddesley Woods	75·3	..
Box wood	24·5	Hertfordshire
Millington wood	21·0	Humberside
Combley Quarr hill (part): new copse	7·6	Isle of Wight
Swainston estate	37·0	..
Nottistone down	20·0	..
Hamstead estate	95·9	..
Benacre wood	26·0	Kent
Rochester and Monk wood	294·0	..
Spring wood	5·0	..
Court farm and College wood	33·0	..
Norland and Pierland wood	35·0	..
Havelock woods	6·0	Lancashire
Gresgarth	36·4	..
Kellet Park wood	34·0	..
Doe wood	2·7	..
Holywell	28·5	Leicestershire
Martinshaw wood	103·0	..
Old Dalby (part)	32·0	..
Potterhanworth wood	67·5	Lincolnshire
Part of big wood	2·4	Norfolk
Breckles heath	34·0	..
Thetford (cpt. 104)	0·5	..
West Rudham	74·5	..
Fritton warren	51·0	..
Big covert	19·0	..
Sawpit plantation	4·5	..
Middle plantation	8·5	..
New Decoy plantations	17·0	..
Gunton park (part)	133·0	..
Morton hall	39·5	..
Monk wood (part)	2·4	Northamptonshire
Hag bank	25·7	Northumberland
Unthank hall estate	31·7	..
Titlington	58·0	..
Woodend	44·0	..
Chillingham estate	8·4	..
Featherstone castle estate	32·1	..
Ingram estate	33·0	..
Garretlee wood	27·1	..
Mosswood/Barmoor moss	35·0	..
Maglin wood (part)	15·3	..
Summit	197·0	..
Fourlaws	351·0	..
Sweethope	28·0	..
Long (plantation)	56·0	..
Lemmington estate	102·5	..
Rye close	11·0	..
Drift wood	7·9	..
Barebottom plantation	1·9	..
Pithouse plantation	2·7	..
Windybanks wood	11·3	..
Wandylaw	43·9	..
Kings plantations	37·0	..
Vauce wood (part)	3·2	..
Kilham estate	39·1	..
Commonburn farm	21·5	..
Shotton estate	44·5	..
Rotheryhaugh plantation	296·9	..
Hornby leasehold	16·0	North Yorkshire
Kippax estate	72·3	..
Rowgate	41·5	..
Maggie	23·0	..
Wintringham	129·0	..
Knapton	53·0	..

Name of property	Area (ha)	County/Region
Crookrise and Gargrave	254·0	..
Grinkle park	170·4	..
Levisham block	68·5	..
Skipsters Hagg wood	10·1	..
Oxdale, Dargo and Laurel plantations	18·2	..
Wilstrop wood	24·7	..
Jackal wood	6·2	..
Moor Covert plantation	11·3	..
Constable Burton (part)	74·5	..
Sherburn and Butterwick whins	17·0	..
Ingleby Greenhow	1·6	..
Back plantation	12·6	..
Harewood whin	8·6	..
Newton Mulgrave	43·3	..
Longside plantations	88·5	..
Fewlergate wood	12·0	..
Burnt Yates Woods	9·2	North Yorkshire
Broxa: Spring Wood East and West	17·5	..
Sand Hutton	8·5	..
Everly Banks Plantations	35·0	..
Elslack	66·5	..
Raindale Head	2·5	..
Elleron Lodge	13·6	..
Kilburn Park	8·9	..
East and West Belts and Ramshaw Quarry Plantations	27·8	..
Snape Wood	11·2	..
Irton Moor (part)	39·0	..
Kilburn Thicket	12·3	..
Brockadale	27·0	North/West Yorkshire
Brockadale/Sodwall	11·0	..
Spalford Wood	36·0	Nottinghamshire
Egmanton	37·0	..
Great Chalk Wood	37·0	Oxfordshire
Buscot and Coleshill	229·9	..
Little London Wood	6·0	..
Weston Wood	20·0	..
Shiplake Woods	26·0	..
Flowercroft Wood (part)	22·0	..
Glenburrels	8·1	Shropshire
Burnhill Green Waterworks	0·2	..
Woolston Coppice	4·5	..
Shelve Hill	46·0	..
Wart Hill	30·0	..
Doverhay	25·7	Somerset
Fry's and Birch Hill Wood	24·6	..
Owston Wood, Duck Holt	65·7	South Yorkshire
Wigfield Wood	5·6	..
Lowe Wood, Wentworth	17·8	..
Loscar and Cuthbright	27·0	..
Hawkswood and Old Spring Wood	59·0	..
Patshull & Hamley Park	49·0	Staffordshire and Shropshire
Kiln Wood (part) and Land at Padley Water	17·5	Suffolk
Arger Fen	18·0	..
Hyde Wood	41·5	..
Assington Thicks	50·0	..
Bunts Farm Woods	16·0	Surrey
Great Church Wood	5·0	..
Part Brickfield Copse	3·1	..
Scammells Grove	15·0	..
Poynters Estate:		
Chatley Wood, the Bogs and part Breach Hill Wood	18·7	..
Bramble Wood (North)	3·6	..
Bramble Wood (South)	1·0	..
Brickfield Copse (South)	1·9	..
Winterfold	129·0	..
Land at King's Park Wood	1·1	..
Ford Manor Estate:		
Cawden Birches (part)	3·0	Surrey and Kent
Moor Wood (part)	11·0	..
Old Plantation (part)	10·0	..
Reynolds Wood (part)	6·5	..
Jules Wood (part)	7·0	..
Greybury Wood (part)	12·0	..
Moons Lane (part)	1·0	..
Hartshill Hayes	47·0	Warwickshire
Wayfield	6·0	..
Woolavington Down	38·0	West Sussex
Harting Combe (West/East blocks)	14·5	..
Newells Rough and Lodgesale Woods	54·0	..
Fishpond Wood and Castle Mill Wood	27·0	West Yorkshire
Land held from Yorkshire Water Authority	972·0	..
Long Plantation	12·0	..
Kirkdyke Plantation	26·0	..
Hanging Wood and Basin Covert	9·4	Wiltshire
Wales:		
Land at Pennant Cottage	0·1	Clwyd
Coed Pantglas and Coed Dynant	31·5	..
Coed Gaerwen	18·0	..
Hafod Wood	24·2	..
Ty'n-y-twm path	9·0	..
Coed-y-fedw	12·4	..
Land adjoining Cefn Du	0·6	..
Coed-y-moelfre and Pant-y-eos	25·0	..
Kinmel Estate Woods (part)	11·6	..
Coed-y-rhos	9·3	..
Fedw Ithel and Coed-y-fforest	16·0	..
Hafodunos	43·0	..
Coed Cwm and Brynllithrig	123·0	..
Coed Rhedyn-coch	7·0	..
Coed Jenny Morgan	18·0	..
Coed yr Ynys	6·0	..
Coed Maes Robert	6·0	..
Rhydorddwyn-wen Covert	3·0	..
Long Covert and Briar Covert	6·0	..
Church Wood	7·0	..
Penymos	1·0	..
Bod Hamer	1·0	..
Ty'n-y-ffynnon	1·0	..
Clywedog	176·5	Dyfed
Plantations near Lampeter (Caeo/Brechfa Package):		
Lot 1	39·0	..
Lot 2	6·5	..
Lot 3	27·0	..
Lot 4	6·0	..
Lot 5	21·0	..
Lot 6	7·5	..
Lot 8	33·0	..
Lot 9	67·0	..
Tegfan	2·9	..
Cwm Wyre	60·5	..
Allt Lwyd Plantation	8·9	..
Crynfryn (part)	1·3	..
Coed Tan-yr-allt	7·5	..
Causeway Block	34·0	..
Allt Gou Plantation	2·5	..
Faerdre Fawr (part)	6·5	..
Bank Green Grove	13·5	..
Ffynnon-rhys	9·9	..
Motydd/Penllwybr Plantation	21·8	..
Allt Fawr (part)	4·0	..
Allt Crug Garn	5·3	..
Bargoed Plantation	9·2	..
Talog Package	489·0	..
Old Pale Package	499·0	..
Cilmaren (part)	8·6	..
Sealyham Woods	34·5	..
Allt Goch South (part)	0·6	..
Dan-yr-allt	7·0	..
Noyadd Trefawr	16·0	..
Coed Gallt-y-gyrnig	8·1	..

Name of property	Area (ha)	County/Region
Allt Cae Gwynfys	9·0	..
Allt Cwmllynfe	3·4	..
Glynllydan Plantation	8·0	..
Glanmarlais and Cwm Marlais (part)	9·0	..
Foel Allt (part)	7·8	..
Abercych (part)	23·0	..
Craig and Dorlan	8·0	Gwent
Youngs Grove	1·3	..
Henllys (part)	4·0	..
Skirrid Blocks	31·0	..
Land and Woodland at Lower Machen (part)	8·8	..
Coed Mawr Goytre	7·0	..
Hendre Estate	38·2	..
Kennels Wood	4·0	..
Tintern Package (part): Lot 10 Tower Hill Wood	13·5	..
Hayes Coppice, Goldsmiths Wood, Joint Wood	44·5	Gwent and Hereford and Worcester
Plas Bodafon (part)	25·0	Gwynedd
Wernwood (part)	14·6	..
Coed Nant and Coed Cadw Plantation	11·0	..
Hafod Boeth	159·0	..
Hafotty and Garreg Fawr	41·3	..
Coed Hafod Talog	4·7	..
Ffridd-y-mynydd	31·5	..
Land Adjoining Nanthir	2·4	..
Coed-y-glyn	41·0	..
Abergwynant East (part)	18·8	..
Maes-y-neuadd	25·1	..
Cwm Gwared	42·0	..
Hafod Fawr Estate (Tyddyn Bach)	5·6	..
Llwydiarth Plantation	2·5	..
Trefriw Service Reservoir	0·2	..
Bryn-y-Gwin	4·9	..
Coed Cefn Llanfair	21·3	..
Hafod-y-morfa	0·1	..
Aberglaslyn Wood	28·0	..
Caerhun (part)	1·3	..
Bryn Eisteddfod Woods	21·0	..
Coed Pen y Bryn	2·9	..
Coed Nant y Rhiw Felen	10·8	..
Coed Fron Acre	5·7	..
Coed y Garth	4·4	..
Marl Wood	13·0	..
Coed Bron Garth	5·4	..
Parc Mawr and Parc Bach (part)	33·9	..
Glyn Parc (part)	18·3	..
Ogmore Washery Site	24·1	Mid Glamorgan
Coed Pen y Parc (part)	13·0	..
St. John's Colliery	25·0	..
Coed Cae Gilbert	5·0	Powys
Rhiw Saeson	66·0	..
Mynydd Mawr North	3·8	..
Mynydd Mawr South	3·7	..
Foel Ortho (part)	57·7	..
Llys Coppice and Penllys Rough	16·3	..
Land at Red Lion	1·5	..
Mynydd Ty Coch	10·9	..
Cefn Hybol	8·2	..
Coed Dolgead	4·4	..
Gilfach Plantation	8·8	..
Round Wood	3·3	..
Coed Lladron	28·7	..
Stonehouse Wood	8·8	..
Coed Bron-y-fedw and Penarth	9·4	..
Cyfronwdd	7·7	..
Cefn Caregog	4·8	..
Dyffryn	11·8	..
Lower Wig (part)	6·7	..
Cwm Brith Bank	14·4	..
Pen-y-castle	10·4	..
Rhos Goch Farm (south)	6·4	..
Pool and Kerryhill Plantations	12·9	..
Rhos Goch Farm (north)	7·3	..
Cefn Derw	10·1	..
Neudd and Tygwyn	38·2	..
Allt Goch	8·0	..
Allt Fawr	20·5	..
Penarth Wood	5·6	..
Sugar Loaf	87·5	..
Maes-y-gwaelod	19·0	..
Charity Wood	3·0	..
Ffosyrhyddod	6·0	..
Park Wood	56·0	..
Nantyrffeiriad	11·0	..
Brycheiniog Main Block	634·0	..
Hay Package (part): Lot 14 Coed Mawr (part)	6·5	..
Lot 15 Coed Mawr (part)	12·0	..
Lot 17 Pen y Lan (part)	7·5	..
Lot 20 Cpt 146	3·0	..
Lot 21 Bettws Dingle (part)	16·0	..
Pontbrenddu (part)	14·0	..
Tair Onen Package (part): Lot 6 Coed St. Hilary (part)	6·0	South Glamorgan
Lot 7 Coed Arthur (part)	26·0	..
Lot 8 Coed Horseland (part)	8·0	..
Cwrt-yr-alla Woods	128·0	..
Plymouth Wood	54·9	..
Barry Link Road, Ely Section	2·2	..
Melin Llan Road Improvement	0·2	West Glamorgan
March Hywell (part)	61·0	..
Land for M4, Groes	0·4	..
Hayes Wood	28·0	..
Pelena, part Penrhiw Angharad Uchaf	45·5	..
Wern Halog Woods	20·0	..

Labour Statistics

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of local jobs per hectare supported by the principal land based activities in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The numbers of local jobs provided per 1,000 hectares by the principal land based activities in Scotland are as follows:

	Number
Dairy farming	31
Lowland crop and stock farming	22
Upland mixed farming	8
Forestry	7
Hill sheep farming	1

In addition there are supporting jobs in the primary processing of agricultural and forestry products, in haulage and in the local community infrastructure which are not readily quantifiable.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many people at the latest available date been registered as unemployed in the Greenock travel-to-work area who are *(a)* aged under 24 years, *(b)* 25 to 40 years and *(c)* 41 to 60 years;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who have been unemployed for each of the last five years in the Greenock travel-to-work area.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's letter to him of 22 October. Current information is available by age and sex for the former Greenock travel-to-work area and (from June 1983) for the revised Greenock and Port Glasgow travel-to-work area, and may be obtained from the House of Commons Library. The change in October 1982 from a registrant to a claimant based count affects the comparability of the data for the former Greenock travel-to-work area over the five years.

Licensing Hours

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will have completed his review of the Scottish experience following the introduction of flexible liquor licensing hours.

Mr. Ancram: As my right hon. Friend announced in the House on 27 March at column *141* a survey is being conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to assess the present public attitudes to the liquor licensing law. The results of the survey are expected next summer and we shall then consider what, if any, action should follow on the survey report.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Forestry Commission felling operations are carried out by local labour; and what proportion of felling and planting operations are put to competitive tender.

Mr. John MacKay: Approximately eighty per cent. of the Forestry Commission's felling operations are carried out by local labour.

About 20 per cent. of felling operations and 1 per cent. of planting operations are put out to competitive tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the recent financial returns achieved by the Forestry Commission on its planting operations carried out since 1920.

Mr. John MacKay: From 1 April 1972 the Commission has been set a target rate of return for forestry of 3 per cent. in real terms. At five-yearly intervals the assets are revalued and performance is measured against that target rate for the preceding five-year period.

The first five-year period ended on 31 March 1977 and the performance achieved within that period represented an overall return of 3·1 per cent. in real terms when expressed as a return over the whole rotation.

The second five-year period ended on 31 March 1982. The performance achieved within that period represented an overall return of 2·6 per cent. in real terms.

With only two years of the current five-year period completed the indications are that the target rate of return of 3 per cent. will be exceeded.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Forestry Commission land has been sold on a sale and leaseback arrangement; and if he is satisfied with this method of disposal.

Mr. John MacKay: Except in the case of one small property, this method of sale has failed to attract any serious interest and it has ceased to be used.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from trade unions concerning piecemeal disposal of Forestry Commission land; and whether he has any plans to privatise the operation as a whole.

Mr. John MacKay: A number of such representations have been received.

The policy relating to the disposal of land managed by the Forestry Commission was set out by my right hon. Friend on 8 November 1984 in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) at column *6*.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the environmental input of the Forestry Commission activities in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations over the last year or two on environmental aspects of the Commission's activities in Scotland. Most of these representations related to specific planting or felling proposals by private owners involving the Commission as the Department responsible for administering the felling licensing regulations and the forestry grant scheme. There were also representations relating to the Commission's own activities, mainly on the possible impact on the environment of certain sales of land.

Western Isles (Development)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much of the funds from the integrated development programme for the Western Isles has been allocated to date for agriculture and fish farming, respectively.

Mr. Younger: As at 31 October 1984, public expenditure of approximately £6½ million and £1½ million had been incurred respectively under the agriculture and fish farming sections of the Western Isles integrated development programme.

Prestwick Freeport (Grants)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the effect on the eligibility for grants of firms setting up in the Prestwick freeport of the recent changes relating to assisted areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Prestwick freeport is situated in the Ayr travel-to-work area which is an intermediate area on the new assisted area map. Firms throughout the TTWA will continue to have access to regional selective assistance on projects which create or safeguard jobs. In addition, firms within the area of the Ayr TTWA as defined before 27 September 1984 (which included the freeport) can continue to claim regional development grant, on the terms of the scheme then in force, on new assets provided up to 28 November 1985.

Republic of Ireland (Extradition Warrants)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of warrants for extradition, in connection with terrorist offences, which have been issued to the authorities in the Republic of Ireland by police forces in Scotland for which the person named therein has not yet been extradited.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have been asked to reply.

There are two cases — that of David Michael Dinsmore this year and the case of Bartholomew Burns in 1973—in which warrants have been issued by Scottish Courts in connection with offences connected with terrorism and passed to the authorities in the Republic of Ireland for extradition by police forces in Scotland for which the person named therein has not yet been extradited.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Swann Committee

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next expects to meet members of the Swann committee; and when he hopes their report on the education of children from ethnic minorities will be concluded.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is to meet members of the Swann committee socially after their next meeting on 12 December. I understand that the committee hopes to present its final report to my right hon. Friend soon after that.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current average pupil-teacher ratio in both primary and secondary schools for the West Midlands county; and how this compares with the same ratio level during the last three school years.

Mr. Dunn: The pupil-teacher ratios within maintained primary and secondary schools in the metropolitan districts of the West Midlands county in the years 1981 to 1984 are as follows:

	Primary	*Secondary*
1981	22·6	16·1
1982	22·5	16·3
1983	22·6	16·4
1984	22·1	15·9

Student Awards

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give a breakdown by education authority of the total amounts paid out in each of the last five years for which figures are available on *(a)* mandatory maintenance awards and *(b)* discretionary maintenance awards.

Mr. Brooke: The information is not readily available on an individual local authority basis. Total such expenditure in England and Wales was as follows:

*Local authority expenditure in full-value awards**

	Mandatory £ million	*Discretionary £ million*
1978-79	271·9	43·5
1979-80	332·2	49·5
1980-81	398·1	52·9
1981-82	443·3	55·2
1982-83	472·0	59·0

* Excluding expenditure on fees.

Numbers of students receiving such awards by LEA are however given in Statistical Bulletin 3/84, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students in receipt of mandatory maintenance awards received only the minimum grant in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: Information on mandatory award-holders alone is not available. The number of all full value maintenance award-holders receiving a minimum award in each of the last five years was as follows:

	Number
1978-79	25,143
1979-80	28,402
1980-81	30,648
1981-82	39,391
1982-83	47,520

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the total annual amount of assessed parental contribution towards student maintenance grants in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The amount of assessed parental contribution in respect of mandatory awards is as follows:

	£ million
1978-79	89
1979-80	84
1980-81	98
1981-82	127
1982-83	155

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students in receipt of mandatory maintenance grants were assessed for nil parental contribution in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The following information relates to the number of full-value mandatory and discretionary award-holders in England and Wales. Information in respect of mandatory award-holders alone is not available.

Numbers of students assessed for nil parental contribution

	Thousands
1978-79	93·2
1979-80	105·6
1980-81	113·1
1981-82	117·4
1982-83	109·8

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the percentage of parents' income after tax and national insurance which would be required for parental contributions to student maintenance and tuition fees in 1985-86 assuming existing rates, and publish a table showing the effects for incomes of £14,000 to £50,000 per annum before allowing for fixed commitments such as mortgage payments and so on.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) on 23 November at columns 341-42. The table extends the previous table to cover gross income up to £50,000:

'000

Family Gross Income (1984-85 Financial year)	of which Husband's earnings	Wife's earnings	Net Income after tax and national insurance	Parental contribution 1985-86	1985-86 Parental contribution as per cent. of 1984-85 net income
£	£	£	£	£	£
31,000	18,600	12,400	21,599	4,000	18·5
32,000	19,200	12,800	22,278	4,000	18·0
33,000	19,800	13,200	22,967	4,000	17·4
34,000	20,400	13,600	23,655	4,000	16·9
35,000	21,000	14,000	24,313	4,000	16·5
36,000	21,600	14,400	24,971	4,000	16·0
37,000	22,200	14,800	25,629	4,000	15·6
38,000	22,800	15,200	26,287	4,000	15·2
39,000	23,400	15,600	26,929	4,000	14·9
40,000	24,000	16,000	27,558	4,000	14·5
41,000	24,600	16,400	28,188	4,000	14·2
42,000	25,200	16,800	28,817	4,000	13·9
43,000	25,800	17,200	29,447	4,000	13·6
44,000	26,400	17,600	30,076	4,000	13·3
45,000	27,000	18,000	30,706	4,000	13·0
46,000	27,600	18,400	31,328	4,000	12·8
47,000	28,200	18,800	31,919	4,000	12·5
48,000	28,800	19,200	32,483	4,000	12·3
49,000	29,400	19,600	33,046	4,000	12·1
50,000	30,000	20,000	33,609	4,000	11·9

Notes:

The contribution payable in each case may be less than the amounts shown in the scale, particularly at its top end. This will depend on the amount of the award (maintenance and fees) towards which the contribution has to be made and whether any of the assessed contribution is offset by allowances for other dependent children.

Families with one award-holder studying outside London and with no other dependent children will be assessed to contribute on average no more than £2,412.

In 1985-86 there will be a maximum parental contribution of £4,000 per family.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he made of salary increases in calculating that 10,000 families will be relieved of the need to contribute towards student grants.

Mr. Brooke: Some 10,000 families who would otherwise have been assessed for a contribution towards the student grant next year will not be so assessed as a result of the indexation of the threshold of the parental contribution scale by around 7 per cent.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of students in receipt of a maximum grant, part grant and minimum grant, respectively, for each of the last five years for which figures are available, expressing these numbers in percentage terms.

Mr. Brooke: The information for England and Wales was as follows:

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83
Numbers of students (000's):					
Receiving a maximum full-value award	132·2	143·9	151·9	159·2	152·4
Percentage of total	35·8	39·0	40·0	39·9	36·6
Receiving only a part of a full-value award	211·9	197·0	196·9	200·7	216·1
Percentage of total	57·4	53·3	51·9	50·3	51·9
Receiving a minimum award	25·1	28·4	30·6	39·4	47·5
Percentage of total	6·8	7·7	8·1	9·9	11·4
All students with mandatory and discretionary full value awards	369·2	369·4	379·4	399·3	416·0
Percentage of total	100	100	100	100	100

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the numbers of students for each of the last three years who have become eligible for maximum grant because of increases in the threshold for parental contributions.

Mr. Brooke: In 1982-83 the threshold for parental contributions was held constant at £6,600 and 15,000 to 20,000 additional families were assessed for parental contribution. In 1983-84 and 1984-85 the threshold has been raised in line with the rise in average parental incomes and the proportion of dependent students eligible for a maximum award has therefore remained broadly the same as that in 1982-83.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, before rejecting proposals for a student partial loan scheme, he considered possible means of funding such a scheme from the private sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: A number of options for the possible replacement of all or part of the grant by a loan, including a private sector scheme, have been considered by Ministers. The Government have at present no intention of replacing any part of the student grant by a loan.

Any reform of the student support system, whether or not involving loans, would be introduced only after wide consultation.

Mr. Bellingham asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will show the parental contribution payable in 1985-86 at residual incomes of £8,000 and £50,000 for maintenance and tuition fees for one student at a provincial university.

Mr. Brooke: The parental contributions are as follows:

Residual Income	Assessed Parental Contribution
8,000	–
9,000	148
10,000	291
12,000	674
14,000	1,074
16,000	1,524
18,000	2,024

Residual Income	*Assessed Parental Contribution*
20,000	*2,345
25,000	2,345
30,000	2,345
40,000	2,345
50,000	2,345

* Equivalent to the elsewhere rate of student grant plus the designated fee of £520. In the case of families with more than one student, the assessed parental contribution will rise incrementally at a rate of £1 for every £4 of residual income to a maximum of £4,000 per family (at a residual income of £25,904).

Higher Education (Ethnic Background)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has collected on the effects of ethnic background on demand for higher education.

Mr. Brooke: The Department has carried out some analysis of the relationship between ethnic background and educational achievement. Some information about the destination of school-leavers from different ethnic groups was published in June 1981 in the interim of the committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups (Cmnd. 8273). I understand that Lord Swann hopes to submit the Committee's final report in the near future.

Teachers

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if Her Majesty's Government have any plans to increase the number of teachers.

Mr. Dunn: In view of the continuing fall in pupil numbers, the Government's expenditure plans envisage a reduction in the number of teachers employed by local education authorities in England next year. The Department's paper "Schoolteacher Numbers and Deployment in the Longer Term" discusses the prospects for the next decade. I am sending a copy to my hon. Friend.

Primary School (Saltley)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he needs any information from the city of Birmingham education department, in order to take a decision on the proposal to open a new primary school at Leigh road, Saltley.

Mr. Dunn: No.

EMPLOYMENT

Disablement Resettlement Officers

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many disablement resettlement officers there have been in each of the last five years; and what were their client numbers and placement records during the same period.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of Disablement Resettlement Officers*	*Client Numbers*		*Placings*
		Caseload at end of year	*Joining caseload during year*	
1979-80	Around 520 to 530	152,792	191,986	59,736
1980-81	Around 520 to 530	185,283	196,174	39,468
1981-82	Around 520 to 530	203,210	171,844	35,470
1982-83	Around 520 to 530	198,749	135,230	35,591
1983-84	Around 450	29,419	58,854	27,749

Changes in the figures reflect the reorganisation of employment services for disabled people which were introduced progressively in 1983-84, and the removal in October 1982 of the requirement to register for employment at jobcentres in order to claim unemployment and allied benefits. Figures from October 1982 therefore relate only to disabled people who choose to register for work at jobcentres and are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.

The figures client numbers and placings in 1983-84 do not include those disabled people helped by the general employment services in jobcentres.

Training

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress towards recognised standards of competence in adult training in line with the objectives of the new training initiative, and on the role of the Skillcentre Training Agency in this.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1984]: Significant progress towards standards-based training is being made in most sectors of the economy and this applies both to the initial training of young people and to adults. In June 1984 the Manpower Services Commission published a position statement which identified the need for greater effort to be made to open up access to jobs and to training, to ensure that training is relevant and cost-effective and to develop and improve systems of assessment and certification. The Government endorse these objectives which the Commission is carrying forward in concert with industry training organisations and standard-setting bodies.

The Skillcentre Training Agency liaises with industry and examining bodies to ensure that its courses include tests of competence to the latest standards. Industrial

to Parliament in the normal way, as a Command paper, together with all the related documents, and the necessary steps will then be taken with a view to ratification.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Soley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information in relation to the mining dispute: (i) the number of arrests in each police force area; and (ii) the number of those arrested who were released without being charged.

Mr. Ancram: I have been asked to reply.

The information held centrally, which relates to the period to 16 November, is set out below:

Police Force area	*Number of arrests*	*Number of persons arrested and released without charge*
Central Scotland	7	4
Dumfries and Galloway	3	—
Fife	199	—
Lothian and Borders	432	6
Strathclyde	688	9
Tayside	13	—
Total	1,342	19

Mr. Soley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the following information in relation to the mining dispute: (i) the number of police sent out of each police force area for duty in connection with the dispute during each week of the dispute; and (ii) the number of police injured in each police force area; how many of these were seriously injured; and how many were treated in hospital other than as outpatients.

Mr. Ancram: I have been asked to reply.

Three Scottish police forces have had occasion to deploy officers outwith their areas in connection with the current dispute in the mining industry. The occasions and numbers of officers involved are shown in Table 1 below. Generally the deployments have been for only very limited periods during the weeks in question.

Table 1
Total number of officers deployed during week

Force and week commencing	*Number*
Central Scotland	
27 August	411
3 September	91
1 October	15
8 October	48
12 November	109
Fife	
11 June	41
20 August	219
10 September	31
12 November	78
Lothian and Borders	
20 August	65
1 October	113
8 October	87
5 November	36

Details of Scottish police officers injured during the dispute are shown in table 2.

Table 2

Force	*Injured*	*Number seriously injured*	*Hospitalised*
Central Scotland	1	—	—
Fife	13	1	1
Lothian and Borders	55	—	—
Strathclyde	19	—	—
Tayside	6	—	—

SCOTLAND

Teachers (Pay)

65. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will be in a position to take a decision on the setting up of an unrestricted independent review body to set the salary scales for all grades of the teaching profession.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him of 9 November 1984 at c. *11*.

Hyperbaric Oxygen

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the centres in hospitals in Scotland where hyperbaric oxygen for the effective treatment of carbon monoxide intoxication is available.

Mr. John MacKay: There are National Health Service hyperbaric oxygen facilities at the Western infirmary, Glasgow, and at Dyce airport, Aberdeen. These facilities are available to clinicians for the treatment of patients suffering from carbon-monoxide poisoning.

Blind Persons

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what special steps he will take to ensure that unemployed blind people, wishing to begin a business venture with the support of the enterprise allowance scheme but who are unable to read the literature provided, understand that they must not make attempts to start their businesses before they apply.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Blind persons seeking information about the enterprise allowance scheme are given a full explanation of its aims and conditions by jobcentre staff, assisted as necessary by one of the commission's blind persons resettlement officers. Written information about the Scheme is, of course, available for use by sighted friends or relatives.

Forest Land (Sales)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total area and value of forest land sold or in the process of being sold since the passing of the Forestry Act 1981; and whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all such properties and the selling price in each case.

Mr. John MacKay: Between the passing of the Forestry Act 1981 and 21 October 1984—the latest date for which information is available—a total of £57·3 million was received from the sale of Forestry Commission land and other real assets. The area involved

included 37,299 hectares of forestry land and plantations. As at 21 October 1984 a further £32·9 million worth of land and other real assets, including 33,743 hectares of forestry land and plantations, were in the process of being sold—that is they were either on the market or had been approved for sale and reserve prices had been fixed.

Lists of forest areas which had been sold up to 21 June 1984, or which were in the process of being sold at that date, were provided on 25 July 1984 in the answer I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) at c. *665-83*. List of forest areas sold between 22 June 1984 and 21 October 1984, or which were in the process of being sold at 21 October 1984.

As regards publication of the selling prices of individual properties I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 28 November 1984, at c. *494*.

Forest areas sold between 22 June 1984 and 21 October 1984

Name of Property	*Area (ha)*	*Region/County*
Scotland		
Land at Eshiels	2·2	Borders
Pilmuir and Dipper Woods	30·9	..
Barend Wood	15·0	Dumfries and Galloway
Dalskairth (East)	8·0	..
Crossford	16·0	..
Caitloch	26·0	..
Strathmilligan	28·0	..
Kirkland (part)	0·8	..
Land adjoining Sheep Park Lodge, Barnbarroch	0·3	..
Goat Quarry No. II	13·3	Fife
Drumgoudrum	73·4	Grampian
Tore and Glackmore (part)	22·3	Highland
Cluny Plantation (East)	17·0	..
Craggie	48·0	..
South Strathy (part)	940·0	..
Lawhead	5·8	Lothian
Dungavel Plantation	1,311·5	Strathclyde
Kilmichael Beg (part)	36·4	..
Howgate	188·0	..
A83 Castleton Road Improvement	1·0	..
Carfin	36·0	..
Laggish and Dochroyal	167·1	..
Sightline Clearance at Kilmichael Beg	0·5	..
Tamano Wood	14·0	Tayside
West Shurrach	4·0	..
England		
Bucklebury Manor Estate (part)	0·6	Berkshire
Round Wood	11·0	Buckinghamshire
Lenborough Wood	37·0	..
Penley Wood	49·0	..
Sowerby: Lot 1 Sowerby Wood	110·0	Cumbria
Blacksnib	12·5	..
Francismoor Wood	18·0	..
Sawmill Wood	61·5	..
Murthwaite	11·7	..
Duncliffe Wood	87·0	Dorset
Hardwick Hall Estate: Cpts 53 and 54 and Brick Kiln	6·7	Durham
Newlands Wood and Long Shaw	6·0	East Sussex
Navestock Estate	53·8	Essex
Siccaridge Wood	27·7	Gloucestershire
Stanway Estate	158·4	..
Great Covert	82·0	Hampshire
Andover Package	386·0	..
Wallop Hill Down	21·7	..
Ramridge Copse	29·0	..
Round Wood	2·6	..
Ilchen Row	5·0	..
Weethley, Williams and Cowley Woods	84·0	Hereford & Worcester and Warwickshire
Combley Quarry Hill (part):		
Elenors Grove	5·6	Isle of Wight
Puckers Copse	14·5	..
Staynes Copse	1·6	..
The High Chart	75·0	Kent
Land at Weybourne	4·3	Norfolk
Greenhills Wood	7·0	..
Bridgham Heath	3·7	..
Spring Wood	19·0	..
Gunton Park (part)	78·5	..
Foxley Wood	118·0	..
Wooley Plantation	8·0	Northumberland
Wishaw	216·0	..
Southwold	31·5	North Yorkshire
Leppington Wood	8·6	..
West Moor Plantations	2·9	..
Swinton Estate and President's Wood	459·1	..
Bishopwood Mainline Diversion	3·3	..
Gotham Hill Wood (part)	32·0	Nottinghamshire
Mogg Forest	19·0	Shropshire
Boons and Bullers Copse	3·8	Somerset
Swinston Hill Wood	20·0	South Yorkshire
Enville Estate (The Million)	230·2	Staffordshire
Quornden Wood	13·0	Surrey
Barrow Green Court	36·5	..
Ford Manor Estate:		
Bowshot Wood (part)	7·5	Surrey and Kent
Old Furzefield (part)	6·0	..
Land at Wildham	1·2	West Sussex
Southwater	142·5	..
Woodshill	38·0	..
Brinsbury Estate (part)	18·0	..
Land at Tullecombe	0·8	..
Bentley Wood	735·0	Wiltshire and Hampshire
Wales		
Blaen-y-Cwm Wood	1·4	Clwyd
Middle Blaen-y-Cwm	0·3	..
Lower Blaen-y-Cwm	3·0	..
Ochr-y-fron	18·5	..
Gop Hill (part)	19·5	..
Banc Grip (part)	5·2	Dyfed
Cilrhedyn Uchaf	4·5	..
Ffynnon Ddu Wood	27·0	..
Barbadoes Wood	2·0	Gwent
Tal-y-coed Court Woods (part)	0·2	..
Tyddyn Mawr	2·6	Gwynedd
Land adj Fridd Bryn Coch	0·8	..
Cwm Mynach Isaf	190·2	..
Coed Pen y Cefn	16·1	..
Coed-y-bedw	16·0	Mid Glamorgan
Esgair Gronwen Plantation	3·6	Powys
Tylwch Wood	26·1	..
Penybanc Wood	7·8	..
Pen-y-garn goch	65·0	..
Coed Erw Ddol	6·0	..
Llanfechan Wood	10·0	..
Coed Neuadd	3·7	..
Coed Ty-canol	4·2	..
Hay Package (part):		
Lot 9 Wern Frank (part)	6·0	..
Lot 10 Cpt 122	7·0	..
Pencae	6·0	..
Hendre Ladis	29·0	..

Forest areas in the process of being sold at 21 October 1984

Name of property	*Area (ha)*	*County/Region*
Scotland		
The Grange (part) and Lumsdaine Farm (part)	52·0	Borders
Ewieside	35·0	..
Whinny Brae	27·0	..
Craik Farm Shelter Belt	10·0	..
Ellemford Bridge Plantation	11·0	..

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been searched when visiting Her Majesty's prison, Walton, in each of the past three years; and what were the findings of such searches.

Mr. Mellor: Information about the number of women searched is not available, and the results of searches are not recorded by reference to the sex of the visitor concerned.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Brittan: For 1983-84 it is estimated that about 0·01 per cent. of Home Office running costs was attributable to duties which had to be carried out as a result of membership of the European Communities.

Elections (Statistics)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a list in the *Official Report* showing the percentage of the poll in each constituency at the last general election, indicating the six polling stations which had the highest and the six polling stations which had the lowest percentage polls and the constituencies in whicy they are situated.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for the last general election which six constituencies in England had the highest and which six constituencies had the lowest percentage poll; which six polling stations in England had the highest and which six polling stations had the lowest percentage poll; what those percentages were; and, in the case of the polling stations, in which constituencies they were situated;

(2) if he will list for the last general election which six constituencies in Wales had the highest and which six constituencies had the lowest percentage poll; which six polling stations had the highest and which six had the lowest percentage poll; what those percentages were; and, in the case of the polling stations, in which constituencies they were situated;

(3) if he will list for the last general election which six constituencies in Scotland had the highest and which six constituencies had the lowest percentage poll; which six polling stations had the highest and which six polling stations had the lowest percentage poll; what those percentages were; and, in the case of the polling stations, in which constituencies they were situated.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

Information for the 1983 parliamentary general election on the number of valid votes counted as a percentage of the number of electors in each constituency is given in table 4 of "Election Expenses" (House of Commons Paper 130). Corresponding information for polling stations is not collected centrally.

Rape and Sexual Assault

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cases of rape and sexual assault have been reported to the police for each of the last five years; and of these, how many cases reported have led to prosecutions;

(2) how many prosecutions for rape and sexual assault have resulted in *(a)* convictions and *(b)* acquittals in each of the last five years;

(3) what type of sentence has been passed on those persons convicted of rape and sexual assault in each of the last three years.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" including the supplementary tables: for notable offences recorded by the police in table 2.9 of the volume for 1983 (Cmnd. 9349): for prosecutions, convictions and sentences in table Sr j 1-101.1(A) of vol. 1 and table 2.1(A) of vol. 2 of the supplementary tables for 1983 and in the corresponding tables in the volumes for earlier years. The figures for rape include some offences other than under section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, including offences of aiding and abetting and attempts.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Oxford and Cambridge University (Entrance Statistics)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many advanced level secondary school pupils applied for and obtained a place at either Oxford or Cambridge university for the 1984-85 academic year; and how these numbers compare with the four previous academic years.

Mr. Brooke: The number of United Kingdom candidates applying for and obtaining a place at Oxford and Cambridge universities in each of the last five years was as follows:

	Applicants	*Acceptances*
1984-85	14,026	5,484
1983-84	14,359	5,334
1982-83	14,244	5,357
1981-82	13,563	5,464
1980-81	13,580	5,552

The numbers include a small number of students from further education colleges as well as school pupils.

The numbers of acceptances include a few conditional acceptances at Oxford, a small proportion of whom fail to meet the required conditions.

Student Awards

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he now has for putting into effect the partial loans scheme.

Mr. Brooke: The Government have at present no intention of replacing any part of the student grant by a loan.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is his intention to uprate the residual income thresholds for parental contributions to student grant in line with prices, earnings or some other measure.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 14 November 1984 at columns 238-39.

VAT (Books and Periodicals)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the extra cost to local education authorities if value added tax is charged on books and periodicals.

Mr. Dunn: The application of VAT to books and periodicals would not result in any increase in their expenditure since local education authorities are able to reclaim VAT paid on goods and services in respect of their non-trading activities.

Higher Education (Report)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his response to the proposals made in the report entitled "Britain's Future: the Economy and Higher Education," published by the National Association of Teachers of Further and Higher Education, a copy of which has been sent to him; and what recommendations he will be issuing arising from that report.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend welcomes the document's recognition of the importance of higher education for the development of the economy, but regrets that it does not show equal recognition of the importance for the economy of containing the growth in public spending. He is currently considering the future development of higher education generally in the light of the advice he has received from the University Grants Committee and the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education, and plans to bring forward his proposals early next year.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Sir Keith Joseph: About 0·3 per cent.

Overseas Students (Fees)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the increases made by the Government in fees for overseas students; and what recent representations he has received on the matter.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend sets maximum fees only for overseas students who began their courses before 1 September 1980, who are excluded from the effects of the Government's policy that overseas students should pay fees that cover the cost of their education. He announced new maximum fee levels for such students in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) on 21 February this year. My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations on those fees. For other overseas students, institutions and local education authorities are free to determine the fee to be charged in accordance with the Government's policy and in the light of their own circumstances.

Science Budget

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has yet received the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the allocation of the science budget for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes. I received the board's advice last Friday and am publishing it today. Copies are available in the Library. I expect to inform the board of my conclusions very soon.

Essex

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent, per child, in real terms in each of the last five years in primary and secondary schools in Essex on *(a)* books, *(b)* equipment and *(c)* maintenance and repair, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *355*]: The average expenditure per pupil in real terms, on books, equipment and maintenance and repairs in each of the five years to 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, are set out in the following table. The combined figures for primary and secondary schools are given.

Per pupil expenditure (£' 1982-83 prices)

Financial Year	*Books*		*Equipment*		*Repairs and Maintenance*	
	Essex	*Non-Met. counties*	*Essex*	*Non-Met. counties*	*Essex*	*Non-Met. counties*
	£	£	£	£	£	£
1978-79	7	8	19	19	32	35
1979-80	7	8	19	18	35	36
1980-81	7	7	16	17	39	39
1981-82	6	8	15	17	33	36
1982-83	7	8	18	19	44	41

The 1982-83 prices have been calculated using the Publishers' Association school books index for books, the RPI, all items except food index for equipment and the local authorities' non-teaching cost index for maintenance and repairs.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the real value of the capitation allowances in the primary and secondary schools in Essex for each of the last five years, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. 355]: The information requested is not available. No central record is kept of capitation allowances.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent in real terms in each of the last five years on each child attending primary and secondary schools in Essex, compared with the average for the non-metropolitan counties.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. 355]: The average net institutional recurrent expenditure per pupil in real terms in each of the five years to 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, are set out in the table. The combined figures for primary and secondary schools are given.

Net Institutional Recurrent Expenditure per Pupil (1982-83 prices)

Financial Year	*Essex* £	*English Non Met. Counties* £
1978-79	697	717
1979-80	718	729
1980-81	715	735
1981-82	713	743
1982-83	741	764

WALES

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what he estimates has been the cost to date to the Welsh economy of the mining dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: It is not possible at this stage to make detailed estimates of the cost of the strike as suggested, but in his Autumn Statement of 12 November in columns. 415-429 my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave an indication of the effects of the public sector borrowing requirements for the country as a whole.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: For 1983-84 approximately 3 per cent. of the running costs of the Department are directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Vosper Thornycroft Ship Repairers Ltd.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the conditions appertaining to the offer of sale by British Shipbuilders of Vosper Thornycroft Ship Repairers Ltd., in respect of the subsequent maintenance of the business of shiprepairing and of the various sites.

Mr. Butcher: I have asked British Shipbuilders to ascertain the intentions of the prospective purchasers and I hope that it will be possible for them to sell the company as a shiprepairer. However, British Shipbuilders is not seeking to impose a formal condition to this effect.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Butcher: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Yorkshire Water Authority

Sir Michael Shaw asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the Yorkshire water authority will be published.

Mr. Fletcher: The report is published today. The commission was asked to report on the efficiency and costs of, and the service provided by, the Yorkshire water authority.

The authority was reconstituted on 1 October 1983 as a result of the Water Act 1983 and a new chairman and board appointed. The commission note organisational and structural changes since put in hand and commends the effect which these, combined with the setting of challenging performance targets, are having in improving efficiency.

The commission identifies scope for further improvement, for example in the need for the authority to develop a structured approach to the assessment of manpower needs, but recognises that the Authority is making great efforts to improve its efficiency and effectiveness by implementing a wide range of management techniques.

The commission has indicated which of its suggestions for improvements should have priority.

The commission notes the extent to which there is a need to improve the standards of service to acceptable levels particularly in relation to water supply and sewerage. It suggests that the time has now come for the authority to work towards a more transparent link between levels of efficiency, minimum acceptable standards of service and future performance aims.

The commission was asked how changes in quality of service would affect costs and the report includes illustrative calculations. The Commission noted that the authority saw such studies as beneficial in assessing priorities and relating its decisions to customers' views on the costs of improvements in services.

Finally, the commission was asked to consider whether the authority is pursuing a course of conduct which operates against the public interest. It concludes that it is not.

The authority will be publishing its preliminary response to the commission's findings within three to four

months, in the light of which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will make a statement.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

38. **Mr. George Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will detail the level of grant in aid made available to the Scottish Citizens Advice Bureaux for each of the last five financial years, as well as for the current financial year; and if he will indicate the criterion he uses to determine the level of grant in aid.

Mr. Fletcher: The total grant in aid paid to the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux since 1979-80 is as follows:

	£
1979-80	228,384
1980-81	415,200
1981-82	503,733
1982-83	530,608
1983-84	629,700

In the current financial year, the cash limit is £700,400.

The grant in aid is determined on the basis of an analysis of needs considered within the framework of public expenditure constraints.

39. **Dame Judith Hart** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funds he is making available to citizens advice bureaux in Scotland over the next two years.

Mr. Fletcher: The information is not yet available. Expenditure plans for 1985-86 and 1986-87 have not yet been laid before Parliament and the exact amount of grant to individual organisations has yet to be decided.

Pharmaceutical Exports

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to seek powers to tighten controls on the export of pharmaceutical products by British-based companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been asked to reply.

Apart from certain biological products, there are no statutory controls over the export of pharmaceutical products by British-based companies. For those countries which require it the Government will certify the licensing status in the United Kingdom of exported medicinal products and their source of manufacture, in accordance with World Health Organisation guidelines. We have no plans to alter these arrangements, but we shall continue to offer as much information as possible about the licensing and pricing of drugs in the United Kingdom to those overseas Governments who request it.

EMPLOYMENT

Wage Trends

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what have been the trends in wages paid since 1979 to young men and young women, respectively; and what has been the trend in unemployment for these categories over the same period.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Figures of the average gross weekly earnings of full-time male and female employees working a full week and aged under 18 years are published regularly for each April in tables 10 and 11 of the report, "New Earnings Survey", part A. Copies of the reports from 1979 to 1984 inclusive are available in the Library.

Information on unemployment analysed by age and sex is also available in the Library. However, current figures cannot be compared directly with those for 1979 mainly because of the change from the registrant-based to the claimant-based unemployment count in October 1982.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The proportion is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service (Performance-related Pay)

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action is being taken to introduce performance-related pay in the Civil Service.

Mr. Hayhoe: The programme of action I announced in July last year was directed at the improvement of the general quality of personnel management in the Civil Service as part of the Government's overall policy for improved management efficiency, and the achievement of better value for money by all civil servants. The introduction of performance-related pay was an important task under this programme.

The Government believe it right to provide additional incentives to good performance. This becomes more important in a contracting organisation, where there are reduced opportunities for promotion, which hitherto has been the main means of giving recognition to good performance. Performance-related pay is widely recognised as a valuable management tool and has been recommended to the Civil Service on a number of occasions.

At the same time, the successful introduction of this kind of arrangement into an organisation as large and complex as the Civil Service would be a major operation carrying with it significant changes in the functions of managers and their relationships with their staff. There are choices to be made about the form of a performance-related pay scheme, as well as about its administration and the systems and procedures needed for that purpose. Cost is also an important factor.

For all these reasons, performance-related pay cannot be introduced immediately across the whole of the Civil Service. But the Government consider it important that some steps should be taken. They therefore think it right to introduce with effect from April 1985 an experimental scheme under which staff at the grading levels of Grade 3 (Under Secretary) down to Principal and equivalent grades will have the opportunity to earn a bonus for particularly good performance. The experiment will last for three years and its operation will be carefully monitored. A total of £4 million is being made available to fund this initial experimental scheme in each of the three

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The population of each health district presents its own characteristics and our opinion is that local needs rather than any kind of national norms should be the relevant consideration in establishing what is the appropriate level of service for any district.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give his Department's best estimate of the shortfall in the number of *(a)* physiotherapists, *(b)* occupational therapists and *(c)* therapists available for the treatment of the population aged 65 years or over; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are examining intitial material from surveys being carried out which suggests that the shortfall in *(a)* and *(b)* may be of the order of 4 per cent. and 15 per cent. respectively. So far as *(c)* is concerned, I would refer the hon. Member to my answer to his other questions today.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many post offices have been distributed with new order book covers in the light of the dispute involving computer staff of his Department; and how many computer tapes covering automatic credit transfers have been run since the commencement of the dispute of the Newcastle computer centre.

Mr. Newton: The distribution of new order book covers showing the new benefit rates in respect of the 7 million retirement pensioners and over 3 million recipients of child benefits to all post offices has been completed. The remaining child benefit recipients have already received order books showing the new rates. The normal arrangements for payment to pensioners by credit transfer resumed on 23 November and payment of the new benefit rates will be included with the appropriate regular payment. The arrangements for payment of child benefit by credit transfer have continued to operate throughout the dispute.

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services at what amount the £10 Christmas bonus for retirement pensioners and others should be set to keep it in line with inflation since its introduction.

Mr. Whitney: The Christmas bonus was introduced in 1972 but was not paid by the previous Administration in 1975 and 1976. To restore the value at which it was introduced in 1972, it would need to be increased to £40. To restore the value at which it was re-introduced in 1977, it would need to be increased to £19.

Heating Allowances

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response he has sent to Age Concern in answer to its recent letter to him about the real effects of pension rises against the reduction in the level of allocations of heating allowances.

Mr. Newton: I wrote to the director of Age Concern today and I have placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Medical Negligence

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new measures he proposes to expedite compensation payments to patients arising from medical negligence or to bereaved relations or dependants in the case of a deceased patient; and if he is satisfied that the current levels of compensation payments allocated to such patients are adequate.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Health authorities are responsible for handling legal claims for compensation. In our guidance on the release of information in legal cases we urge authorities to be as helpful as possible. I would hope that no health authority would cause needless delay in resolving a claim. Levels of compensation are for the courts to decide in the light of the particular circumstances of a case or for the parties concerned to agree between themselves.

NHS (Managers)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which section of which Act of Parliament gives him the power to confirm or refuse to confirm the appointments of a general manager by a regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The powers of the Secretary of State in respect of the appointment of health authority staff are those conferred by paragraph 10 of schedule 5 to the NHS Act 1977.

Our guidance circular on the appointment of general managers asks regional health authorities to submit their proposals for identifying a general manager to the Secretary of State for discussion with the regional health authority chairman to confirm that the Secretary of State is content, before the authority proceeds to a formal decision.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. John Townend asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many striking miners are drawing sick pay.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not available.

Drugs (Side Effects)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many persons, male and female, were admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom for treatment for the side effects of drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, and 1983;

(2) what was the nature of the side effects for which people were admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom resulting from the taking of prescribed drugs in the benzodiazepine groups in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November, c. *49*]: We do not collect the detailed information requested on hospital admissions centrally. The side effects and adverse reactions associated with benzodiazepines are well known and described in the data sheets for prescribers prepared by the manufacturers. They rarely give rise to the need for hospital admission unless an overdose has been taken.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether his Department will publish the results of research sponsored by it into the side effects of taking drugs in the benzodiazepine group.

(2) what research has been sponsored by his Department into the side effects of prescribed drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November, c. *49*]: The Government support research into this topic through the Medical Research Council, the Government-funded body supported mainly under a grant-in-aid from the science Vote of the Department of Education and Science.

The council has informed us that the total costs of the projects listed below which it has supported during the four financial years have been:

	£
1980-81	332,000
1981-82	389,000
1982-83	336,000
1983-84	404,000

The projects, by chronological order of starting date within these four financial years (with finishing dates where they are no longer being supported) are as follows:

Department of Pharmacology, University of Oxford
Chronic effects of centrally active drugs and their metabolites on brain chemistry and structure including gas — phase chromatography—mass spectroscopy. Started 1 November 1972, finished 1 December 1983.

Institute of Psychiatry, London
Psychophysiological and Biochemical measures in the assessment of Psychotropic drug effects. Started 1 April 1976.

University of Wales, College of Medicine, Cardiff
Investigation of improved methods of treatment and biochemical factors in affective disorders. Started 1 April 1976.

MRC Clinical Pharmacology Unit, Oxford
Development of methods for monitoring drug therapy in individual patients: Psychotropic drugs. Started 1 April 1976, finished 31 March 1982.

Department of Pharmacology, School of Pharmacy, London
An alternative approach for the manipulation of Gaba activity in the brain. Started 1 January 1980, finished 31 December 1982.

Clinical Research Centre, Harrow, Middlesex
Clinical studies of Psychotropic drugs: modes of action and physiological and biochemical correlates. Started 1 April 1980.

MRC Brain Metabolism Unit, Edinburgh
Cellular and clinical studies of effective disorders. Started 1 April 1980, finished 31 March 1982.

Department of Pharmacology, University of Bristol
Behavioural and biochemical investigations on the mode of action of benzodiazepines and their long term effects. Started 1 January 1981, finished 31 December 1983.

MRC Clinical Pharmacology Unit, Oxford
Clinical studies of the mechanisms of action of ECT, Antidepressent drugs and new drugs for depression and anxiety. Started 1 April 1982.

Department of Physiology, University of Oxford
Behavioural, Electrophysiological and Neurochemical effects of anxiolytic and anti-depressent treatments. Started 1 April 1982.

Department of Pharmacology, University of Oxford
Mechanisms involved in toxicity and in the development of tolerance shown by centrally active drugs. Started 1 October 1982, finished 30 September 1984.

Department of Pharmacology, Institute of Psychiatry, London
Behavioural pharmacology of the benzodiazepine receptor complex. Started 4 October 1982.

Department of Pharmacology, Institute of Psychiatry, London
Psychometric performance and neuroradiological measures in long term benzodiazepine users. Started 1 January 1983.

MRC Clinical Pharmacology Unit, Oxford
Clinical biochemical pharmacology of depression and anxiety. Started 1 April 1983.

Department of Psychology, Birkbeck College, London
An investigation of the role of brain gaba in the anti-anxiety effects of benzodiazepines. Started 3 October 1983.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many unoccupied hospital beds there were in England in 1983.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November, c. *472*]: In 1983 there was a daily average of 66,660 beds recorded as being available but not occupied in National Health Service hospitals in England. Bed occupancy figures are based on a midnight count and do not threfore reflect the use of beds by patients who do not stay overnight, for example, day surgery cases whose numbers have increased from 432,000 in 1978 to 581,000 in 1983.

A variety of reasons may lead to some beds being unoccupied. These include the need to have beds available for emergencies, unexpectedly early discharges which leave a bed available until the next day and unpredictable admissions (eg, in maternity cases).

The health services information steering group recommended in its first report that bed use data should include all patients using a ward in a 24-hour period and that aggregated bed occupancy statistics should not be used as an indicator of efficient bed use. A more useful measure of bed utilisation is patient throughput per available bed. For instance, in 1983 17·5 in-patient cases were treated per available bed compared with 14·5 in 1978.

NHS (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the standard of provision of ancillary services in the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 29 November, c. *576*]: I am satisfied with the general standard of these services although there are no doubt occasions, in an organisation as large as the National Health Service, when they fall below the high standard required. Our policy of competitive tendering will help to ensure that these services are provided as efficiently and economically as possible, whilst maintaining standards, which are specified in tender documents.

Perinatal Deaths

Mrs. Renée short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what change there has been in the perinatal mortality rate in the west midlands in social classes III, IV and V since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November, c. *624*]: The available information is given in the table, but it should be noted that analyses of perinatal mortality by social class within a region are based on a small number of events in the overall sample and can therefore produce large random variations in the figures over one or two years. The total rate of perinatal mortality in the region over a longer period (1979-1983) fell by 27 per cent, only a little less than the figure of 29 per cent. for England as a whole. The regional health authority, in its outline strategic plan, has given a high priority to the further reduction of perinatal mortality locally.

West Midlands. Perinatal Mortality: Rate per 1000 Total Births.

	Social Class (Legitimate Births Only)		
	III	*IV*	*V*
1981	13·3	13·9	13·1
†1983	11·2	15·0	19·4
Change	−2·1	+1·1	+6·3

* Live births by social class are estimated from a national 10 per cent. sample.
† Provisional.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs and Excise

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise management plan 1984-85, how many officers are engaged full-time in dealing with restrictions or controls over dangerous drugs, firearms, explosives and indecent and obscene articles; if such officers are organised in special units; and what is the management structure.

Mr. Hayhoe: The number of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise staff engaged full-time on customs preventive and non-revenue fraud work at 31 March 1984 was 3,060. These duties include dealing with restrictions or controls over dangerous drugs, firearms, explosives and indecent and obscene articles.

Many of these staff are deployed at ports, airports and inland clearance depots where thay operate both static and flexible controls and also man intelligence gathering teams. There are also mobile task forces and mobile rummage crews available to enhance these controls and participate in targetted operations. Coastal waters are patrolled by revenue cutters, often working in conjunction with land based mobile forces. 339 staff were engaged at 31 March 1984 on non-revenue fraud work. This included 201 (since increased to 212) specialist drugs investigators working in special teams.

The management structure is headed by two headquarters directorates—customs and outfield, who cover questions relating to policy and management of resources—but operational control is delegated to 22 regional collectors, within whose areas of responsibility the maximum use is made of flexible deployment to match the needs of the work.

In 1984-85, and extra 60 posts have been allocated to enhance preventive controls of passengers and freight. A further increase of 100 posts for the fight against drugs smuggling is planned for 1985-86.

Nationalised Industries (Return on Capital)

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the return on capital *(a)* in each of the nationalised industries and *(b)* in all other commercial state concerns; and what is the total capital involved in each case.

Mr. Peter Rees: It is not possible to provide information for each nationalised industry on a comparable basis. Available figures are as follows:

Rates of Return on Capital Employed 1983—National Accounts Basis

Industry	*Capital Stock £ billion*	*Rates of Return*	
		Including subsidy per cent.	*Excluding subsidy per cent.*
Air Support Services (BAA; CAA)	1·2	7·4	7·2
Air Transport (BA)	1·3	6·9	6·9
Other Inland Transport (NBC; STG; LRT)	3·6	−2·0	−18·7
Posts and Telecom (PO; BT)	19·4	3·8	3·8
Rail (British Railway Board)	13·8	−1·5	−8·5
Shipbuilding (British Shipbuilders)	1·2	−11·6	−13·0
Steel (BSC)	9·0	−9·2	−9·2
Public Corporations (other than nationalised industries)	12·2	4·6	0·7

1983 rates of return for industries in the standard industrial classification division 1 (the energy and water supply industries) are not yet available as the assumptions underlying the rates, in particular asset lives, are at present under review by the CSO.

The basis for the calculation of the figures, which relate to all the public corporations in particular standard industrial classifications, was set out in the Treasury evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in 1981 (published as appendix 12 of volume III of its report "Financing of the Nationalised Industries" HC 348-III). The rates of return given are based on national accounts statistics and, therefore, differ from figures based on nationalised industries' published accounts.

Pensions

Mr. Murphy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultation he is planning to have regarding taxation of pensions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have no such plans.

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the extra cost to an employer in percentage terms if a pension fund was taxed on investment income and capital gains where benefits remain the same for existing and future pensioners.

Mr. Moore: For a particular pension fund, any additional cost would depend upon the rate of tax and the circumstances of the fund. These would include the nature of the assets held by the fund and the extent of the fund's liabilities to current pensioners and serving members. I regret that it is not possible to provide a general answer.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Hayhoe: The number of registered blind people employed by Her Majesty's Treasury at 1 June in each of the last four years was:

	Number
1 June 1981	1
1 June 1982	4
1 June 1983	4
1 June 1984	3

European Communities (Supplementary Finance)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he intends to take in relation to the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Undertaking on Supplementary Finance for the Community) Order following the High Court decision by Mr. Justice Hodgson on 28 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Government are still considering their response to the action brought by Mr. O. Smedley. There is no question of rushing the section 1(3) Order through the House. The Government have made it clear throughout that they would not ask the House to approve the intergovernmental agreement until the European Community Council of Ministers has finally adopted the text on budgetary discipline. That has not yet been done; the question of budgetary discipline is on the agenda of the European Council this week. The House will have a full opportunity to debate the intergovernmental agreement and to vote before any money is paid to the Community.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why he tabled the order providing for supplementary funds for the Common Market before an agreement had been reached on budgetary restraint.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The draft Order was tabled in good time, so as to provide full opportunity for considering it. The Government repeatedly made it clear that Parliament would not be asked to approve implementation of the intergovernmental agreement for supplementary funds for 1984 before effective measures on budgetary discipline have been adopted.

Mortgages

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the estimated number of mortgagors with mortgages of £15,000, £20,000, £25,000 and £30,000, respectively, in 1984-85 in each tax band.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to the reply*, 20 November, c. *96*]: The latest estimates are as follows:

	Thousands of mortgagors					
	Range of mortgage outstanding					
*Marginal tax rate**	*Under £15,000*	*£15,000 -£19,999*	*£20,000 -£24,999*	*£25,000 -£29,999*	*£30,000 and over*	*Total*
30 per cent.	4,490	820	580	310	290	6,490
40 per cent.	110	25	20	15	30	200
45 per cent.	75	15	15	15	30	150
50 per cent.	30	10	10	10	20	80
55 per cent.	15	5	5	5	10	40
60 per cent.	10	5	5	5	15	40
Total	4,730	880	635	360	395	7,000

* After taking mortgage interest (and other) relief into account.

Customs and Excise (Confiscated Books)

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to the answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, whether the court cases referred to involve the Obscene Publications Acts, the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Customs (Consolidation) Act 1876; whether the instructions were in writing; and if he will publish them.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply* 3 December, c. *17*]: Customs take into account as far as is practicable cases under all the Acts quoted.

The instructions given were oral but officers were referred to the Department's internal standing instructions. It is not the practice to publish these.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 December 1984

TRANSPORT

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Ridley: The proportion is not known, and cannot be determined without disproportionate cost.

Aerial Crop Spraying

Mr. Dormand asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to institute additional controls on aerial crop spraying; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Controls over aerial crop spraying are exercised by the Civil Aviation Authority under the Air Navigation Order 1980. The authority is just completing a thorough review of its requirements. Strengthened and more precise requirements will be in force before the beginning of next year's spraying season. Changes will include increasing the minimum horizontal separation which aircraft must maintain from houses to 200 ft; a requirement that aircraft must not fly below 200 ft over gardens; and a stipulation that water authorities must be consulted before spraying is carried out near water.

These changes are in addition to the strengthened requirements for the prior notification of adjacent occupiers which my hon. Friend and colleague the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport announced on 31 July at columns *209-210*.

In addition in the Food and Environmental Protection Bill, which is currently under consideration in another place, Ministers are seeking powers which would enable them to make regulations to complement the controls already exercised by the Civil Aviation Authority.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Bill

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many statutory instruments he estimates will have to be made to implement fully the Local Government Bill; how many will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure; how many will be subject to the negative resolution procedure; how many will be subject to no parliamentary procedure; and how many will not have to be laid before either House.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is not possible to estimate such numbers at this stage.

Dog Licence

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he is planning to have with dog-owning members of the public regarding the proposed change in dog licensing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's consultation paper on dog licensing has been sent to a number of organisations representing dog owners, as well as to individuals who have written to the Department on this subject, or whose letters have been forwarded by hon. Members. Copies are available on request from the Department. We will consider the views of all interests, including those of dog owners, very carefully before reaching final decisions.

Home Insulation

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to begin re-examining the list of measures required within the building regulations intended to conserve fuel and power; and whether his re-examination will include requirements for floor insulation.

Sir George Young: Once the new building control system is in force next year, the content of the regulations, including the requirements for the conservation of fuel and power, will be reviewed. This review will include, among other measures, the case for extending the regulations to include general requirements for floor insulation.

Historic Buildings

Mr. Bulmer asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the historic buildings currently financed or administered by the metropolitan county councils or the Greater London council.

Mr. Macfarlane: The preparation and publication of lists giving this information is the responsibility of the individual local authorities.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly attributable or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The proportion of the running costs of the Department directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

The Solicitor-General: The proportion of the running costs of the Law Officers' Department directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

Expenditure

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence for how long the United Kingdom is committed to 3 per cent. annual real increases in defence expenditure.

Mr. Stanley: The public expenditure provision for 1985-86 allows for annual growth of some 3 per cent. in real terms, excluding Falklands costs. The 3 per cent. growth commitment has not been extended into 1986-87.

Falkland Islands (Air Mail)

Mr. Critchley asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the free air mail letter facility for service men in the Falklands is to be continued; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: We fully appreciate the value and importance of the free air mail facility for service personnel in the Falklands and their families in the United Kingdom and this facility will be continued for the time being. The similar free Familygramme facility for those serving in South Georgia will likewise be continued.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Butler: This information is not available, nor can it be reliably estimated.

US Secretary of the Navy (Visit)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the visit of the United States Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, to the Scottish highlands from 6 to 9 September.

Mr. Stanley: I understand Mr. Lehman spent the weekend privately in the Scottish highlands following a number of official engagements in the United Kingdom.

Training Areas (Scotland)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any specific areas of land in Scotland have been considered for use as an Army training area since 24 January.

Mr. Stanley: The requirement for an Army training area in Scotland remains, but no specific areas are under active consideration.

Submarine Communications System (Scotland)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations have been carried out by or for his Department into the potential use of land in Scotland for an extremely low frequency communications system for submarines.

Mr. Stanley: There is a naval requirement for such a site in Scotland. Several mainland areas are under consideration, although no firm decision has yet been taken.

Nuclear Tests (Service Men)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in respect of each of the following: Operation Grapple, carried out between May 1957 and September 1958 in the Gilbert and Ellis Islands, Operation Hurricane I, carried out on 3 October 1952 at Monte Bello Islands, Western Australia, Operations Totem 1 and 2, carried out on 14 and 26 October 1953 at Emu Field, South Australia, Operations Mosaic 1 and 2, carried out on 16 May and 19 June 1956 at Monte Bello Islands, Western Australia, Operations Buffalo 1, 2, 3 and 4, carried out in September and October 1956 at Maralinga, South Australia, and Operations Antler 1, 2 and 3, carried out in June and September 1957 at Maralinga, South Australia , he will state separately: *(a)* how many service men participated, *(b)* how many of those service men participating have had their cases examined by the National Radiological Protection Board in the study commissioned by his Department, and *(c)* if the National Radiological Protection Board has available to it, for the study commissioned by his Department the scientific advice given to Her Majesty's Government on the likely effects on participants in nuclear tests.

Mr. Butler: The number of service men who participated in each of the tests referred to is not readily available at this time. My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Mr. Pattie) said in the House on 12 March 1984 that about 20,000 men participated in the entire programme.

Almost all these individuals are known, and their details are being made available to the National Radiological Protection Board for it to consider for inclusion in the study. There will be no examination of individual cases.

The scientific advice given to Her Majesty's Government has no relevance to the study. However, the NRPB is, of course, well aware of the nationally and internationally agreed radiological standards which applied during the tests.

ENERGY

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the definitions of plutonium used by agencies sponsored by or responsible to his Department, specifying the isotopic composition of each.

Mr. Goodlad: Plutonium produced in United Kingdom civil reactors is not classified by the Department or its sponsored agencies into different grades defined by isotopic composition.

Miners' Co-operatives

Mr. Marland asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to seek to encourage the establishment of miners' co-operatives for the operation of coal mines once the current dispute is ended.

Mr. David Hunt: I have stated that I am always willing to consider any such proposal, but the NUM has shown no enthusiasm for this approach.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Peter Walker: The number of registered blind people employed in my Department as at 1 June in each of the last four years was:

	Number
1981	4
1982	4
1983	4
1984	3

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Peter Walker: The proportion of the running costs of my Department directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost, but it would not be very large.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police Computers

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the constabularies outside the Metropolitan police area that have direct terminal links to the Metropolitan C department computer.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There are none.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the modus operandi or method index on the Metropolitan C department computer.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the method index includes data fields relating to persons, addresses, vehicles, offences and reference numbers.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Metropolitan C department computer has been or will be used in connection with the current miners dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his Question on 19 November at column 7. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that he still has no plans to put the computer facilities dedicated to C department to any special use in connection with the miners' dispute.

Fines (South Western Magistrates' Court)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown of the offences for which fines are still owed at the south western magistrates' court, London.

Mr. Mellor: Information on the particular offences in respect of which fines are outstanding at the south western magistrates' court could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Civil Defence Volunteers

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends that civil defence volunteers shall be instructed on law and order problems in the civil defence context.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Volunteers have an important role in civil defence, but we intend that responsibility for law and order should remain with the Government and the police.

Prisoners' Wives (Searches)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the sex of the prison officer who searched the wife of a prisoner who was visiting her husband at Her Majesty's prison, Walton, details of which have been sent to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside; and what was the extent of the search.

Mr. Mellor: The incident to which the hon. Member refers occurred on 29 October. At that time there was a special security alert at Liverpool prison, as at very many public buildings, following the bomb outrage at Brighton, and the hand luggage of all visitors to the prison was being searched. A notice was displayed at the prison gate accordingly. No exception was made in this case and the hand luggage of the prisoner's wife was searched by a male prison officer. My noble Friend, the Minister of State, will be replying shortly to the hon. Member's letters.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria is used in deciding to search wives of prisoners who visit their husbands in Her Majesty's prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The decision to conduct searches of visitors on a particular occasion is taken in the light of a range of factors, including the need to maintain security and good order and discipline within the establishment.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the searching of wives who visit their husbands at Her Majesty's prison, Walton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: One other hon. Member has written about this in the current year; there have also been a few petitions and I am advised that the governor of the prison has received about six letters. So far as we can establish in the time available, all these cases were about searches by the police when information had been received about drug smuggling.

limited list. I am about to start discussions with the representatives of the industry on the operation of the scheme.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department will take to seek to prevent doctors who presently prescribe inexpensive drugs which will not be on the limited list from prescribing instead more expensive drugs which remain available on prescription, following the implementation of limited list prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We would not expect many, if any, doctors to be so irresponsible as to provide expensive drugs unnecessarily when cheaper and equally effective drugs will be available to them on the new limited list. However, the present system of prescription monitoring will identify any significant variation in prescribing practices or costs. Our Department's regional medical officers will continue, for the time being, to undertake visits to practitioners as necessary to discuss changes in prescribing habits.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to extend the number of benzodiazepine drugs available under limited list prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The final list of drugs to remain available on the National Health Service in each of the groups covered by the limited list proposals will not be determined until consultation with the professions and industry is complete.

National Insurance (Contributions)

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the net cost to public funds of raising the lower earnings limit of national insurance contributions to £60 a week; and what would be the estimated net gain to public funds of raising the upper earnings limit of national insurance contributions to £730 a week.

Mr. Whitney: On the assumptions set out in the Government Actuary's report on the draft of the Social Security (Contributions Re-rating) (No. 2) Order 1984 (Cmnd. 9386) the net loss to the national insurance fund from raising the lower earnings limit to £60 a week would be £100 million in a full year at 1984-85 rates; the net gain to the fund from raising the upper earning limit to £730 a week would be £1,325 million (assuming the upper profits level for class 4 contributions remained unchanged).

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to introduce exemption for employers from paying national insurance contributions on sickness payments as announced in the autumn statement.

Mr. Whitney: An amendment will be put down for discussion in Committee on the Social Security Bill to provide for employers to be compensated for their share of national insurance contributions payable on payments of statutory sick pay from 6 April 1985.

Statutory Sick Pay Scheme

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will detail the latest information since 13 March on *(a)* employers with fewer than six employees, and *(b)* employers with six or more employees found to have (i) underpaid, or (ii) overpaid benefits under the statutory sick pay scheme.

Mr. Whitney: Information is not available in the form requested The information given in reply to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 27 April [c. *628*] related to the number of individual employees' cases checked during all visits to each of the two groups of employers specified. The updated results of these checks available since 13 March are as follows:—

In the 4 weeks ending (1984)	*Employers with fewer than 6 employees*			*Employers with 6 or more employees*		
	No. of individual cases checked	*underpaid*	*overpaid*		*underpaid*	*overpaid*
10 April	3,933	364	527	13,099	841	1,198
8 May	2,521	253	300	7,517	542	696
5 June	3,188	291	375	10,225	642	776
3 July	3,179	312	359	9,655	832	812
31 July	2,322	242	271	6,715	530	578
28 August	1,326	114	151	3,554	320	312

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out his reasons for extending the scope of coverage for sickness payments from eight weeks to 28 weeks effective from April 1986 as announced in the autumn statement.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's opening statement on 26 November 1984 at column 676 when moving Second Reading of the Social Security Bill.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been spent, in cost terms, by his Department in each of the last five years on promoting the take-up of benefits.

Mr. Whitney: It would not be possible without undue expense to calculate the total amounts spent by this Department on all measures designed to promote the take-up of benefits for each of the past five financial years. However, in cost terms (at 1983-84 prices) the amounts

spent on promotional press and television advertising, and on the printing of all social security benefit leaflets and posters are estimated to be approximately as follows:

	£
1979-80	*1,350,000
1980-81	*1,090,000
1981-82	*1,250,000
1982-83	†2,520,000
1983-84	1,620,000

* Excluding Department of Environment expenditure on rent and rate rebates before the introduction of housing benefit.

† Extra expenditure was incurred in this financial year on advertising the new housing benefit and statutory sick pay schemes.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to reopen negotiations on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will be meeting the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry shortly.

Pharmaceuticals (Patent Life)

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress he is making in his consideration of introducing an extension of the patent life for pharmaceutical products; what discussions he has had with the industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) on 20 November at column *116-7*.

Osteopathy

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will institute an inquiry into the practice of osteopathy; and whether he will take steps for osteopathy to have a recognised place within the National Health Service.

Mr. John Patten: We see no reason to hold such an inquiry. There is nothing to prevent a doctor from providing alternative therapies, including osteopathy, for his patients if he has the skill and training to do so. Health authorities may make use of the services of osteopaths if this is recommended by a consultant and they are satisfied that it is an appropriate use of resources, given other priorities.

NHS (Prescribed Drugs)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to remove antiseptic lozenges and sprays from the list of drugs that can be prescribed on the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are now consulting the professions and the industry on the introduction of a limited list of drugs along the lines outlined by my right hon. Friend on 8 November at column 226-8. The Government will consider any suggestions made during consultation for limited lists in other therapeutic categories but we do not at present have any plans to extend the scheme in this way.

Ambulances

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the provision of ambulances per thousand citizens *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest available statistics were compiled for the year 1982-83 by the York health authority. These show that the average number of ambulances per 100,000 population served was 15 for England and 12 for the Cambridgeshire ambulance service. However, these figures are not a good measure of service provision, since they take no account of distances to be travelled, traffic density, etc.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement regarding changes made in ambulance cover in the light of closures of hospital casualty departments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Standards of provision for both the emergency and non-emergency elements of the ambulance services have been set by our Department in relation to response times for emergency calls and waiting times for routine journeys. Responsibility for the day-to-day organisation and management of the ambulance services within those standards has been devolved to individual health authorities. In considering any rationalisation of accident and emergency services, we would expect a health authority to take into account the implications for the ambulance service, and to ensure that the standards we have set are attainable in the changed circumstances.

Satisfactory accident and emergency services depend on the support of highly trained staff, and a range of sophisticated equipment such as is available at a distict general hospital. We recognise that rationalisation of accident and emergency services based on such hospitals may, in some cases, mean longer journeys to hospital for treatment. The disadvantages of this are outweighed in most cases by the increasingly sophisticated services available from the ambulance crews, coupled with the benefits from the concentration of medical and nursing skills in a major accident and emergency department.

Dental Statistics

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth at 12 years of age in England; and how this compares with the position 10 years ago.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In 1983, the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth at 12 years of age was 3·3 in England. A comparable statistic is not available for England only in 1973 but for England and Wales together the average figure for 12-year-olds was 5·2.

Supplementary Professions

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will give his Department's best estimate of norms for trained occupational therapists per thousand population aged 65 years or over; if he will also give the norms for associated therapy aids; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give his Department's best estimate of norms for trained physiotherapists per thousand population aged 65 years or over; if he will also give the norms for therapy aids; and if he will make a statement.

of claims—are examined by the dental advisers of the Scottish Dental Estimates Board. References to the regional dental officers were as follows:

	Number
1980	1,740
1981	2,270
1982	2,570
1983	4,550

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the gross earnings of dentists in the National Health Service in each of the last five years, showing in each year the highest and lowest annual earnings paid.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Year	*Highest gross earnings* £	*Lowest gross earnings* £
1979	88,190	210
1980	116,497	423
1981	130,842	193
1982	152,326	93
1983	140,963	23

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of examinations which took place in 1980, 1981 and 1982 of the work done by those National Health dentists with gross earnings of £100,000 in the relevant year; and with what results.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

	1980	*1981*	*1982*
Number of dentists with gross earnings of £100,000 or more	1	5	6
Number of references to the regional dental service in respect of work by those dentists	2	13	36

In two of the cases reported on by the regional dental service the dental advisors of the Scottish Dental Estimates Board considered that work had been unsatisfactory.

Fluoridation

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for allowing water authorities to fluoridate public water supplies.

Mr. John MacKay: The Government intend to introduce legislation this Session along the lines indicated in the reply given on 6 December 1983 at column *143-44* by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley).

Hospital Beds

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospital beds have been permanently closed in each health board area between the end of 1979 and the present date; and what further closures are contemplated in the current financial year.

Mr. John MacKay: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 24 October to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) at column *626-28*. In 1984 to date the following closures have taken place:

	Number of beds
Argyll and Clyde Health Board	32
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board	26
Grampian Health Board	26
Shetland Health Board	19

Note: Numbers refer to the approved bed complement at the time of closure: Details provided relate only to complete hospitals taken out of use; information on partial closures or changes of use is not held centrally. Most of the beds closed have been replaced in alternative facilities.

Further hospital closures have been approved by the Secretary of State, but it is not possible to say whether they will take effect during the current financial year.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons were on hospital waiting lists in Scotland in March in each of the last six years; and how many there were in the September of each of those years.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Names on lists

	March	*September*
1978	56,022	61,481
1979	76,616	70,970
1980	69,904	67,180
1981	67,679	65,024
1982	66,692	86,179
1983	96,757	88,213
1984	*84,790	*83,061

* Provisional.

NHS (Nursing Staff)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of total nursing staff in National Health Service hospitals was engaged exclusively in the care of the mentally ill and handicapped in each of the last five years; what these figures represented in terms of staff per 100 patients; and what were the comparable figures for other National Health Service services.

Mr. John MacKay: For the National Health Service in Scotland, this information is as follows:

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
(a) Psychiatric nurses as percantage all hospital nurses.					
Mental Illness*	14·9	14·7	14·7	14·5	14·4
Mental Handicap	5·2	5·2	5·3	5·2	5·3
(b) Nursing staff per 100 average occupied beds.					
Mental Illness	61·5	64·5	68·8	70·1	71·8
Mental Handicap	51·5	55·2	59·7	60·9	63·1
Maternity	234·5	250·3	268·4	287·7	306·9
General	134·3	140·4	146·2	151·5	151·1

* Since 1982 the first 18 months of all student nurse training has been generic in nature. Because of this some mental illness students may have been recorded as general students with the result that statistics for mental illness students are understated and those for general students overstated.

Mental Hospitals (Food Costs)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the weekly cost of food per patient in mental hospitals in each of the last five years; and what were the comparable figures for other hospitals.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is as follows:

Total average cost of patient catering per patient consumer week

	1979-80 £	*1980-81* £	*1981-82* £	*1982-83* £	*1983-84* £
Mental/Mental Deficiency Hospitals	10·95	12·54	13·77	14·54	15·04
Acute Hospitals	16·50	18·59	20·17	21·30	21·37
Geriatric and other Long-Stay	12·75	14·38	15·68	16·73	17·45
Maternity	19·68	21·82	24·33	25·62	26·36
Other costed hospitals	15·53	17·63	19·63	20·37	20·81
All hospitals average	13·60	15·46	16·93	17·82	18·26

The lower turnover of patients in long-stay hospitals permits more efficient catering provision and helps to contain catering costs.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Cockeram asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now announce the result of his consideration of the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation that the Forestry Commission should disclose the sums received after selling public land.

Mr. Younger: The recommendation by the Committee of Public Accounts at paragraph 17(vi) of its Eighteenth Report, HC265, 1983-84, was that the Forestry Commission "should publish the selling price of publicly-owned land when sold and a full explanation of their sales policy and practice".

That explanation of sales policy and practice was provided by the Commission in its annual report for the year to 31 March 1984, which was laid before the House on 28 November 1984.

The Government have given long and careful consideration to the allied question of whether the Commission should publish the prices it receives from its sales. We are satisfied, however, that the Commission is not selling off its assets cheaply and that the rules of public accountability are not being breached either in the Commission's sales policy or in its individual sales. We do not feel justified, therefore, in requiring the Commission to depart unilaterally from normal commercial practice, which applies throughout the Government sector as well as in private transactions, by publishing prices received from sales of forestry properties.

British Leyland (Bathgate Plant)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his recent discussions with British Leyland about the Bathgate plant.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I are in close touch with senior British Leyland representatives. They have encouraged the interest of potential purchasers of the Bathgate plant, notably two companies, Marshalls Tractors and JCB, who are considering whether they can develop viable proposals which could lead to acquisition of part of the assets. My Department has made contact with these companies to ensure that they are fully aware that regional assistance is available to maximise viable investment and employment at Bathgate.

Following initial approaches to a number of companies worldwide, Locate in Scotland has identified and approached well over a hundred which could have the capability to make use of the Bathgate facilities.

This marketing campaign, unprecedented for a single site, has subsequently been reinforced by the acceptance of my right hon. Friend and others of the recommendations of the Bathgate working party about improvement to the environment, communications and promotion of the area, and by the Government's recently announced decision to upgrade Bathgate to inner tier status, enabling companies in the area to qualify for maximum regional assistance for investment.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the adminstrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Younger: The proportion of the running costs of the Scottish Office directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

Rape

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many men have been prosecuted for rape in each of the last five years in Scotland; how many have been convicted in each of these years; and, of these, how many have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment of less than three years, between three and five years, between five and 10 years and over 10 years, respectively.

Mr. Younger: The information requested is:

Persons proceeded against for rape, Scotland

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Total	50	52	64	55	52
Charge proved	34	30	40	31	30
Sentenced to imprisonment*	30	25	38	30	22
Up to 3 years	9	9	13	8	4
Over 3 years and up to 5 years	6	8	12	8	8
Over 5 years and up to 10 years	15	8	13	11	9
Over 10 years	—	—	—	2	1
Life	—	—	—	1	—

*including detention in a Young Offenders' Institution.

Local Authorities (Ministerial Default Powers)

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out in detail the range of default powers open to him and other Ministers in dealing with local authorities in Scotland in the same form as used by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in his reply to the hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe on 11 April 1984, *Official Report*, column 249.

Mr. Younger: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Parole

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the outcome of his consultations with the Parole Board regarding possible changes in relation to the release of prisoners on parole.

Mr. Younger: I hope soon to make a full statement about these matters.

Sexual Offences

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the second report on the investigation into evidence in cases of rape and other sexual offences

Mr Ancram: We hope to publish the second report by the Scottish Office central research unit on the processing of sexual assault cases, dealing with prosecution and court stages, early next year.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Dental Treatment

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the present arrangements for preventing and detecting unnecessary dental treatment in the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am becoming increasingly concerned that a small minority of dentists might be abusing the present system of payments to dentists under the NHS and that the present legal provisions and methods of detection might be inadequate to prevent this and act as a proper deterrent. I have asked a small but distinguished committee to investigate the matter and give me advice as quickly as possible.

The committee will be chaired by Mr. S. G. Schanschieff, Chairman of Northampton health authority. The other members will be Professor D. F. Shovelton, professor of restorative dentistry, Birmingham university and Mr. J. Toulmin QC. The committee's terms of reference will be:

"To enquire into the extent of unnecessary dental treatment in the general dental service; to consider methods of preventing and detecting such treatment; to consider any amendments which may be necessary to the relevant legal provisions; and to make recommendations together with the estimated costs of those recommendations."

The committee is expected to report by the middle of 1985.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provisions will be made to ensure the maintenance of school dental inspections and treatment for children and services for special schools and homes in areas covered by the Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton district health authorities arising from their recent decision to close four of their community dental service clinics.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton health authority has put forward a proposal to close four commmunity dental service clinics. This has been the subject of formal consultation locally and the health authority will need to consider the outcome of that consultation before a final decision is taken. If the health authority's proposal is implemented however I understand that the remaining dental staff would be deployed so as to provide the necessary dental inspection and treatment of pupils at maintained schools.

MIND (Correspondence)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response he has sent to the legal director of MIND in answer to the letter he received from him about transfer of mentally disturbed patients to mental hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been unable to identify the particular letter from the information supplied by the hon. Member. However, if she provides further details I shall be pleased to look into the matter.

Cervical Cancer

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is proposing to take new steps to seek to reduce the numbers of deaths from cervical cancer.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of deaths from cervical cancer is already falling but we are seeking to make further progress towards this objective through our cervical screening programme. We issued revised guidelines on the implementation of our policy to health authorities in July. A copy of the guidance, HC(84)17, is in the Library.

Drugs (Imports)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements are being made to monitor the import of drugs from the People's Republic of China, following the introduction of limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: For a medicinal product to be imported from the People's Republic of China (and other countries outside the European Community), a valid United Kingdom product licence, under the Medicines Act 1968, relating to the product, must be in existence. Before a product can qualify for a product licence, the licensing authority must be satisfied that the product is safe, efficacious and of good quality. Importers of all such licenced products are required to ensure that their products conform to acceptable standards and are subject to appropriate checks as well as being liable for inspection by our Medicines Inspectorate.

Questions of the volume of trade in a medicinal product are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Heating Allowances

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the number of supplementary pensioners in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(b)* West Yorkshire and *(c)* the Huddersfield area who have received increases of less than £1·75 per week as a result of cuts to their heating allowances; and what is the average deduction involved.

Mr. Whitney: Of the areas listed, reliable estimates of the increases in benefit received by supplementary pensioners at the general uprating this November could be obtained only for Yorkshire and Humberside and then only at disproportionate cost. Supplementary benefit heating additions were increased from 26 November in line with the rise in fuel prices over the year to last May, although we decided that it would be reasonable to increase to £1, and reapply to heating additions, the available scale margin deduction from weekly payments for special needs given to people receiving the higher long-term rate of supplementary benefit. The reasons for this decision are set out in the reply given by my hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) on 27 November at column *468*.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements have been made for the United Kingdom Medicines Inspectorate to inspect the products of overseas drugs manufacturers for the period after the implementation of limited list prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The usual effective arrangements will continue to apply. Manufacturers of all licensed products, whether United Kingdom or overseas-based, are required to ensure that their products conform to acceptable standards of strength, quality and purity and their premises are subject to inspection.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why such a short time has been allowed for consultation over the limited list drugs proposal.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke The period allowed for consultation is almost three months, which we regard as adequate. We have already received preliminary views from several bodies and expect to have received all substantive comments by 31 January 1985.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how the anticipated saving of £100 million from the limited list proposals is calculated in terms of the main categories namely *(a)* antacids, *(b)* laxatives, *(c)* inhalations, *(d)* anti-tussives, *(e)* analgesics for mild to moderate pain, *(f)* vitamins, tonics and bitters and *(g)* benzodiazepines, sedatives and tranquillisers, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke The approximate percentage of the total anticipated savings that will be contributed by each therapeutic group affected by the limited list proposal is as follows:

	Per cent.
Antacids	17
Laxatives	7
Cough and cold remedies	17
Analgesics for mild to moderate pain	30
Vitamins and Tonics	4
Benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquillisers	25

No firm estimates will be possible until the proposals are finalised following consultation.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the reasons for the proposed limited list being more restrictive than the current hospital formulary drawn up by local therapeutic committees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke The Government's proposals aim to provide effective low-cost medicines to meet the clinical needs in a small number of therapeutic categories. If there are differences of significance between these proposals and the 400 or so hospital formularies we would expect these to be reflected in consultation.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how new discoveries in fields such as the mild to moderate analgesic market will be treated following the introduction of a limited list scheme;

(2) whether he will allow branded products to continue to be prescribed where there is no accepted generic substitute, although the branded product may be in the limited list;

(3) if he will ensure sufficient safeguards are proposed for the elderly taking a variety of medicines in the limited list which at present are distinctively branded and coloured to enable them to distinguish between different pills in a variety of white and unbranded packaging;

(4) if dispensing general practitioners will be permitted to prescribe and dispense private prescriptions following the introduction of the limited list;

(5) if he will ensure that arthritic patients unable to take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs because of gastro-intestinal side effects continue to be able to obtain suitable drugs on prescription after the introduction of limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: These matters will be fully considered during our consultations with the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if it is proposed that a doctor prescribing a branded product for a clinical purpose outside the indication list for limited list products will have to disclose the diagnosis on the form FP10.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is no question of doctors having to give their diagnoses on prescription forms. If a drug is available through the National Health Service under the proposed limited list arrangements doctors will be able to prescribe it whenever appropriate. If it is not available then it will not be prescribable for any condition.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will advise family practitioner committees about the effects of his proposals for limited list prescribing on the availability of National Health Service treatment for people suffering from coughs, dyspepsia, pain or bowel function disorders.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Once all details of the scheme have been finalised following consultation, family practitioner committees will be advised in the normal way.

available. We hope agreement will be reached this month on the 1985 programme, whereas the 1984 programme was only settled in May this year. The normal procedures for purchase and shipment of food aid after allocations have been agreed are complex, but there are more rapid emergency procedures, the use of which we have strongly supported in appropriate cases.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Jopling: The work undertaken by my departments which is directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the EC cannot easily be distinguished from other work. Many programmes contain both EC and non-EC elements; not all activities carried out in connection with membership of the EC are obligatory; and some programmes now forming part of our Community obligations were previously operated under national arrangements. Although, therefore, it is not possible to give the precise cost of administering duties arising from membership of the EC, it is estimated that between one quarter and one third of the running costs of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1983-84 was attributable to EC membership. The running costs of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce are wholly attributable to EC work.

Wholesale Milk Deliveries

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average percentage trend in wholesale milk deliveries between 1981 and 1983 in the United Kingdom; and what was the percentage trend in wholesale deliveries between 1981 and 1983 in each of the nine regions of the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *136*]: The following additional information requested on the percentage trend in wholesale deliveries between 1981 and 1983 is now available:

	Percentage increases
1. The area to which the Scottish Milk Marketing Scheme 1933 applies, other than Region 2 below	5·2
2. The islands of Arran, Bute, Coll, Gigha, Great Cumbrae, and Kintyre South of Tarbert	14·4
3. The area to which the Aberdeen and District Milk Marketing Scheme 1933 applies	11·7
4. The area to which the North of Scotland Milk Marketing Scheme 1933 applies, other than the Islands of Orkney	8·31
5. The Islands of Orkney*	19·4
6. The Islands of Shetland*	26·8

* The islands of Shetland and Orkney take up only 0·15 per cent. and 1·14 per cent. respectively of total Scottish quota.

Milk Prices

Mr. Maclean asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to decontrol milk prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: I have held discussions with the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales, the Dairy Trade Federation and the National Farmers Union with a view to improving the competitive position within the milk industry. In the light of those discussions, and of separate discussions which have taken place in Northern Ireland my right hon. Friends and I have decided that statutory price control of milk in England, Wales and Northern Ireland should end on 31 December 1984, a year earlier than the target date which I announced in my reply of 3 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley. In addition my right hon. Friend and I propose to appoint management consultants to advise us on an examination of the commercial activities of the Board having regard to paragraph 53(4) of the Milk Marketing Scheme. The Dairy Trade Federation and the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales have indicated that they are content with these moves. They have reached an understanding on improved procedures for the period after decontrol which will help the industry to resolve disputes without having to invoke statutory procedures. In addition the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales has agreed with the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales arrangements for consultation on matters affecting producer interests.

I believe that the measures represent a major improvement in our milk marketing arrangements. I am placing in the Library of the House terms of reference of the proposed study, the text of the understanding reached with the Board and the Federation and the text of a letter from the Chairman of the Board to the President of the National Farmers Union.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the instructions given to the United Kingdom delegation to the first committee of the United Nations General Assembly with regard to the three resolutions calling for a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Luce: We remain ready to support at the United Nations resolutions which recognise that international agreement on nuclear testing constraints can only emerge from the resolution of outstanding problems of verification. We will not support resolutions which ignore this important factor. Our voting record at the first committee this year reflects the above position, including our support for further work at the Geneva conference on disarmament.

Saharan Region

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom Government and the Governments of countries in the Saharan region.

Mr. Rifkind: We enjoy diplomatic relations with all the countries of the Saharan region, with the sole exception of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. In some cases, diplomatic representation is on a non-residential basis.

Namibia

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether he will make a statement on the efforts of the multi-party conference of the internal political parties in Namibia to organise a peace conference and in particular the multi-party conference statement of 30 October which calls for such a conference and for the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation's response to be awaited until December;

(2) whether the Government support the efforts of the multi-party conference of Namibia's internal political parties in their moves to negotiate for peaceful independence of Namibia at the earliest possible date; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken in response to the call by the multi-party conference of internal parties in Namibia to the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation to end all hostilities before 31 December 1984 in order to establish the conditions essential for a peace conference; and will he make a statement;

(4) what steps the Government are taking to support the efforts of the multi-party conference in Namibia to bring greater representation to the people of Namibia with or without the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation.

Mr. Rifkind: We support all moves which bring an internationally recognised independence for Namibia closer. We remain committed to the early implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibia, which is the internationally agreed basis for such a settlement. We believe that current negotiations led by the United States offer the best hope of achieving this.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what specific representations the Government have made to the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation in the last six months to end its campaign of political violence in northern Namibia;

(2) what representations the contact groups have made to the South West Africa Peoples' Organisation about its campaign of violence being an obstacle to Namibian independence.

Mr. Rifkind: We have consistently condemned violence in Namibia whether by the South African armed forces or by SWAPO. Violence can do nothing to assist the process of achieving a Namibia settlement.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what verification measures the British delegation to the United Nations conference of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva plans to propose to seek to facilitate a limited chemical weapons ban treaty.

Mr. Luce: Following our earlier verification proposals, the United Kingdom is considering tabling a further working paper next year on how to verify that certain civil chemicals are not diverted into illicit military stockpiles. As I made clear in my reply to the hon. Member on 29 October at column 815, we seek a comprehensive chemical weapons ban. A limited or regional ban would not be an adequate substitution.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Renton: In 1983-84, 1·06 per cent. (£3,947,703) of the running costs of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, was attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Overseas Students (Fees)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for commercial relationships between the United Kingdom and other countries of the increases made by the Government in fees for overseas students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: When the Government made the decision in 1979 to charge full cost fees for overseas students, we took into account all the relevant political and commercial factors against the background of using the limited resources for overseas students to maximum effect in the national interest. We later came to the conclusion that we should limit the damage to our commercial interests by replacing the indiscriminate subsidy with targeted support to overseas students. This included, besides specific country schemes, the creation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's scholarships and awards scheme, the criteria of which include business-and-trade-related objectives, in addition to giving awards to particularly able students from countries with whom the United Kingdom's economic relations are expected to develop. Within the resources available, we believe our policy best serves our political and commercial interests.

Hong Kong

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and commonwealth Affairs how many of the 6,000 British Dependent Territories citizens whom he believes the Chinese Government may not consider to be Chinese compatriots under the draft agreement with the Chinese Government acquired their present citizenship by birth in *(a)* Hong Kong and *(b)* elsewhere in the Dependent Territories; and how many acquired citizenship by descent and by naturalisation, respectively.

Mr. Luce: The Hong Kong Government estimate that approximately 4,000 of the British Dependent Territories citizens to whom my hon. Friend refers acquired their present citizenship by birth in Hong Kong, none by birth in other dependent territories and approximately 180 by naturalisation. The figure for those who have obtained their citizenship by descent is unobtainable.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate

of the total numbers of British Dependent Territories citizens presently resident in Hong Kong; how many of these possess no other citizenship or nationality; and how many are entitled to the right of abode in Hong Kong.

Mr. Luce: The Hong Kong Government estimate that there are about 3 million BDTCs resident in Hong Kong. The Chinese Government probably regard all but about 6,000 of these to be Chinese nationals as defined in the Chinese memorandum. In the time available, it is not possible to estimate how many of this latter figure have no other citizenship or nationality. All 3 million BDTCs have the right of abode in Hong Kong.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Scottish Law Commission

45. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will meet the Scottish Law Commission.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have no meetings with the Scottish Law Commission arranged at present but both formal and informal meetings are held from time to time. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate recently met the commission and discussed various matters of law reform including the implementation of commission reports. I am glad to say that in three Bills during the present Session we hope to implement a total of six reports.

Peterhead Prison (Assaults)

46. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will consult the procurator fiscal at Peterhead sheriff court with a view to reducing the period taken to bring prisoners from Peterhead prison for trial for assaults upon prison officers.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I intend to consult the procurator fiscal at Peterhead and I will be writing to my hon. Friend.

Coal Industry Dispute

47. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what discussions he has had with sheriffs' courts on cases involving miners.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have not had any such discussions.

50. **Mr. Henderson** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many prosecutions in Fife and Scotland have been or are being pursued relating to violence and other offences and crimes, arising out of the current industrial dispute in the coal industry; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: As at 28 November 1984, 200 persons have been prosecuted in Fife for offences arising out of the mining dispute. The comparable figure for Scotland as a whole is approximately 800. The majority of accused have been charges with breach of the peace or obstruction of the police in the execution of their duty. However, there is also a small but nevertheless disturbing number of persons who have been charged with assault. There is an underlying element of violence and intimidation in many of those cases where the charge is that of breach of the peace or obstruction.

Legal Aid

48. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will make a statement on the recent advice he has given in relation to the operation of legal aid to the court systems in Scotland.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have not given any recent advice in relation to the operation of legal aid to the court systems in Scotland. This is not a matter on which my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate and I give advice to the courts.

Law Society of Scotland

49. **Mr. Malone** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland when he next intends to meet the president of the Law Society of Scotland.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have no such meetings arranged at present. However, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate and I meet the president of the Law Society of Scotland from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Drugs

51. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland how many cases involving drugs have been and are under investigation in the current year in Lothian region and in Scotland; which age groups are involved; how many prosecutions have been brought; how many convictions there have been; whether this represents an increase on the figures for 1982-83 and for 1983-84; what steps he is taking to deal with this problem; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The detailed information sought by my hon. Friend is not readily available. I shall write to him with any such information as can be obtained. Crown Office figures set out in the table below for drugs cases in the High Court of Justiciary in the current year and 1983 indicate a substantial increase in the number of serious cases involving drugs in the current year, both in Lothian and in Scotland generally.

My Department's responsibility lies in the prosecution of drugs cases, not their investigation. To ensure the most effective prosecution of serious drugs cases I held a meeting on 8 October 1984 with Crown counsel and senior officers responsible for drugs cases from the Crown Office, procurator fiscal service, all the Scottish police forces, Customs and Excise and forensic Science laboratories, at which practical aspects of the preparation and prosecution of these cases were discussed. The meeting was very useful and I am confident that the already high conviction rate in such cases shown in the table will be maintained.

Drugs cases in the High Court of Justiciary 1983-84

	Total cases indicted	**Total cases dealt with*	*Cases in which conviction*	*Cases remitted for sentence*
1983				
Scotland	30	30	27	4
Lothian	8	8	7	—
1984				
Scotland	122	99	94	4
Lothian	38	30	29	—

* To 30 November 1984.

Prosecution Policy

52. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what advice his Department gives to procurators fiscal with regard to deciding between prosecutions or warnings in matters involving members of councils and members of crime prevention panels.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: No advice is given on these specific points.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Nurses

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many trained nurses from the Republic of Ireland are presently employed in Northern Ireland hospitals.

Dr. Boyson: The information requested is not available.

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many student nurses have just completed their training at the Royal Victoria hospital; and how many will be offered positions as nurses in that hospital.

Dr. Boyson: 41 student nurses will complete their training on 21 December 1984 and none has been offered a post at the hospital to date.

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many student nurses have recently completed their training at Ards hospital; and how many nursing posts at this hospital will be available to them.

Dr. Boyson: 13 nurses recently completed their training, four have taken up permanent nurse posts and three have obtained temporary nurse posts in the hospital.

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many student nurses from the Republic of Ireland are presently being trained within Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: Sixty-three.

Milk Production

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the revised closing date for the collection of the first super levy instalments for milk production in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: The date set by the Commission for all members states is 14 December 1984.

Local Government Elections

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date he will announce the ward groupings for the proposed local government elections next year.

Mr. Hurd: I have today laid before Parliament the report of the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, Sir Frank Harrison, MBE, QC, DL, which contains his recommendations for the grouping of wards into district electoral areas for the purposes of local government elections in Northern Ireland. I shall shortly be bringing forward for approval a draft Order-in-Council under section 38(1)*(a)* of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 giving effect, with or without modifications, to the Commissioner's recommendations.

Blackwater Drainage Scheme

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost of the Blackwater drainage scheme; how this cost is to be divided between Her Majesty's Government, the Government of the Republic of Ireland and the European Community; how many jobs the scheme will provide; when it is to be completed; and what inquiry has been held into the opinions of local farmers and others concerned.

Dr. Boyson: The total estimated cost of the Blackwater drainage scheme is £29 million, of which Her Majesty's Government will meet £16 million and the Republic of Ireland £13 million. The European Community is contributing approximately £5 million in grant-aid which is to be shared between both Governments. It is not possible to assess with precision the effect on employment since the majority of the work will be carried out by contractors. However it is considered that up to 250 jobs could be provided during the five-year construction period which will end in 1989-90.

In accordance with statutory requirements the scheme was published in regional and local newspapers and exhibited at local council offices. There was also consultation with local farmers, district councils and with angling and conservation interests.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Dr. Boyson: The number of registered blind people employed over the last four years in the Departments for which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible.

	Number
1981	6
1982	5
1983	5
1984	6

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Hurd: The proportion of the running costs of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

European Day of Music

Sir David Price asked the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government have any plans for the official celebration on 22 June 1985 of the European Day of Music.

The Prime Minister: The arrangements for European Music Year are in the hands of the United Kingdom organising committee, chaired by His Royal Highness Duke of Kent. The date of 22 June is intended particularly as a day to celebrate amateur music-making, and musicians and schools are being encouraged to take part accordingly.

SCOTLAND

Corporal Punishment

10. **Mrs. McCurley** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has plans to introduce legislation to give parents in Scotland the right to withdraw their children from corporal punishment in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: As announced in the Gracious Speech, a Bill will be brought forward later in this Session to enable parents of children educated at public expense to exempt their children from corporal punishment.

Nursery Education

11. **Mr. Johnston** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce measures to restore the duty on the local authorities to provide nursery education as previously stated in the Education (Scotland) Act 1962.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No, Sir. The duty prescribed in the 1962 Act was defined in only the broadest terms. It left education authorities very wide discretion in practice; and I see nothing to be gained by reverting to it.

Crime Prevention Panels

12. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to change the method by which appointments are made to crime prevention panels.

Mr. Ancram: No. I think that these appointments are best left to local decision by chief constables.

NHS Privatisation

13. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has had to his recent circular on National Health Service privatisation.

Mr. John MacKay: The majority of health boards are complying directly with the request to test the cost-effectiveness of their catering, laundry and domestic services. Others are taking steps to improve the efficiency of such services. However, competitive tendering is the ultimate test of efficiency and I expect all boards to apply it.

27. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the chairmen of the health boards in Scotland to discuss his privatisation proposals.

Mr. John MacKay: I discussed competitive tendering with them at our regular meeting on 13 November. I expect to meet them again on 12 March 1985.

Manufacturing Industry

14. **Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs have been lost in manufacturing industry since 1979; and how many closures have been reported to him.

Mr. Younger: The latest estimates indicate that the number of jobs in manufacturing industry in Scotland fell by 164,000 between June 1979 and June 1984; over the same period 613 closures in manufacturing industry, involving 10 or more workers, were notified to the Manpower Services Commission.

Teachers (Salaries and Conditions)

15. **Mr. Gourlay** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received for an independent review body for Scottish teachers' salaries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg).

37. **Mr. Lambie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he is going to reply to the request by the teachers of Scotland for an independent review of their salaries and conditions.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg).

Youth Training Scheme

16. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number and percentage of mode A participants on the youth training scheme in Scotland in 1983-84 who are at present in employment.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret that detailed information on the destinations of youngsters leaving the youth training scheme in Scotland is not yet available.

Denominational Schools, Midlothian

17. **Mr. Eadie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received notice of appeals against proposed closures of denominational schools in the parliamentary constituency of Midlothian.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No.

Regional Policy

18. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact on the Scottish economy of the Government's regional policy.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) earlier today.

Housing Costs

19. **Mr. Craigen** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what central Government contribution is being made in 1984-85 and 1985-86 towards local authority housing costs in Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: Housing support grants totalling £52·5 million have been made in 1984-85. Final decisions on a possible variation of this amount and on the amount of grants for 1985-86 will be taken after a meeting with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 10 December.

Education

20. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of the teaching unions in Scotland to discuss matters relating to education in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Since the present Government took office, my right hon. Friend and I have met representatives of teaching unions on a number of occasions. There are no current plans for further meetings.

Accommodation Agencies Act 1953

21. **Mr. McTaggart** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what statistics or other information he gathers about the operation in Scotland of the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953.

Mr. Ancram: Offences under the Act would fall to be included in the criminal statistics collected and published by my Department. No offences under the Act have been recorded by the police since 1974.

Fish Processing Agency

22. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will investigate the situation in the fish processing industry, particularly in the Banff and Buchan constituency, and take steps to grant temporary financial aid in order to prevent further losses of employment in that industry.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend is aware that reduced supplies of white fish have been causing difficulties for the fish processing industry. He has no plans to provide financial aid, but so as to ease the supply situation he has urged the European Commission in its negotiations with Norway, to seek the highest TACs justifiable for the main North sea stocks in 1985.

Employment (Fife)

23. **Mr. Willie. W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effects of the proposed new regional aid policy on employment prospects in Fife.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The new assisted area map preserves the assisted area status of the greater part of Fife at a level which reflects its position relative to other parts of the country. The areas remaining assisted will continue to qualify for regional selective assistance and other benefits which will enable them to continue to compete effectively for new investment and jobs.

Standard Grade Examination

24. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils in Scotland will be taking the standard grade examinations in 1986.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Firm figures will not be available until schools and other presenting centres submit provisional estimates of presentations to the Scottish examination board in October 1985. On present indications, about 77,500 pupils are expected to complete courses in S4 and to be presented for one or more standard grade examination in 1986. Estimates of candidates at other levels of secondary education are not available at this stage.

Local Authority Financial Needs

25. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how soon he expects to be able to remove the damping effects presently involved in the phasing in of the client group approach to assessing local authority financial needs.

Mr. Ancram: My aim is to move towards full implementation of the client group method for the distribution of needs element of rate support grant as quickly as is consistent with avoiding undue grant losses for those authorities which stand to lose.

Education Provision, Tayside

26. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision he has made in rate support grant for education provision in Tayside.

Mr. Ancram: Rate support grant is paid in support of an authority's income generally. It is not attributed to particular services.

Job Creation

28. **Mr. Malone** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new jobs have been created in Scotland in the past 12 months.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Comprehensive information on new jobs created is not available. However, over 14,500 new jobs have been associated with offers of selective financial assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 for projects in Scotland during the

past year. It is also encouraging that in the year to June 1984 the net total of employees in employment in Scotland is estimated to have increased by 15,000.

Health Boards (Chairmen)

29. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of the health boards; and what issues they discussed.

Mr. John MacKay: I last met health board chairmen on 13 November 1984, and discussed with them a number of matters related to the management and financing of the NHS in Scotland.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

30. **Mr. Hugh D. Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next be meeting the chairman of the Greater Glasgow health board; and what subjects he will be discussing.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the Greater Glasgow health board regularly, and I myself met him last on 13 November; my right hon. Friend has, however, no immediate plans to meet him.

Hill Farming

31. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the National Farmers Union about the profitability of hill farming in Scotland.

Mr. George Younger: The profitability of hill farming in Scotland forms part of the annual review of the economic situation in the hills and uplands which takes place each autumn. The review is carried out in close co-operation with the SNFU, which put forward its views on the current situation in Scotland. This year's review has just been completed and the results were announced on 29 November.

Caravan Sites (Rating)

32. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is to introduce retrospective rate rebates when the Rating of Caravan Sites (Scotland) Order 1984 comes into operation on 1 April 1985.

Mr. Ancram: No.

Children's Hospitals (Expenditure)

33. **Mr. Allen Adams** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to reduce expenditure on children's hospitals in the west of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. Friend does not allocate funds to individual hospitals: it is for the health boards to determine the level of funding each hospital should receive.

Labour Statistics

34. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of those aged over 50 years who are unemployed in Scotland and Lanarkshire in particular.

Mr. Allan Stewart: On 11 October 1984, the latest date for which the information is available, there were 54,403 unemployed claimants aged 50 and over in Scotland and 5,550 in the areas covered by jobcentres in Lanarkshire.

School Further Education, Jordanhill

35. **Mr. Roy Jenkins** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of lecturers at further education colleges in Scotland have undertaken training at the school of further education, Jordanhill, Glasgow.

Mr. Younger: At October 1983, the latest date for which information is available, the basic teaching qualification in further education from the school of further education at Jordanhill college was held by 44 per cent. of lecturers at further education colleges in Scotland. A further 5 per cent. hold a teaching qualification in further education from a college elsewhere in the United Kingdom and an additional 23 per cent. hold a teaching qualification in secondary education. A number of lecturers have also taken in-service training at the school of further education or elsewhere.

Composite Classes

36. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the use of composite classes in the Scottish educational system.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Composite classes have long been a feature of the Scottish educational system. Such classes are not inherently unsound educationally, so long as they are formed with due regard for the needs of the pupils concerned and provided the work of each class is adapted to the abilities of individual pupils through, for example, the use of group and individual methods.

Skillcentres

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the number of skillcentre places available per 100,000 work force in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: For each 100,000 of the work force it is estimated that there were 54 skillcentre places available in Scotland in September 1984, the latest date for which information is readily available.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Younger: In 1983 I had four registered blind and nine registered partially sighted officers employed in my Department. Figures for previous years are not available.

Housing Associations

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sheltered housing units have been built in Scotland in each of the last three years; and how many of these were built by housing associations.

Mr. Younger: The table shows the estimated increases in the numbers of sheltered dwelling units in each of the last three financial years:

Year	Additional sheltered dwellings	
	All agencies	Housing associations
1981-82	2,400	1,150
1982-83	2,000	750
1983-84	1,700	650

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total expenditure of housing associations in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 July at columns 175-78.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the total allocation of finance available for capital programmes to housing associations in Scotland has been spent in the Strathclyde region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Younger: Expenditure by housing associations in Strathclyde region in each of the years from 1979-80 to 1983-84 represented 56 per cent., 57 per cent., 58 per cent., 56 per cent. and 59 per cent. of the respective totals for Scotland.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many housing units have been created by new build and rehabilitations, respectively, by housing associations in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Younger: The information requested is as follows:

Financial Year	Number of Units	
	New Build	Rehabilitated*
1979-80	740	1059
1980-81	1286	2448
1981-82	1617	2820
1982-83	1133	2302
1983-84	1597	2983

* The figures shown, which are net of any gain or loss of dwellings in the tenders approved, are for projects undertaken by the Housing Corporation.

Building Regulations

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to begin re-examining the list of measures required within the building regulations intended to conserve fuel and power; and whether his re-examination will include requirements for floor insulation.

Mr. Ancram: On 29 November I announced a package of measures for improving the building control system in Scotland, including a re-assessment of the technical content of the building standards regulations. The regulations relating to the conservation of fuel and power, and the possibility of extending these to ground floor insulation, will be covered by these studies.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of the names of those local authorities and other organisations which have protested to him about the proposed amendments to Part Q of the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1981 and 1982; and what reply he has made to them.

Mr. Ancram: There have been 69 replies from individuals, local authorities and other organisations commenting on these proposals. Many responses contain degrees of criticism and approval of individual parts of the proposal, and it would be misleading to classify them simply as protests or endorsements.

All responses will be carefully considered and, except where confidentiality was specifically requested, responses can be inspected on open file in the Scottish Office Library at St. Andrew's House. They will be taken fully into account in the preparation of the Government's detailed conclusions which will be announced in due course.

Grain Storage, Glenrothes

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much grain is stored in Glenrothes, Fife; what were the comparable figures for each of the last three years; what is the estimated cost of such storage; and how much is stocked elsewhere in Scotland, and at what cost.

Mr. John MacKay: As at 31 October, stocks of intervention grain held in Scotland totalled 294,000 tonnes, of which 9,900 tonnes were held at Glenrothes. No intervention grain was held in that store in any of the previous three years.

Storage costs are recorded on a UK basis and separate figures for Scotland are not available. The cost of storage at a particular store derives from the contractual terms negotiated between the Intervention Board and the individual storekeeper. This information is commercially confidential.

NHS Beds (Occupancy)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of National Health Service beds was occupied by mentally-ill and mentally-handicapped persons in each of the last five years; and what percentage of consultants worked with such patients in each of those years.

Mr. John MacKay: For the National Health Service in Scotland, this information is as follows:

	Percentage of NHS hospital beds occupied by patients with		Percentage of NHS consultants working with patients with	
	(a) Mental illness	(b) Mental handicap	(a) Mental illness	(b) Mental handicap
1979	31·6	13·1	12·0	0·8
1980	31·2	12·8	11·9	0·8
1981	30·8	12·8	12·0	0·8
1982	30·8	12·7	12·2	0·7
1983	30·2	12·7	12·1	0·7

Dentists

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of payment claims made by dentists was reviewed in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; what was this percentage expressed in numerical terms; and how many were referred for further examination to the Scottish regional dental officers.

Mr. John MacKay: Every claim is routinely checked and all claims for complex and high cost treatment—currently about 100,000 or 4 per cent. of the total number

years. This will not come from existing provision for Civil Service pay and related expenditure. It will be additional to existing departmental allocations but will be met from within planned public expenditure totals.

The Government will enter into immediate consultations with the Civil Service unions. It is also prepared to enter into discussions with the unions about the possibility of conducting further experiments at other grading levels. The method, timing and finance for such further experiments would all be for decision. But any such schemes identified and approved would be introduced as soon as practicable. The steps now announced will provide a basis on which the value and operation of performance-related pay arrangements in the Civil Service can be tested, and enable decisions to be taken in the light of the experience gained as to any long-term arrangements.

Personal Incomes

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would have been the gross weekly income required on 1 April to maintain the real disposable income of a single person, taking into account payment of tax, national insurance and 5 per cent. of earnings as superannuation contributions who on 1 April 1969 earned *(a)* £25, *(b)* £30, *(c)* £35, *(d)* £40, *(e)* £45, *(f)* £50, *(g)* £60, *(h)* £70, *(i)* £80, *(j)* £90, *(k)* £100, *(l)* £125, *(m)* £150, *(n)* £175, *(o)* £200, *(p)* £225 and *(q)* £250 per week;

(2) what would have been the gross weekly income required on 1 April to maintain the real disposable income of a married man with two children under 11 years of age, taking into account payment of tax, national insurance and 5 per cent. of earnings as superannuation contributions, and taking into account receipt of child benefit, who on 1 April 1969 earned *(a)* £25, *(b)* £30, *(c)* £35, *(d)* £40, *(e)* £45, *(f)* £50, *(g)* £60, *(h)* £70, *(i)* £80, *(j)* £90, *(k)* £100, *(l)* £125, *(m)* £150, *(n)* £175, *(o)* £200, *(p)* £225 and *(q)* £250 per week.

Mr. Moore: Information is given in the following table:

Gross weekly earnings 1969-70 £	*Gross weekly earnings needed in 1984-85 to maintain the level of real disposable income of 1969-70*	
	Single man	*Married man with 2 children under 11 years of age*
25	134	127
30	162	155
35	190	183
40	219	212
45	248	241
50	273	267
60	322	316
70	375	366
80	435	422
90	495	480
100	558	540
125	699	685
150	835	824
175	971	962
200	1,091	1,088
225	1,176	1,173
250	1,249	1,251

Average male gross earnings (all occupations) in April 1984 were about 6·5 times higher than in April 1969.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions during each of the last five years Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has collaborated with the police so as to enable a drugs courier to pass through control and proceed to a liaison with other persons; and under those circumstances how many persons have been arrested.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that the information is not readily available. On numerous occasions Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have successfully collaborated with police forces both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere to follow through an attempt to smuggle drugs, so that the principals involved were arrested.

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the most convenient recent 12-month period, if he will show in table form the number of seizures by Customs and Excise officers of dangerous drugs, where possible distinguished by category and quantity, firearms, explosives and indecent and obscene articles.

Mr. Hayhoe: Apart from small quantities of items such as fireworks, of which no central records are kept, there were no seizures of explosives for the year ended 31 March 1984. The number of seizures of controlled drugs and the quantity of firearms and indecent or obscene articles seized in that year are as follows:

Item	*Number of seizures*	*Number of items seized*
Controlled drugs	3,841	
Firearms		1,140
Indecent or obscene articles		170,921

The statistics given in this answer should not be taken as an indication of customs resources devoted to controlling the various classes of goods, the large number of indecent items seized suggesting an inordinate amount of effort spent pursuing them. Each detection of indecent material generally yields several items, sometimes running into hundreds or even thousands. This is not the case with firearms, where one detection normally produces only one or two.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Murphy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he is planning to have regarding mortgage tax relief; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: None.

Budget Council

Mr. Hind asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement about the European Economic Community Budget Council on 29 November.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I represented the United Kingdom at this Council in Brussels.

The Council met a delegation from the European Parliament led by the President of the Parliament, M. Pflimlin, to exchange views on the Parliament's proposed amendments and modifications to the draft budget for 1985. Following this, the Council considered and voted on the Parliament's proposals.

The Council rejected the Parliament's major changes to the draft budget, which included proposals:

to place the United Kingdom's 1,000 mecu compensation for 1984 on the expenditure side of the budget, rather than as an abatement of our contributions, in contravention of the agreement reached at Fontainebleau:

to increase the agricultural provision by 1,300 mecu, thus taking the Budget beyond the 1 per cent. VAT ceiling;

to make alterations relating to the revenue side of the budget.

With regard to additional agricultural expenditure, the Council agreed to make two memorandum entries, one on the revenue side and one on the expenditure side of the budget. That on the expenditure side included a figure of 1,315 mecu but the text makes it clear that it is not part of this budget, it does not therefore bear upon the 1 per cent. ceiling. The entry on the revenue side repeats the undertaking which the Council adopted in October to meet by 1 October 1985 the additiona budgetary requirements which will arise in 1985 including the obligations entered into vis-a-vis the United Kingdom as prescribed under the Fontainebleau agreement through a supplementary and amending budget, for which additionall funds will be provided.

The Council accepted a number of proposed amendments to non-obligatory expenditure. In particular, provision of 50 mecu was entered in the reserve chapter 100 for integrated mediterranean programmes and increases were agreed to several items of aid expenditure.

The Council agreed that, if necessary, it would hold a further meeting with the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 12 December.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Within the Treasury the European Community group of divisions deal exclusively with Community matters. The administrative expenses of this group represented about 0·6 per cent. of the 1983-84 total. An allowance should also be made for the work of other groups concerned to a lesser extent with Community matters. This figure could not be calculated without disproportionate cost.

Business Expansion Scheme

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the companies which currently have an approved fund established under the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Moore: [*Pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1984, c. *17*]: The organisations which manage investment funds approved by the Inland Revenue for the purposes of the business expansion scheme are as follows:

Aberdeen Fund Managers Ltd.
Baronsmead Associates Ltd.
BEF Management Ltd.
Britannia Development Capital Ltd.
British Linen Fund Managers Ltd.
Buckmaster & Moore.
Burrage & Co. Ltd.
Capital for Companies Ltd.
Capital Ventures Ltd.
Castleforth Fund Managers Ltd.
Causeway Capital Ltd.
Charterhouse Business Expansion Fund Management Ltd.
County Bank Ltd.
Creative Capital Nominees Ltd.
Criterion Fund Management Ltd.
Electra Risk Capital PLC.
Granville Business Expansion Finance Ltd.
Gresham Trust PLC.
Guiness Mahon & Co. Ltd.
Hoare Octagon Ltd.
Hodgson Martin Ventures Ltd.
Industrial Technology Securities Ltd.
Lazard Development Capital Ltd.
Mathercourt Fund Management Ltd.
Minster Trust Ltd.
Northern Ireland Venture Capital Management Ltd.
Oak Venture Management Ltd.
Parsons Fund Management Ltd.
Quester Capital Management Ltd.
Ravendale Business Expansion Management Ltd.
Sabrelance Ltd.
Singer & Friedlander Ltd.
Solent Business Fund Management Ltd.
South Cumbria & North Lancashire Fund Management Ltd.
Stewart Business Management Ltd.
S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd.
Wellington Fund Managers Ltd.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Africa (Aid)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to direct more of Britain's African aid programme towards increasing domestic food production.

Mr. Raison: We shall continue to help agriculture and food production, and are well aware of its importance, particularly in Africa. Much of our programme aid and technical co-operation, as well as our project aid, is already directed to this end. But it is important that these should reinforce sensible agricultural policies on the part of the recipient Governments.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will make it its policy to support the use of the $200 million pledged to the International Development Association supplementary fund to support the World Bank's programme for action on Africa and the international fund for agricultural development.

Mr. Raison: There are many competing claims on the aid programme. We are discussing with the World Bank the best way to take forward its proposals on sub-Saharan Africa. If agreement is reached on a replenishment for the international fund for agricultural development, the Government would contribute on a basis to be decided following the usual consultation among donors.

EC (Food Aid)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek reforms of the European Economic Community food aid procedures.

Mr. Raison: We have been urging reform for some time and much progress has been made. The European Council approved a food aid management regulation in December 1982 which we have used to press for earlier decisions in the Council on total quantities to be made

over the 10 years of designation. Similarly much of the investment in buildings and hence eligibility for capital allowances arises well in advance of the creation of jobs.

Thamesmead

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about the future of Thamesmead.

Sir George Young: I have recently seen a press release about Thamesmead issued by the chairman of the GLC housing committee on 28 November. The chairman claims that the Government have forgotten about Thamesmead and have shown no interest in the area. The allegation is based on the absence of a specific reference to Thamesmead in the Local Government Bill.

The allegation is ridiculous. The Government have made it clear that we firmly support the early completion of Thamesmead as a balanced community. We granted the GLC a special allocation for the current year of £5 million for works at Thamesmead. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction have both visited the area in recent months, and I am visiting in January.

Our first preference for Thamesmead after abolition is that ownership should pass to a non-profit-making trust, a company limited by guarantee and using private finance but including full representation for local residents. I have made it absolutely clear, however, that there will be wide consultation with residents before any decision is taken, and that we will not seek to impose a trust if the residents do not want one.

Consultation will take place during 1985. If a trust is established, no special powers will be needed under the abolition legislation, as the GLC will be well aware from their knowledge of trusts which already exist and which they have visited. If the residents do not want a trust, Thamesmead will pass to borough ownership by order under the general provision in the Bill to transfer property consequent on abolition.

Far from having forgotten Thamesmead, the Government are convinced of the need to see the development successfully completed and of achieving whichever solution—a trust or borough ownership—best accords with residents' wishes. Neither alternative requires further provision in the Bill. There is no reason why the confidence of investors or residents should falter, and I am disappointed that by misrepresenting our position the chairman of the GLC's housing committee should choose to suggest otherwise.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Tuition Fees (Parental Contribution)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what payments have been made by parents towards student tuition fees and grants in cash and real terms in each year since 1954; and what is expected to be paid in each of the next three years.

Mr. Brooke: The figures in respect of mandatory awards are as follows:

Academic Year	*Assessed parental contributions (£ million)*	*Index in real terms (1976-77=100)*
Actual		
1976-77	91	100
1977-78	92	87
1978-79	89	79
1979-80	84	63
1980-81	98	64
1981-82	127	74
1982-83	155	85
Estimated		
1983-84	165	86
1984-85	215	107

Comparable information for the period before 1976 is not available.

The estimated figures for the next three years are:

	Estimated figures
1985-86	250
1986-87	261
1987-88	273

Inner London Education Authority

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what criteria he has set the spending target of the Inner London education authority at the level of £900 million; and what factors he took into account when reaching his conclusion that spending projects proposed by the Inner London education authority are out of proportion to those of other such authorities with comparable problems.

Sir Keith Joseph: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment set the provisional target of the ILEA for 1985-86 at £900 million, and determined the expenditure level for the authority under the Rates Act 1984 at the same sum.

In the comments that I have made about ILEA's expenditure I have compared the spending on schools by the ILEA with that of the inner city partnership authorities outside London—Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester/Salford and Newcastle/Gateshead—which shows that ILEA's spending per head, after allowing for London salary weighting payments, is between 29 per cent. and 59 per cent. higher than that of these authorities. All these authorities have been designated as partnership authorities because of their difficult problems. The incidence of particular indicators varies, but overall I believe a fair comparison can be made between these authorities. ILEA has a larger ethnic minority population and a greater incidence of poor housing conditions than the other authorities. On the other hand, the percentage of children in families in receipt of supplementary benefit, the level of youth unemployment and of adult unemployment, and the percentage of children in households whose head is a semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker is higher in most of the inner city partnership authorities outside London that it is in ILEA.

Pupil Costs

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the expenditure per pupil in secondary schools and in primary schools on

books since 1980 expressed in cash terms and in 1980 cost terms; and what has been the expenditur per pupil on equipment since 1980 in cash terms and 1980 cost terms.

Mr. Dunn: The average expenditure per pupil by local education authorities in England, in cash and in 1979-80 cost terms, on books and on equipment in each of the four years to 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, is set out in the table:

Per pupil expenditure

	Books				*Equipment*			
	Primary		*Secondary*		*Primary*		*Secondary*	
	Cash £	*Cost* £	*Cash* £	*Cost* £	*Cash* £	*Cost* £	*Cash* £	*Cost* £
1979-80	4·4	4·5	8·0	8·0	9·5	9·5	19·0	19·0
1980-81	5·5	4·5	8·0	7·0	10·5	9·0	21·0	18·0
1981-82	6·0	4·5	8·5	6·5	12·0	9·5	23·5	18·0
1982-83	7·0	5·0	10·0	7·0	14·0	10·0	26·5	19·0

The expenditure in cost terms has been calculated using the GDP deflator.

Information Technology

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will report on the projected requirements of the information technology industry for graduate entrants, trained in information technology, in 1985; what is the number of students at present attending courses in information technology at universities expected to graduate in 1985; and what is the Government's proposed level of finance over the coming year for university departments of information technology.

Sir Keith Joseph: Detailed demand projections of the kind indicated cannot be made with any precision and estimates vary widely. The question of demand for graduates in the information technology field was, however, recently considered by a committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department of Trade and Industry. A copy of its first report is in the Library. In 1984-85 some 1,900 first degree students are expected to graduate from universities in electronics engineering, and some 1,500 in computer science. The Government do not fund university departments directly. Individual universities determine how to distribute between departments the grant allocation made to them by the University Grants Committee.

University Tuition Fees

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to fees charged for tuition by universities in each of the Euopean Community countries to British citizens who were not resident in the country in question prior to the proposed course of study.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend understands that all member states of the European Community with the exception of Belgium treat students from other Community countries on the same basis as their own students for fees purposes.

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what tuition fees British universities will charge in the years 1984-85 and 1985-86 to students who are nationals of European Community countries and who were not resident in the United Kingdom prior to their course of study.

Mr. Brooke: It is for universities themselves to decide what tuition fees to charge the students they admit. Under paragraph 2 of Schedule 2 to the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1983, nationals of European Community member states who can meet the specified ordinary residence requirements in the Community area are eligible to pay the home rates of fee at British universities. My right hon. Friend announced on 21 February this year that, for the academic year 1984-85, he had recommended fee levels for home and European Community students of £500 for first degree and diploma courses and of £1,569 for postgraduate courses. In giving details on 12 November this year of the Government's expenditure plans for education and science in 1985-86, my right hon. Friend announced that the cash available allowed for a tuition fee of £520 for home full-time and sandwich course students in courses designated for mandatory student awards. So far as postgraduate courses are concerned my right hon. Friend is recommending a fee of £1,632 in 1985-86 for home and European Community students.

Student Awards and Fees

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the levels of contributions required from parents to students' grants and university tuition fees in each European Community state; and how they compare with the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: The student support arrangements of each European Community country involve a parental means test. Detailed information on the level of contributions is not available for the purpose of comparisons with the United Kingdom, but grant levels in the United Kingdom are more generous than in other Community countries.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Pesticides

46. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on reform of the law governing the distribution and manufacture of pesticides over the last six months.

Mr. Trippier: None.

Departmental Staff (Blind Persons)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many registered blind people have been employed in his Department for each of the last four years.

Mr. Butcher: The number of visually handicapped staff has varied between 26 and 28 over the last four years. Of the 27 such staff currently employed, 20 are registered blind. It would be of disproportionate cost to obtain a similar breakdown for previous years.

Regional Aid

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect the recent changes to United Kingdom regional industrial incentives will have on the Community programmes sector of the European regional development fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the Community programmes under the non-quota section of the ERDF announced by my hon. Friend and Mr. Antonio Giolitti on 26 November. These programmes are not affected by the recent changes to United Kingdom regional industrial incentives.

Deprivation (Stoke-on-Trent)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the assisted areas in the new regional policy have a higher rate of deprivation than Stoke-on-Trent; and if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* which elements of deprivation are involved.

Mr. Trippier: Every assisted area under the map introduced on 29 November has a greater need for employment opportunities than the Stoke travel-to-work area. In assessing areas' relative need for current and future employment opportunities, our main criterion was annual average unemployment. Of the new AAs, only Dunfermline had lower annual average unemployment than Stoke. Other criteria included long-term unemployment, growth in labour supply, industrial and occupational structures, and economic activity rates. We also took account of the relative position of neighbouring areas.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a consumer's guide to new motor vehicles offered for sale in the United Kingdom, specifying the approximate proportion by value of British manufactures.

Mr. Butcher: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Steel Industry

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the restructuring of the steel industry in the European Community.

Mr. Norman Lamont: For a long time the United Kingdom led the Community in reducing steel capacity, and I am glad to be able to report that other member states are now matching and in some cases surpassing our efforts. The aim of the EC steel aids code has been to bring supply into line with demand so that the European steel industry can stand on its own feet, and the European Commission is now confident that the specific target of reducing hot-rolled steel capacity by 30 to 35 million tonnes per year by the end of 1985 will be achieved.

The progress being made in restructuring the Community steel industry is illustrated by the following table prepared by the Commission. It shows in particular that, between the beginning of 1980 and the end of this year, capacity cuts totalling 21·9 million tonnes will have actually been carried out.

	Capacity 1980	*Minimum Required*	*'000 tonnes per year Reductions Identified*	*Closures actually carried out by 31 December 1984*
West Germany	53,117	*6,101	†6,922	6,295
Belgium	16,028	3,155	‡3,183	3,182
Denmark	941	66	66	66
France	26,869	5,311	5,311	3,631
Italy	36,294	5,834	3,860	3,494
Luxembourg	5,215	960	1,045	1,045
Netherlands	7,297	950	1,432	82
United Kingdom	22,840	4,500	4,229	4,104
	168,601	26,786	26,048	21,900

* Not including Klöckner
† Including Klöckner
‡ Including 250,000 tonnes of capacity transferred from Luxembourg.

The Government will continue to monitor other countries' progress in carrying out their restructuring plans and will keep up pressure to ensure that they fulfil their obligations.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates (Newcastle)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General how many members of the present advisory committee on the appointment of magistrates for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne who are also justices of the peace *(a)* answered question 5(a) on the application form for appointment to

the bench and *(b)* answered question 16 on the same application form; and what are the total answers in each category.

The Solicitor-General: All the members of the Newcastle upon Tyne advisory committee are justices. Half of these were appointed to the bench prior to 1967, before which date forms are not available. The forms were altered to their present form in 1979. Of the remaining half of the advisory committee three answered the question relating to religion (numbered differently on the older version of the form) as the Church of England, one as Roman Catholic, and one as "Committed Christian". In reply to the question on political opinions two were described as Conservative, two as Labour, and one as, in effect, uncommitted.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General what statistical information the advisory committee on the appointment of magistrates for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne possesses concerning the religious opinions and affiliations of the citizens of Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Solicitor-General: This information is not collected statistically.

Magistrates (Appointments)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General what is the publication date for the new edition of the notes on procedure as to how advisory committees for the appointment of magistrates should carry out their duties; and if he will make a statement regarding changes from the previous directions.

The Solicitor-General: The publication date for the new edition of the Lord Chancellor's "Directions to Advisory Committees" is not yet known. When available a copy will be placed in the Library.

Sentencing Policy (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Attorney-General if he will publish in the *Official Report* a copy of the Lord Chancellor's recent comments on the sentencing policies of the magistrates' bench in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Solicitor-General: The Lord Chancellor's recent speech had no direct reference to the sentencing policies of the magistrates' bench in Newcastle upon Tyne as such. The entire speech was circulated to a number of national and professional journals, and to the *Newcastle Journal*, but I am arranging to send the hon. Gentleman a copy in the hope that he may find it interesting.

Auction (Bidding Agreements) Act

Mr. Faulds asked the Attorney-General whether he will refer to the Director of Public Prosecutions the circumstances surrounding the auction sale of furniture from the estate of Mrs. Elizabeth Dreyfus held by Messrs. Bruton Knowles in Gloucestershire on 19 July and ask him to initiate proceedings against those dealers who have contravened the Auction (Bidding Agreements) Act.

The Solicitor-General: There is no evidence before me which would justify referral to the Director of Public Prosecutions with a view to a request for inquiries by the police. The director has neither the powers nor the facilities to investigate criminal allegations. If the hon. Member or any other person is in possession of evidence tending to show a contravention of the Auctions (Bidding Agreements) Act 1927 or the commission of any other criminal offence the proper course is to place that evidence in the hands of the police.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Best asked the Attorney-General what criteria will govern the distribution of casework within the Crown prosecution service to be established by the Prosecution of Offences Bill; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: The fundamental principle underlying the management of the Crown prosecution service will be maximum delegation consistent with proper accountability. In the great majority of cases decisions on prosecutions will be taken locally. The Director of Public Prosecutions will promulgate within the service guidance on matters of policy and practice intended to produce a sensible degree of consistency rather than rigid uniformity. Crown prosecutors will have a wide measure of discretion and in reaching their decisions will take account of any relevant local circumstances as well as the general guidance given by the director.

The Attorney-General has today laid before this House a White Paper outlining the proposed initial distribution of functions between the headquarters and local offices of the proposed Crown prosecution service. As an interim measure pending the establishment of the new service it is also intended to revise the Prosecution of Offences Regulations 1978 so as to provide greater flexibility in the handling of cases reportable by the police to the Director.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Personal Allowances and Taxation

Mr. Squire asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish for the tax years 1983-84 and 1984-85 the following information for (i) a single person, (ii) a married man without children, (iii) a married man with two children aged under 11 years, (iv) a married man with four children and (v) a two-child family where the wife is in paid employment: *(a)* the tax threshold at current prices, *(b)* the tax threshold at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50=100), *(c)* the tax threshold as a percentage of average manual earnings, *(d)* tax-free income at current prices, *(e)* tax-free income at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50=100), *(f)* tax-free income as a percentage of average income, *(g)* break-even point at current prices, *(h)* break-even point at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50=100) and *(i)* break-even point as a percentage of average manual earnings.

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish for 1983-84 and 1984-85 the following information for (i) a single person, (ii) a married man without children, (iii) a married man with two children aged under 11 years, (iv) a married man with four children: *(a)* the tax threshold at current prices, *(b)* the tax threshold at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50=100), *(c)* the tax threshold as a percentage of average manual earnings, *(d)* tax-free income at current prices, *(e)* tax-free income at 1949-50 prices (index 1949-50=100), *(f)* tax-free income as a percentage of average income, *(g)* break-even point at current prices, *(h)* break-even point at 1949-50

sclerosis between his Department and overseas organisations; and what incentives he has provided for local health authorities and others to exchange information on multiple sclerosis with medical and scientific organisations abroad;

(3) what steps he has taken to monitor the progress of research into multiple sclerosis and the development of new treatments and therapies both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is the responsibility of individual doctors, including our Department's professional medical advisers, to keep up to date with research and development, both in this country and abroad, relating to their particular fields of interest. This is done by keeping abreast of journals, by attending local, national and international conferences and seminars and meetings of professional bodies, by personal contact with other members of their specialty, and where appropriate by formal postgraduate training. We are confident that these established methods whereby medical and scientific knowledge is disseminated apply to developments in multiple sclerosis.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessments of the various needs of people with multiple sclerosis have been made in the last 10 years by his Department.

Mr. Newton: None. We have, however, just commissioned a national survey, one of the aims of which is to identify the needs of disabled people, including those suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Disabled People (Voluntary Organisations)

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to encourage disabled people in forming and operating their own voluntary organisations in order to ameliorate their condition and thereby supplement the statutory services.

Mr. Newton: We already give encouragement to this important activity, and provide grants for several national disability organisations which foster such developments. Disabled people should also benefit from our general policy of promoting self-help activities by, for example, sponsoring the publication of "Working with Self-Help Groups: a guide for local professionals" (Bedford Square Press, 1984), and the small scheme of grants we are planning with the voluntary sector to support the appointment of local generalist development officers for self-help groups.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the number of recorded cases of tuberculosis each year since 1980 in each of the area health authorities in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Notifications of tuberculosis in the metropolitan county districts within Greater Manchester between 1980 and 1983 were as follows:

Metropolitan County Districts	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Bolton	146	133	100	75
Bury	23	20	30	29
Manchester	154	130	117	155
Oldham	51	46	36	54
Rochdale	57	59	62	44
Salford	61	38	50	49
Stockport	26	20	32	26
Tameside	60	46	52	38
Trafford	31	13	28	21
Wigan	37	23	45	43
Total*	646	528	552	534

*Greater Manchester.

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Fowler: The proportion of the running costs of the Department directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

Computer Staff

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what information he bases his conclusions on the financial savings which will accrue by amending shift patterns involving computer staff in his Department.

Mr. Newton: The savings are based primarily on recommendations and options identified in an organisation and methods review in 1982. Our proposals for more effective use of staff and computer equipment involve the use of fewer staff and provide for savings in overtime and shift disturbance allowances.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what level of costs has been incurred due to the advertising campaign initiated by his Department to inform claimants of the methods of drawing benefits during the course of the dispute involving computer staff.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) on 3 December at column 77.

West Midlands RHA (General Manager)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many applicants for the post of general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority were shortlisted by the regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am told that five candidates have been interviewed by the RHA.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what savings he expects to make as a result of *(a)* changes in the way supplementary benefit board and lodging ceilings are set, *(b)* restrictions on local and

lodging payments to young supplementary benefit claimants and *(c)* changes in the way supplementary benefit residential care and nursing home ceilings are set.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 November 1984, c. *120*]: At this stage it is not possible to give precise estimates of the savings from the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 29 November, which are set out in a consultative document and have been referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee for consultation. We expect the savings to be of the order of £70 million in 1985-86 and somewhat higher in subsequent years.

Office of the Chief Scientist

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he established his inquiry into the functions of the office of the chief scientist in his Department; what are its terms of reference; when he expects it to report; and if he will publish the evidence submitted to it.

Mr. Fowler [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 November 1984, c. *526*]: I set up a review in August 1984 of my Department's research management arrangements relating to the health and personal social services. Its remit is to consider how best to implement the objective that research and development requirements for health and personal social services should be met from outside this Department, to the extent that that is not already the case. The review will identify the range of functions and facilities required to promote, commission, co-ordinate, execute and disseminate research and development in this field. It will make proposals as to how these functions and facilities can be most effectively undertaken and provided outside the Department, and will advise on how to carry out any functions which it is considered essential to retain within DHSS.

The review is due to be completed by February 1985 and I intend to announce my conclusions later in the year. Any evidence submitted to it can of course be made publicly available by its authors.

Social Security Advisory Committee (Reports)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which of the Social Security Advisory Committee's reports listed in his reply of 25 October, *Official Report*, *726-8*, to the hon. Member for Oldham, West were not implemented in whole or in part.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *625*]: All the committee's reports have been implemented in whole or in part. A total of 21 reports on draft amendment regulations have been published, as listed in my answer to the hon. Member on 25 October. These have covered over 300 changes in social security legislation, some of which have referred to wider policy issues also covered in the committee's two annual reports. The overwhelming majority of proposals relating to draft regulations have been implemented, either directly or by meeting in other ways the point of concern which led the committee to make them. The major exception is that we did not accept the committee's recommendation (Cmnd. 9150 and 9155) to withdraw proposed housing benefit and related changes earlier this year; we did however make a number of important changes responding to the committee's more detailed comments and suggestions. Other proposals we have not felt able to accept, for reasons which are set out in the appropriate government responses to the committee, have included recommendations for extended rights of appeal on weekly payment of child benefit (Cmnd. 8453); reconsidering withdrawal of child benefit for certain young people in temporary full-time work (Cmnd. 8586); writing off unrecovered overpayments after the same period as for ordinary civil debts (Cmnd. 8656); withdrawing for further consideration a provision to restrict application of the lower rate of deduction from benefit in cases of voluntary unemployment (Cmnd. 8978); and certain modifications on single payments for hospital visiting, assistance with house repair and maintenance, and reimbursement of travelling expenses to local offices (Cmnd. 9296).

Of the benefit policy recommendations in the committee's first annual report, published in 1982, 10 out of 14 have subsequently been implemented in whole or in part: these were the preservation in real terms of supplementary benefit, family income supplement and child benefit; the restoration of the 2 per cent. shortfall in benefits; the restoration of child benefit to its April 1979 level; the restoration of the 5 per cent. abatement of unemployment benefit; the eradication of the invalidity trap; and the preservation of the real value of the supplementary benefit capital cut-off and the capital limit for supplementary benefit single payments. We have taken steps to improve the advice and information service given in local offices, and although the committee's recommendation to extend the long-term rate of supplementary benefit to all those unemployed for more than a year remains on the table, we have been able to go some way towards it by enabling unemployed people over 60 on supplementary benefit to claim the long-term rate immediately.

Of the new recommendations in the committee's second report, published in 1983, we have been able to abolish the household duties test for housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension through the introduction of the new severe disablement allowance, and as my right hon. Friend recently announced, we shall be making good the 5 per cent. abatement of invalidity benefit made in lieu of taxation. The remaining recommendations largely relate to matters that are under consideration in the current social security reviews.

Special Hospitals (Riot Shields)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if the specific training in the use of physical restraint recently begun at Broadmoor hospital will include training in the use of riot shields;

(2) if there has been any training involving the use of riot shields at any of the special hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *625*]: Staff at Broadmoor hospital and Rampton hospital have taken part, on a voluntary basis, in approved training courses in the techniques of handling violent patients. These courses cover the use of polycarbonate shields in certain circumstances to avoid injury to the patient, to other patients, and to staff. Training already covers the planning of general routines and organisation at the hospitals, of individual patient programmes, and of patient-staff relationships, in a way that will normally avoid violent incidents arising. No polycarbonate shields are held at either hospital.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 December 1984

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Blind Persons (Employment)

Mr. Butterfill asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, what information he has on the number of blind people who have been employed in the Palace of Westminster for each of the last four years.

Mr. Beith: No registered blind people have been employed by the House of Commons Commission in the last four years.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Trials (Statutory Time Limit)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce statutory time limits for the period from arrest to trial for those held in custody in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: There are no immediate plans to introduce statutory time limits in Northern Ireland. However, the Government are mindful of the need to reduce the delay in bringing cases to trial in Northern Ireland. We will watch with particular interest the field trials which it is proposed to mount in England and Wales to test the practicality and effectiveness of time limits. We can then consider whether such measures might be effective in Northern Ireland.

Short Brothers (Privatisation)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement about the Government's plans to privatise Shorts.

Mr. Hurd: The Government have decided that Shorts should in principle be a candidate for privatisation. We therefore intend to seek specialist advice about the feasibility, costs and benefits and other details of disposal including how best to secure employee involvement so that the Government can consider the question fully in due course. In deciding eventually whether to proceed to sell, the Government will in particular wish to give full weight to the importance of the company in the Northern Ireland economy as well as to its policy of spreading share ownership.

WALES

Adult Training (Loans)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is Wales' allocation of the adult training loans experimental scheme for 1985-86.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: A consultation paper was issued on 12 November inviting views, by the end of January, on an experimental scheme of training loans. Decisions on such a scheme will be taken in the light of this consultation.

Self-employed People

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of self-employed people in Wales in 1981-82 and in 1983-84; and of these, how many in each case were self-employed in the construction industry.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Based on the biennial labour force survey estimates, the numbers of self-employed in 1981, 1982 and 1983 were 115,000, 118,000 and 121,000. No occupational breakdown is available on that basis. The latest information on self-employed construction workers relates to 1981 and is based on the census of population for that year which showed a figure of 16,290.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the numbers of unemployed *(a)* skilled construction workers and *(b)* unskilled construction workers in Wales in 1979-80 and 1983-84 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information is not available for the period after 1981. Figures for that and the preceding two years were as follows:

Unemployed workers whose last employment was in the construction industry

	Skilled	*Unskilled*
October 1979	1,392	697
October 1980	3,347	1,154
October 1981	5,289	2,116

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs were created in 1983-84 under the part-time job release scheme in Wales; how much cash employers in Wales received in 1983-84 in Wales; and how many jobs were created in Wales in 1983-84 under the job-splitting scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The part-time job release scheme was introduced in October 1983 and there was no take-up between that date and the end of the 1983-84 financial year. Fifty jobs were created in the same period under the job-splitting scheme.

Enterprise Agencies

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many enterprise agencies exist in Wales; how many jobs currently exist in these agencies; what is his calculation of the number of jobs per agency; and what total cash the Welsh agencies received.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Eleven local enterprise agencies are now operating in Wales directly employing 65 people. They estimate that they have been instrumental in creating or safeguarding a total of some 4,400 jobs.

Information is not available about the total financial support for these agencies which receive funding from a variety of sources. Urban programme contributions during the current financial year amount to £135,900.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the financial share for Wales of the increase in funds for the enterprise allowance scheme; how many enterprise allowances are currently taken up in Wales; and what is his estimate of the number for 1985.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: At the beginning of April 1984 some 40 places a week were available in Wales and this was increased to about 65 a week in May. Next year the planned weekly rate is about 80. It is not possible to give a precise expenditure figure since expenditure depends upon the pattern of take-up, but we would expect that the share in Wales of the total expenditure allocation would be of the order of 6 per cent. At the end of October 1984, just over 2,500 people in Wales were receiving allowances under the scheme and we expect a total of about 4,000 entrants in 1985-86.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of cash currently available to Welsh local education authorities; which local education authorities currently receive cash under the training and vocational education initiative; and what additional sums will be available to Welsh local education authorities in 1985 and 1986.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: In the present financial year Welsh counties are likely to spend on current and capital accounts about £680 million on education including meals and milk. All local authorities in Wales except Dyfed and South Glamorgan are participating in the technical and vocational education initiative. Details of the rate support grant settlement for 1985-86 and the level of capital resources for that year will be announced next week.

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of current expenditure on education by local education authorities in Wales for each year since 1978-79 in cash and cost terms.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information is as follows for local authorities' revenue expenditure on education excluding meals and milk:

£ million

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Cash	344·7	393·8	481·5	534·3	574·3	*605·5
1983-84 Cost terms	585·4	572·0	589·7	595·0	599·6	605·5

The figures in cost terms have been calculated using the GDP deflator.
* Provisional outturn figure.

Rhymney Valley District Council

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the housing block allocation for Rhymney Valley district council in 1983-84, in cash and percentage terms, is represented by enhancement from capital receipts accruing in that year and from previous years, respectively and cumulatively; and if he will provide the equivalent information for the estimates for 1984-85.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The capital receipts element of the housing allocation is determined only at the national level.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the housing block allocation for Rhymney Valley district council for 1983-84, in cash and percentage terms, was represented by expenditure on housing improvement grants; what is the equivalent information for the estimates for 1984-85; and if there is a limit on the proportions so spent by local authorities in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Provisional figures for 1983-84 show that Rhymney Valley district council spent £2·92 million—53 per cent. of its housing allocation—on improvement grants. The authority's forecast for 1984-85 is £2·9 million—66 per cent. It is for each authority to determine its own expenditure priorities in the light of the resources available to it.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the capital expenditure allocation for Rhymney Valley district council, specifically for housing, in cost and real terms, for each year since 1979-80, including the estimate for 1984-85 and using the latter as the base year.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information requested is as follows:

Housing Capital Allocation (£'000)

Year	*Cash*	*At 1984-85 Prices*
1979-80	5,260	8,004
1980-81	5,150	6,607
1981-82	3,650	4,258
1982-83	6,211	6,793
1983-84	5,465	5,725
1984-85	4,412	4,412

River Conwy (Tunnel)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest cost for the construction of a tunnel under the river Conwy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The current estimate of cost for the whole scheme from the Glan Conwy junction to Conwy Morfa is £130 million.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the pupil to teacher ratio for each year since school pupil numbers were at their highest level since 1954.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: School pupil numbers reached their highest level in 1976-77. For each year since then the information is as follows for primary, secondary and nursery pupils and teachers in service with LEAs:

	Number
1976-77	19·1
1977-78	18·8
1978-79	18·2
1979-80	18·1
1980-81	18·0
1981-82	18·0
1982-83	17·7
1983-84	*17·3

* Provisional

PRIME MINISTER

Falklands War

Q4. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister whether the rules of engagement for attacking Argentine ships were changed on Friday 30 April 1982.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Farleigh Wallop

Q16. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit the village of Farleigh Wallop, Hampshire.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Secretary of State for Energy (Speech)

Q17. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if the speech made by the Secretary of State for Energy on 20 November on unemployment represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 27 November 1984 at column 776.

Lewisham

Q25. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Lewisham.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Moynihan asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 6 December.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy).

Education Act 1944 (Correspondence)

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library the letters she has received from and sent to the hon. Member for Newham, South consequent to her answer of Tuesday 17 July, *Official Report*, columns 169-70 about the Education Act 1944.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Gibraltar

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Prime Minister whether it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government not to change Gibraltar's relationship with the United Kingdom without the consent of the people of Gibraltar.

The Prime Minister: Yes. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House on 28 November, the British Government will fully maintain their commitment to honour the freely and democratically expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar, as set out in the preamble to the 1969 constitution. The agreement which has been reached has been welcomed by the Chief Minister as an honourable outcome. In our view, it is very much in the interests of both Gibraltar and Spain. Full opening of the frontier should bring positive consequences for the economy of Gibraltar.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total of all local authorities' committed expenditure for 1985-86 shown on forms HIP 2 which have been submitted to his Department.

Mr. Gow: Summaries of local authorities' HIP 2 returns for 1985-86 are available in the Library. These show expected commitments for 1985-86 of just under £1·5 billion.

Homeless Persons

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many persons are classified as homeless in the following regions at the latest available date; the north-east, the midlands, the south-west and the south-east.

Sir George Young: The number of households found to be homeless by local authorities for the first half of 1984 was as follows:

Region	*Homeless Households (000)*
North	5·4
Midlands (East and West)	10·3
South-West	9·3
South-East (including inner and outer London)	27·1

Note:

1. This information is not collected for persons, nor for a particular point in time.
2. North-east is not recognised as a standard region.

Grant-related Expenditure

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what the maximum percentage change has

been in England on local authorities' grant-related expenditure from one year to the next over the period 1981-82 up to 1984-85.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: 72·1 per cent. for Oswestry district council between 1981-82 and 1982-83.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of staff which would be needed by the London residuary body to manage and service the Greater London council mortgage account.

Sir George Young: Under paragraph 10 of schedule 13 to the Local Government Bill it will be for the London residuary body to decide what staff it needs to discharge its functions, including its proposed responsibility for managing and servicing the GLC's mortgage account. I expect the body to give early attention to its staffing needs, as soon as it is set up after Royal Assent to the Bill, so that arrangements for the employees concerned are in place well before abolition day.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he is considering for the monitoring and control of staff levels in the joint boards he proposes to set up if the Greater London council and metropolitan counties are abolished.

Sir George Young: Clause 80 of the Local Government Bill enables my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to require the relevant joint authorities to submit to them manpower schemes for the first three financial years following the establishment of these authorities. We also intend that the staff of the joint authorities should come within the joint manpower watch arrangements.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, he will take into account when assessing financial targets the impact on boroughs containing present Greater London council housing action or general improvement areas.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No decisions have yet been taken on the future of expenditure targets beyond 1985-86.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 15 November, *Official Report*, column *314*, if he has asked the councils of the districts in which are located Greater London council seaside and country homes for assurances that they would maintain current standards of management and maintenance if, as proposed, the homes were transferred to the districts in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: I have announced that the financial basis of the transfer of ownership will enable the district councils to maintain the levels of management and maintenance expenditure they inherit on abolition. The levels adopted will be a matter for local decision. For the first time, however, the decisions will be taken by local authorities for which the tenants are electors, rather than by county hall in London.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council, he will adjust the block grant poundage schedule for London local authorities in respect of the expenditure on land drainage transferred to the Thames water authority, in a similar way to that which he proposes for the transfer of expenditure from the Greater London council to London Regional Transport.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Government are discussing the details of the post-abolition block grant distribution system with representatives of the local authorities. No final decisions have yet been made.

Sheltered Housing Schemes

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sheltered housing schemes are operated to full standard and how many not to full standard by each London borough; how many dwellings they involve; and what proportion of local authority stock in the borough they represent.

Sir George Young: Statistics on sheltered dwellings are provided to my Department each year by local authorities, by dwelling but not by scheme. The number given by each London borough for sheltered dwellings within its area, and the proportions of local authority stock they represent, were on 1 April 1984 as follows:

	Total LA Dwellings	*Sheltered*	*Sheltered as Percentage of Total LA Dwellings*
City of London	1,788	0	0·0
Camden	33,750	1,296	3·84
Hackney	45,571	915	2·01
Hammersmith and Fulham	19,152	929	4·85
Haringey	24,261	986	4·06
Islington	40,672	579	1·42
Kensington and Chelsea	8,862	225	2·54
Lambeth	48,650	953	1·96
Lewisham	42,186	581	1·38
Newham	30,761	231	0·75
Southwark	62,459	727	1·16
Tower Hamlets	19,044	402	2·11
Wandsworth	37,165	565	1·52
Westminster	23,320	466	2·00
Barking and Dagenham	33,720	496	1·47
Barnet	18,664	695	3·72
Bexley	11,471	719	6·27
Brent	21,685	618	2·85
Bromley	17,991	481	2·67
Croydon	20,637	1,060	5·14
Ealing	20,735	971	4·68
Enfield	20,551	960	4·67
Greenwich	37,116	860	2·32
Harrow	8,744	490	5·60
Havering	17,236	952	5·52
Hillingdon	20,360	636	3·12
Hounslow	19,530	995	5·09
Kingston upon Thames	6,898	1,226	17·77
Merton	13,989	233	1·67
Redbridge	11,686	1,072	9·17
Richmond upon Thames	9,350	520	5·56
Sutton	12,382	701	5·66
Waltham Forest	20,773	494	2·38
TOTAL	781,159	23,034	2·95

Planning Permission

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has of the number of unimplemented planning permissions in *(a)* London and *(b)* elsewhere.

Mr. Macfarlane: We do not collect this information.

Block Grant

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, on the assumption that the 1984-85 block grant for upper tier authorities is attributed to lower tier authorities in proportion to their rateable value, which lower tier authorities will receive less block grant in real terms in 1984-85 than they were receiving rate support grant in 1979-80.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The allocation of block grant from upper tier to lower tier authorities on a rateable value basis conflicts with the equalisation principles of the block grant system and would not provide a meaningful basis of comparison with grant entitlements received under the pre-1981-82 arrangements.

Tobacco Companies (Sponsorship)

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department collects on the scale and cost of sponsorship for sport and other recreations by tobacco companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies is restricted by a voluntary agreement between the industry and the Government. Under the terms of that agreement, tobacco companies are required to inform my Department, in confidence, of their annual plans for sports sponsorship, and any subsequent changes to them. Expenditure by tobacco companies on sports sponsorship is restricted under the agreement to the 1976 level with due allowance for inflation. Again in accordance with the agreement, the industry makes annual confidential returns to my Department showing their United Kingdom expenditure on sports sponsorship.

Greater London Research Library

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the future of the Greater London research library.

Sir George Young: There have been few recent representations, though the numerous responses to the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities", Cmnd. 9063, included references to this subject.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *423*, when he expects to make a decision on future arrangements for the Greater London research library.

Sir George Young: As soon as practicable.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the proportion of applicants on housing waiting lists in London who are pensioners.

Sir George Young: My Department finds is unprofitable to collect information on waiting lists because local authority policy varies widely. I am aware of some incomplete statistics published by the Greater London council.

GLC (Mortgagors)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the household income of Greater London council mortgagors.

Sir George Young: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with private sector lenders on their willingness to re-finance loans from the Greater London council mortgage account in the event of the Greater London council being abolished; and what information he has been given regarding the extent to which transferred mortgages will be re-financed.

Sir George Young: It will be primarily for the London residuary body to hold such discussions.

Radioactive Waste, Billingham

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many written communications have been received by his Department on the subject of proposals to deposit radioactive waste materials in the disused anhydrite mines at Billingham in Cleveland.

Mr. Gow: Approximately 13,200.

Public Sector Tenants

Mr. Powley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to enable public sector tenants to see information about themselves which is held by their landlords.

Sir George Young: My Department has today written to the local authority associations, to organisations representing tenants' interests, and to other interested bodies, to seek their views about how such information can be made more readily available. Public sector tenants sometimes believe that their landlords' files contain misleading personal information. In this area, and subject to proper safeguards, they ought to be able to check that mistakes are not being made. A copy of the consultation letter is in the Library.

Enterprise Zones (Job Creation)

Mr. John Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average cost of creating a job in an enterprise zone.

Sir George Young: At this stage of the enterprise zones experiment, it is not possible to give a figure: the costs of providing the infrastructure in the zones are incurred mainly in the early years whilst the jobs follow

Wheelchairs

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the cost to his Department of providing an electric-powered wheelchair for indoor use in the present financial year; and how many such wheelchairs have been provided in each of the last five financial years;

(2) what is the cost to his Department of providing an electric-powered wheelchair for outdoor use in the present financial year; and how many have been provided in each of the last five financial years;

(3) how many disabled persons are in possession of two electric-powered wheelchairs, one for indoors and one for outside use, provided by his Department;

(4) what would be the cost to his Department of providing one electric-powered wheelchair suitable for indoor and outdoor use, which can be self-operated, in the current financial year;

(5) what plans the Government have to change the present rules on the provision of electric-powered wheelchairs to the disabled to provide only one wheelchair suitable for indoor and outdoor use which is self-operated.

Mr. Newton: The number of indoor electric wheelchairs and outdoor electric power-assisted pushchairs issued in the last five financial years is as follows:

	Indoor	*Outdoor*
1979-80	3,010	3,709
1980-81	3,723	3,732
1981-82	4,130	4,015
1982-83	4,982	4,166
1983-84	5,322	4,849

Figures relating to dual provision could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Department does not provide occupant-controlled outdoor electric wheelchairs.

A detailed analysis of the costs of wheelchair provision is being made by a working party which is reviewing the services of artificial limb and appliance centres. A full separation of these costs is not at present available. We have no plans to change current arrangements for the provision of different kinds of wheelchairs, but the working party is considering the range of wheelchairs issued by the Department and when it has reported we shall study any recommendations it may make.

Board and Lodging Charges

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the maximum permitted board and lodging charge for a single person, not included in the categories of people mentally ill or people in nursing homes applied by his Department's local offices in Norwich (both offices), Yarmouth; Diss; Highgate, London; Finsbury Park, London; and Surbiton, Surrey, in 1983.

Mr. Whitney: The maximum limit on the amount of supplementary benefit normally payable to a single person, other than in a residential or nursing home, in 1983 to meet the charge for full board and lodging accommodation in the area of each of the offices concerned was as follows:

	Before November 1983 increase £	*After November 1983 increase* £
Norwich Chantry	50·00	72·80
Norwich Mountergate	50·00	72·80
Great Yarmouth	45·00	56·00
Diss	55·00	66·00
Highgate, London	60·00	90·00
Finsbury Park, London	85·20	90·30
Surbiton, Surrey	70·00	81·00

Health Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was *(a)* the overall and *(b)* the per capita spending on health in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France and West Germany in 1983; and what percentage of each country's gross domestic product the overall spending represented.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Differences between the health care and health financing systems of the countries mentioned means that no precise comparisons can be made. Figures of this sort should not necessarily be taken to represent differences in provision. An OECD report, which is still in preparation, gives the figures from which total health expenditure, total health expenditure per capita and the share of each country's gross domestic product devoted to health expenditure can be calculated as in the table. Information later than 1982 is not available for the United States of America, France and West Germany.

	France	*West Germany*	*United Kingdom*	*United States of America*
*(a) Overall Expenditure on Health Care**				
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*
1981	25,700	28,340	15,380	152,770
1982	29,200	29,520	16,390	172,240
1983	—	—	18,550	—
*(b) Total Health Expenditure per capita**				
	£	£	£	£
1981	480	460	270	670
1982	540	480	290	740
1983	—	—	330	—
(c) Total Health Expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product				
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
1981	9·0	8·3	6·0	9·8
1982	9·3	8·2	5·9	10·6
1983	—	—	6·2	—

* Health expenditure figures for France, Germany and the United States of America have been converted to £ sterling using general purchasing power parities. All estimates are quoted to the nearest £10.

Health Authorities (Ancillary Services)

Sir Anthony Grant asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all district health authorities that have contracts with private companies for catering or domestic services or laundry and the annual savings figures as compared with direct labour.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my replies to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 30 October and 30 November at columns *967* and *623-24*.

Sir Anthony Grant asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that where direct labour

organisations win a tender for catering or domestic services or laundry the price quoted is the total paid by the relevant health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have given health authorities clear advice on the costs that should be included in the in-house tender. We believe this advice is being followed generally and we will investigate any case in which it appears that it is not. If the outturn cost of the service proves to be significantly higher than the estimated cost in the successful tender, we will require a new open tendering exercise to be carried out.

Supplementary Benefit

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will assess the effect on the present level of supplementary benefit payable to pensioners of his proposed new regulations.

Mr. Whitney: I presume the hon. Member is referring to the changes to the rules for paying additions for special needs to people receiving the long-term rate of supplementary benefit, which came into effect from 26 November, together with an extension of heating additions for supplementary pensioners. I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 27 November at column *468*.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many public sector tenants in Scotland are receiving housing benefit; of these how many are in receipt of full benefit; and what each of these figures represents as a percentage of the total number of public sector tenants in Scotland.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will take steps to ensure that every pensioner who qualifies will receive the Christmas bonus by Christmas 1984;

(2) in view of the withdrawal of poster RP2/84 entitled. "Your Christmas '84 Bonus," what arrangements are being made by his Department to ensure that pensioners know how and when they will receive their Christmas bonus;

(3) what was the reason for the withdrawal of the poster RP2/84 entitled, "Your Christmas '84 Bonus";

(4) what was the cost of withdrawing the poster RP2/84 entitled, "Your Christmas '84 Bonus";

(5) how many copies of the poster RP/84 entitled, "Your Christmas '84 Bonus", were printed; and what was the cost.

Mr. Newton: Arrangements have been made for the Post Office to pay the Christmas bonus to pensioners paid by order book, including those receiving payment on the stub of an expired book, during the week commencing 3 December. Pensioners paid annually and those paid four-weekly will also receive the bonus before Christmas. For some pensioners paid quarterly the Christmas bonus will be included with the next regular payment, which for some 20,000, people will be after Christmas.

The payment arrangements have been publicised by means of advertisements in national daily and Sunday newspapers during last week. It was decided not to display the usual poster because it did not accurately reflect the emergency arrangements which were necessary because of the industrial dispute at Newcastle. The poster was printed in two sizes—27,025 in A4 and 9,400 in A3 at a total cost of £2,600 including VAT. The cost of issuing instructions not to display it was negligible.

Pharmaceutical Industry

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the amounts spent on research by the pharmaceutical industry in each year since 1954; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information most readily available is given in the table. Figures relate to companies with sales to the National Health Service of over £2 million per annum (£1 million for years 1970-77); several also had significant export sales. The figures are for revenue costs of research and development on medicines in both home and export markets. Capital expenditure is excluded. Of the £1·3 billion spent on research and development in the years 1970-82 inclusive, £881 million was effectively reimbursed to companies in the price of medicines supplied to the NHS.

United Kingdom research and development costs

	£ million
1970	25
1971	28
1972	33
1973	35
1974	44
1975	59
1976	73
1977	97
1978	107
1979	146
1980	177
1981	218
1982	261

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will assess the total costs incurred by the Government as a consequence of the incidence of multiple sclerosis;

(2) what funds he is making available specifically for the relief of multiple sclerosis; and how these funds are to be dispensed.

Mr. Newton: Statutory services for people with multiple sclerosis form part of overall health and social services provision, and it is not possible to identify the expenditure devoted to particular categories of disabled people.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he is satisfied that his Department are sufficiently aware of research which is being carried out in other countries into the cause of multiple sclerosis and the development of new treatments and therapy programmes;

(2) what steps he has taken to encourage the international exchange of information on multiple

the light of advances in technology. The consultative document estimated total costs over a 20-year period of some £700 million, with cumulative net savings in staff and administrative costs of some £1,200 million. It is not envisaged however that the strategy will be fully implemented until the middle of the next decade and these figures must therefore be regarded as very broad estimates.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths have occurred in England and Wales resulting from asbestos-related diseases in the last three years; and what levels of industrial disablement benefits have been allocated to patients in hospital while receiving treatment for such diseases.

Mr. Newton: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the numbers of deaths from asbestos-related diseases recorded in Great Britain in respect of people known to have worked with asbestos and participating in the asbestos survey are:

	Number
1981	598
1982	619
1983	*530

* (latest information available).

When a person is admitted to hospital for treatment of an injury or disease for which he is receiving industrial disablement benefit, that benefit is increased to the 100 per cent. rate whilst he remains in hospital.

Family Practitioner Service (Review)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the review of the family practitioner service to be completed; and if he will make a statement about publishing its conclusions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We anticipate publication of the Green Paper in the early part of next year.

Social Security (Equal Treatment)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the specific action taken by each member state of the European Economic Community to comply with the requirements of Community directive 79/7/EEC on equal treatment in social security; if any countries have requested a deferment of the obligations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The most recent information on the action taken by each member state of the EC to comply with Community directive 79/7/EEC is contained in the "Interim Report on the application of directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 (COM(83)793 final)" issued by the Commission of the European Communities on 6 January, a copy of which is in the Library.

The implementation period for the directive expires on 22 December. Within a year of this date member states are required to provide the Commission with all information necessary to enable them to draw up a report on the application of the directive for submission to the council. When this final report on the application of the directive is published a copy will be placed in the Library.

Smoking (Health)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of deaths from heart disease he attributes to smoking in people aged under 45 years, under 65 years and in all age groups; what is the total number of such deaths he thus attributes to smoking in each of these age ranges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Total deaths from coronary heart disease are in the table. In its recent report "Health or Smoking?" the Royal College of Physicians estimates that perhaps 20 per cent. of deaths from coronary heart disease are related to smoking and that the risk is greater among smokers aged under 45.

Total deaths from ischaemic heart disease (international classification of diseases 410-414): 1983† England and Wales*

Age group	*Number*
Under 45	1,897
45 to 64	31,946
All ages	156,550

* Commonly referred to as coronary heart disease.
† Provisional.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of deaths annually from lung cancer he attributes to smoking; how many such deaths occurred in people under 65 years and in all age groups in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In its recent report "Health or Smoking?" the Royal College of Physicians estimates that about 90 per cent. of deaths from lung cancer are attributable to smoking. In 1983 total deaths from this cause (international classification of diseases 162) in England and Wales are provisionally estimated to have been 11,021 in people under 65 years and 35,572 for all ages.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of acute beds in National Health Service hospitals and what total number of inpatient bed days per annum he estimates to be used by patients who are suffering from smoking-induced illnesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The estimated daily average number of beds occupied by patients suffering from diseases in which smoking is considered to be significant is as shown. However, it is not possible to estimate what proportion of the beds would be occupied by patients in whose cases smoking was a contributory factor.

Estimated average daily number of beds occupied in 1983 by patients with selected main diagnoses, NHS Hospitals in England

Diagnosis	*International Classification of Disease codes*	*Estimated average number of beds occupied daily*
Ischaemic heart disease	410-414	5,950
Malignant neoplasm of trachae, bronchus and lung	162	1,830
Bronchitis and emphysema	490-492	1,310
Other obstructive lung disease	496	880

Diagnosis	International Classification of Disease codes	Estimated average number of beds occupied daily
Total of conditions listed above		9,970

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the percentage of outpatients at chest clinics who attend as a result of smoking-induced illnesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In 1983, there were 179,700 new attendances at outpatient clinics for chest diseases in National Health Service hospitals in England. It is not possible to estimate the proportion of patients who attend as a result of smoking-induced illnesses.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many amputations are carried out each year as a result of peripheral vascular disease caused by smoking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: An estimated 2,220 patients who underwent an amputation in National Health Service hospitals in England in 1982 were diagnosed as suffering from atherosclerosis and other peripheral vascular diseases. It is not known how many cases were smoking-related.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of premature deaths caused by the use of tobacco; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Royal College of Physicians estimates that at least 100,000 deaths occur each year as a result of smoking.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost to the National Health Service of smoking-induced diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The current estimated cost to the National Health Service in England and Wales of diseases attributable to smoking is about £120 million a year.

Drugs (Overprescribing)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has now received concerning the over-prescribing of a drug, the name of which has been supplied to him; how many complained of the side effects of the drug and of withdrawal symptons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have assumed that the hon. Member is referring to the drug Lorazepam, the constituent of Ativan. I have received no further representations about this drug since the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 31 October at column *1110*.

Heroin

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of premature deaths caused by the use of heroin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information is not available centrally in precisely the form requested. The information in the table may be of help to the hon. Member. The Government will continue to give high priority to measures to combat drug misuse.

Number of deaths in England and Wales

Year	Morphine type* drug dependence	Morphine type* non-dependent abuse	Poisoning† involving heroin
1979	43	—	3
1980	43	—	9
1981	29	1	10
1982	58	3	8
1983	64	1	10

* Heroin, Methadone, Opium, Opium alkaloids and their derivatives, and synthetics with morphine-like effects.
† Accidental, suicidal or undetermined.

Drug Addiction

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost to the National Health Service of drug addiction.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: These costs are not identified separately in the accounts of health authorities or estimated costs of family practitioner services.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines issued by year during the last five years in the Merseyside regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Myasthenia Gravis

Mr. Spencer asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of myasthenia gravis were diagnosed in each of the last three years; and what facilities are available for diagnosis and treatment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Detailed statistics on the incidence of this disease are not readily available. The estimated number of hospital discharges and deaths in respect of myasthenia gravis in National Health Service hospitals in England in each of the years 1980-82 (the latest available data) was:

	Number
1980	800
1981	740
1982	700

Facilities for diagnosis and treatment are available in all NHS regions.

Abortions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will investigate why women who have abortions in National Heath Service hospitals are 17 times more likely to die from accidents during the operation than women who go to private clinics for this operation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I assume the hon. Member's question refers to recent correspondence in *The Lancet*. The correspondent who first raised the point subsequently amended the ratio of deaths following abortions carried out within the National Health Service and the private sector to 9:1 during the period 1968-82. In our opinion, the numbers involved are too small to calculate meaningful death rates or draw any conclusions about relative risk.

Dentists

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he makes of the extent nationally that dentists are paid for their services in cash; if he will take steps to reduce or eliminate this; and if he will require that receipts be made available for all payments by patients before fee or item payments are issued.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are not aware of the extent to which patients pay National Health Service charges in cash. We would not wish to take any steps to reduce patients' choice to make such payments by whatever method they find most convenient. Dentists are required by their terms of service to give patients receipts for any NHS charges paid and to include on the form which they use to claim fees the amount of any charges received or being claimed from the patient.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much the Post Office measures to counteract the effects of his Department's strike at Newcastle is expected to cost up to the end of 1984.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

West Midlands RHA (General Manager)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many members of the West Midlands regional health authority interviewed the shortlisted applicants for the post of general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The details of internal arrangements made by the West Midlands regional health authority for its members to consider the candidates are a matter for that authority. I suggest that the hon. Member should approach the chairman for the information he requires.

Social Security Advisory Committee

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is yet able to announce the chairmanship of the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Mr. Fowler: I am pleased to be able to announce that Mr. Peter Barclay, CBE, has agreed to serve as chairman of the Social Security Advisory Committee for a period of three years from 1 January 1985. Mr. Barclay, a senior partner in a London firm of solicitors, is at present chairman of the National Institute for Social Work.

DEFENCE

Forces (Free Mail)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on free mail for HM forces in the Falklands.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) of 5 December at column 181.

Nimrod Airborne Early Warning Project

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimated cost of the Nimrod airborne early warning project; how this varies from the original estimate; when it is likely to be in service; if he is satisfied with progress towards its introduction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: On the progress of the project, I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 29 October at column 854. So far as project cost is concerned, as I told the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) on 15 November at column 346, it is our policy not to divulge information that is commercially confidential.

Airland Battle Concept

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the implications for British forces of the adoption by United States forces of the airland battle concept.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Lady to my answer to her of 15 November at column 349 in which I made it clear that airland battle is United States army, not NATO, doctrine, and that United States army forces will, like British forces, operate in Europe under NATO procedures and principles.

NATO

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the defensive nature of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation alliance influences force structures and tactical planning.

Mr. Stanley: NATO's deterrent strategy of forward defence and flexible response forms the basis of all its planning.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the role of 1st British Corps is influenced by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation strategy of forward defence.

Mr. Stanley: The planning and disposition of 1st British Corps on that sector of NATO's central region to which it is assigned reflects NATO's strategy of forward defence.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the battle role of 1st British Corps of the adoption by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation of the follow-on force attack doctrine.

Mr. Stanley: The adoption by NATO of follow-on force attack as a long-term planning guideline will not affect the role of 1st British Corps; consideration of any implications for the detailed conduct of that role will be part of the further development of long-term planning.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what alternative strategies to follow-on force attack have been considered by the North Atlantic Trety Organisation.

Mr. Stanley: NATO has adhered consistently to its defensive strategy based on forward defence and flexible response since its adoption in 1967. The long-term planning guideline follow-on force attack is consistent with that strategy.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what studies he has made of the implications for the level of reserves of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopting the doctrine of follow-on force attack.

Mr. Stanley: FOFA was adopted by NATO as a long-term planning guideline. Implications for the level of reserves is one of the many aspects to receive due consideration in the further development of long-term planning in this as in other areas.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what requirement for offensive action is envisaged in current North Atlantic Treaty Organisation strategy on the central European front.

Mr. Stanley: We have repeatedly made it clear that NATO is a defensive alliance, and that none of our weapons will be used except in response to an attack.

Government Policy

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the lectures given to the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies by General Sir Nigel Bagnall and Air Marshall Sir Patrick Hine on 23 May continue to reflect Her Majesty's Government policies, particularly as regards the role of British forces in Germany.

Mr. Stanley: The Government's policies are to support NATO's defensive strategy of flexible response and forward defence, a strategy reflected in both lectures.

Fleet Headquarters (Signals)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the normal practice at Fleet headquarters at Northwood for the recording and retention of signals sent from, and received by, flag officer submarines.

Mr. Stanley: Records of classified signals are kept by flag officer submarines in accordance with the normal rules for the security and handling of classified documents. Signals are normally destroyed after a month unless they are required, in which case they are usually placed on a registered file.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any of the original signals sent between HMS Conqueror and Fleet headquarters at Northwood in April and May 1982 have been retained.

Mr. Stanley: Yes.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any of the signals sent between HMS Conqueror and Fleet headquarters at Northwood in April and May 1982 were destroyed before November 1982.

Mr. Stanley: Yes.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any copies of signals sent between HMS Conqueror and Fleet headquarters at Northwood in April and May 1982 are retained in any form other than the war diary of flag officer submarines.

Mr. Stanley: Yes.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 December, if he will list the days between 16 June 1982 and 16 February 1983 on which signals documents relating to HMS Conqueror were destroyed, stating whether the document was *(a)* a signal originating from Northwood, *(b)* a signal originating from HMS Conqueror and *(c)* part of the signals log of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Stanley: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now list in a form which neither discloses tactical information nor prejudices current naval operations, the approximate position of each element of the Falklands task force at noon and midnight on 29 and 30 April and 1, 2 and 3 May 1982.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Defendants' Pleas (Statistics)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics his Department collects in respect of defendants' pleas on arraignment *(a)* before Crown courts and *(b)* before magistrates' courts.

Mr. Mellor: Information collected by the Department on court proceedings includes whether defendants pleaded guilty of not guilty when prosecuted for indictable offences at the Crown court or at magistrates' courts, and for some of the more serious summary offences at magistrates' courts. However, in 1980 the recording of this information was found to be inaccurate and despite subsequent efforts to improve the recording of plea, reliable information is not at present available from this source. However, I understand from my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor that his Department records the defendant's plea on arraignment at the Crown court and results are published annually in "Judicial Statistics" (tables 5.13 and 5.16 of the issue for 1983, Cmnd. 9370).

Movement for London have expressed to me recently their concern about the ability of the Dartford tunnel to cope with expected M25 traffic flows. On this matter I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) on 3 December at column 34. No representations have been received from the National Chamber of Trade.

Driving Tests, Stoke-on-Trent

Mr. Forrester asked the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has made arrangements for driving tests in Stoke-on-Trent to be held after a shorter waiting time if they are organised through particular driving schools than the normal waiting time for direct applicants for tests.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

Mr. Forrester asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to reduce the waiting time for driving tests in Stoke-on-Trent; and when an improvement can be expected.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department is recruiting extra examiners. Some are due to be posted to Stoke-on-Trent. This should bring about an improvement in waiting times early in the new year. Examiners are also posted in temporarily from other centres to even out waiting periods throughout the traffic area.

Mr. Forrester asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average waiting time for driving tests in England; and what are the minimum and maximum waiting times in Stoke-on-Trent.

Mrs. Chalker: The average waiting time for an L-test in England and Wales on 9 November, the latest date for which figures are available, was 18½ weeks. Waiting times at that date at centres serving Stoke-on-Trent were: Fenton, 20 weeks; Cobridge, 20 weeks; and Newcastle-under-Lyme, 28 weeks. This compares with an average wait in the west midlands of some 20 weeks. I am not satisfied with these waiting times, and the current recruitment of further staff will help to reduce them.

Cyclists

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Transport what specific steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that road designers and engineers are considering the needs of cyclists.

Mrs. Chalker: The Department undertakes research into cycle facilities and publishes information for the use of road designers and engineers. Local advice on individual schemes is available through the Department's regional offices.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many child cyclists under the age of 15 years were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injuried in road accidents in 1981, 1982, 1983 and to the nearest available date in 1984;

(2) how many cyclists were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in road accidents in 1981, 1982, 1983 and to the nearest available date in 1984;

(3) what is the approximate number of cycling accidents which have occurred on *(a)* large roundabouts, *(b)* slip roads, and *(c)* busy main roads in the last three years.

Mrs. Chalker: The numbers of pedal cyclists killed and seriously injured in 1981, 1982 and 1983 and to the nearest available date in 1984 were:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	**1984*
0 to 14 years				
Killed	86	76	87	41
Seriously injured	2,010	1,982	2,200	1,021
All Ages				
Killed	310	294	323	152
Seriously injured	5,194	5,673	6,073	2,766

* January to June (provisional figures).

The number of cycling accidents which occurred on large roundabouts—mini roundabouts are not included—slip roads and main roads—motorways, A(M) and A class roads—for the last three years were:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*
Roundabouts	1,547	1,775	2,014
Slip roads	143	181	208
Main roads	10,929	12,508	12,995

Identifying busy main roads would involve disproportionate cost. An article on pedal cycle accidents is included on page 34 of "Road Accidents Great Britain 1983", a copy of which is in the Library.

Departmental Economies (Rewards)

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has funds available within his budget for rewarding employees, or members of the public, for putting forward suggestions which result in the saving of costs.

Mr. Ridley: Funds are available under a staff suggestions scheme for rewarding employees whose suggestions improve the efficiency of the Department. There are no such arrangements for members of the public.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to alter the public inquiry system in relation to trunk roads.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment will be considering whether any changes should be made in the light of the Civil Engineering Economic Development Committee's report on pre-construction procedures for motorway and trunk road schemes, which they expect to receive shortly.

Greater London Transport Survey

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is taking steps to continue the Greater London transport survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Greater London transport survey of 1971 and 1981 were the responsibility of the GLC. On that pattern the next survey would not need to be carried out until 1991. It will be for the boroughs and the Secretary of State to decide, under powers being sought in the Local Government Bill, what survey arrangements will be appropriate in the London area.

Greater London (Motor Cars)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to restrict and restrain car use into Greater London.

Mrs. Chalker: I am not clear what steps the hon. Member considers would be justifiable to limit Londoners' car use or what powers he proposes should be used.

British Transport Police (Identification Parades)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the stations at which informal identification parades were conducted by the British Transport Police in each year from 1979 to September 1984.

Mrs. Chalker: Information covering previous years since 1978 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

British Rail (Public Service Obligation Grant)

Sir Philip Goodhart asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will adjust British Rail's public service obligation grant cash limit for 1984 to take account of the change of the board's annual accounting period from a calendar to fiscal year.

Mr. Ridley: Yes. The PSO grant cash limit normally covers a 12-month period. But British Rail is changing its annual accounting period from a calendar to a fiscal year basis with effect from 1 April 1985. I have decided, therefore, to extend the PSO grant cash limit for 1984 to cover the 15 months period from 1 January 1984 to 31 March 1985. The new limit for that 15 month period will be £1,088 million. This continues to reflect British Rail's progress towards achieving the 1986 grant target.

Road Traffic Growth

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to revise the forecasts of road traffic growth released in July 1980.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes. In the light of trends in traffic growth and economic factors, the national road traffic forecasts of 1980 have been revised. I am issuing the new set of figures today and have placed copies in the Library. The new forecasts show increases over the next 30 years in the overall rate of traffic growth previously forecast.

ENERGY

Coal Mining Industry

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of persons employed in the coal mining industry in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures showing the total number of persons employed by the board and its wholly-owned subsidiaries are set out in the NCB's annual report and accounts. Figures given for the last five years were:

(end September)

1979:	294,906
1980:	293,940
1981:	279,207
1982:	266,315
1983:	246,835

The equivalent figure for 1984 is 222,022 (provisional).

The reduction in the number of persons employed in the industry in the last 11 years of Labour Governments was 227,130, which far exceeds 130,019, the reduction in the nine years of Conservative Governments since 1970.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the British delegation to the United Nations conference of the Committee of Disarmament in Geneva has had communications with representatives of other international committees in regard to proposals for a total chemical weapons ban in Europe.

Mr. Luce: Our delegations to the conference on disarmament and to the Stockholm conference on disarmament in Europe have made it clear in those fora that proposals for a chemical weapons ban in Europe do not represent an adequate or satisfactory alternative to the global ban we are pursuing in the Geneva negotiations.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards proposals at the United Nations conference of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva for the creation of a chemical weapon-free zone in Europe, in co-operation with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, while simultaneously continuing negotiations for a global chemical weapons ban treaty.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 29 October at column 815. A European ban would be no easier to negotiate, and bring much less benefit than a global ban. We will not be distracted by the superficial attractions of a limited approach.

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government's view has changed on the signing of the law of the sea convention.

Mr. Rifkind: No. Our view has not changed. As I indicated in my statement to the House on 2 December 1982 at column 410, we have fundamental objections to certain aspects of the convention. We had hoped that there might have been improvements which would have enabled us to sign, but these have not occurred. We will not, however, stand in the way of signature by the European Community whose competence as regards the convention is limited.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme (Tameside and Stockport)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for the Stockport district the name and number of managing agents, the number on their schemes, by scheme, and the fees being paid to each managing agent under the youth training scheme in 1984-85 with a projection for 1985-86.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The names of the 75 managing agents operating in the Stockport district, including those which are organised on a national basis, and details of numbers of youngsters currently in training, are:

Number of Trainees (Includes both 1983-84 and 1984-85 entrants)

	Number
1. *Locally negotiated schemes*	
Alexandra Hospital	28
C. M. Baker	62
British Aerospace	72
Business Machine Training	69
CSC Construction	3
Damar Secretarial College	66
Fairey Engineering	22
Fielden House Productivity Centre	25
Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board	29
Michael John Salon	66
Roger J. Miller	82
Mirriless Blackstone	18
Norwest Pioneer	6
Mullard Hazel Grove	5
N. W. Furniture Trades	6
Link Organisation (North West)	92
Penberton Packaging	2
Simon Group Engineering	46
Smith Fort and Symonds	5
Stockport Area Health Authority	14
SETA (Stockport Engineering Training Association)	47
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	227
Sutcliffe Catering and Co.	1
Training and Manpower	91
United Biscuits Ltd.	18
2. *Schemes negotiated at national level by the Manpower Services Commission's large companies unit.*	
Argyll Stores	17
Association of British Travel Agents	18
B and Q Retail	—
British Association of Professional Hairdressing Employers	4
Baxters Butchers Ltd.	1
British Insurance Brokers Association	1
Boots the Chemist	4
British Gas	4
Builders Merchants Federation	4
Burton Retail Division	—
C and A	3
Collier Holdings	1
Cordon Bleu	2
COSMA Holdings	11
Debenhams	24
J. H. Dewhurst Ltd.	—
Dixons Ltd.	1
Drinks Industry Training Association	—
Electricity Council (CEGB)	3
Electricity Council (NWEB)	4
Flotilla Shoes Ltd.	1
Football League	—
Gardner Merchant	2
Gateway Food Markets	6
GKN Kwikform	3
Midland Bank	—
Automobile Association	10
Abbey National Building Society	2
International Thompson/Lunn Poly	—
Kwikfit Euro	1
R. S. McColl	2
Marks and Spencer	5
Mothercare Ltd.	1
National Bus Company	—
National Institute of Hardware	1
Post Office	23
Plastic Products Industry Board	1
Shoe Repair Training Agency Ltd.	3
W. H. Smith and Son Ltd.	2
Thorn EMI Rentals	—
Thorn EMI Retail	1
Lloyds Bank	1
National Westminster Bank	2
Trustee Savings Bank	3
Williams and Glyns Bank	1
William Timpson Ltd.	3
Whitbread and Co. plc	—
Clothing and Allied Products Industry Training Board	23
Construction Industry Training Board	105
Sight and Sound	34

Fees payable to managing agents will vary according to a number of factors. Each place included in a formal contract attracts a fee of £100. In addition, and provided certain current requirements are met, £39 per week is made available to the agent as long as a place remains filled.

No forecast is available at present of the size of schemes likely to be approved or the fees likely to be paid in 1985-86.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many accidents have occurred on the youth training scheme since the inception of the programme in the Stockport and Tameside districts, respectively.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The table shows the number of accidents on the youth training scheme which have been reported to the Manpower Services Commission's Greater Manchester east area office which covers the local authority districts of Stockport, Tameside and Oldham:

*Accidents**	*Period* 1 April 1983 to 31 March 1984	1 April 1984 to 30 September 1984
Fatalities	Nil	Nil
Injuries		
Major†	2	1
Minor	11	4
Total	13	5

* MSC accident figures for YTS are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on employed persons. However, MSC figures will include a number of accidents, in particular road traffic accidents during scheme time and accidents to trainees in educational establishments, which may not have been reportable to HSE had the individuals been employed.

† Major injuries are classified according to the severtiey criteria laid down in the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1980.

Training and Job Creation

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will issue a booklet for the small employer, describing exactly what schemes are in operation for job creation; and how the employer can provide practical support for such schemes;

(2) whether he will introduce a special leaflet to explain the system of state help in finding training for and self-creating jobs for the 18 to 26 age group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Department and the Manpower Services Commission maintain a range of explanatory publications and leaflets aimed at employers and individuals, whether employed or not, describing those schemes and programmes which could be of use to them according to their circumstances. A number of these publications cover more than one type of assistance where appropriate. We therefore have no immediate plans to

increase the range of existing publications as my hon. Friend suggest but the situation is kept under constant review, and if he has any suggestions we would be glad to hear from him.

Health and Safety

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average fine paid by firms violating the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act in 1982, 1983, and to the latest available date in 1984.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The table shows the average fine paid by firms convicted under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act for prosecutions brought by Her Majesty's Factory Inspectorate.

Year	*Average fine* £
1982	377
1983*	371
1984*†	480

* Provisional.
† January to October.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many firms have been fined for violations of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act in 1984 to the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: During the period 1 January to 30 October 1984 there were 347 firms prosecuted by HM Factory Inspectorate and were fined under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act.

Farm Machinery (Accidents)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers were *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in accidents involving farm machinery in 1981, 1982, 1983 and to the latest available date in 1984.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Information is given below on the number of workers reported killed or seriously injured in accidents involving farm machinery during the last three years and during 1984 so far.

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	**1984*
Fatal Accidents	19	13	15	7
Serious Injuries	Not readily available	212	211	90

* (Provisional).

Coal Miners (Accident Statistics)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of coal miners who have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured at work in each of the past five years to the latest date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is as follows:

	**Fatal*	†*Reportable Serious Injuries*
1979	46	473
1980	42	512
1981	35	815
1982	38	865
1983	30	824
1984†	18	240

Notes:
* Including deaths as a result of injuries sustained up to 12 months earlier.
† A comparison of reportable serious injury figures prior to 1981 with subsequent years is not valid as there was a change in the definition of reportable accidents on 1 January 1981.
‡ Provisional to 17 November 1984.

In addition to the serious injuries reported to the Health and Safety Executive statistics from the National Coal Board and the business statistics office for other accidents resulting in absence of more than three days are as follows:

	Number
1979	40,329
1980	36,221
1981	30,265
1982	24,110
1983	18,592
1984	Not available

Liverpool Skillcentre

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the implications for employment of his plan to close the Liverpool skillcentre; how many instructors will be made redundant; what will be the savings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Wages Councils

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many establishments in England, Wales and Scotland, respectively, are covered by wages councils; and how this figure compares with the number in each year since 1977.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is given in the table and relates to the number of establishments on the Wages Inspectorate's register.

Number of establishments

	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1977	353,093	22,273	43,211
1978	353,939	22,214	42,352
1979	331,168	20,892	38,404
1980	333,058	21,255	37,829
1981	336,844	22,001	38,878
1982	328,449	21,359	39,902
1983	330,574	22,067	38,630

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many workers in the United Kingdom are covered by wages councils; and if he will show how this figure has altered over the past seven years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) on 21 June 1984 at column *249-52*.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of workers in Scotland whose wages are governed by wages council legislation; if he will give a breakdown by wages council sector; and if he will show the number of workers in each regional or district council, whichever is most convenient.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Estimates of the number of workers in scope of wages councils are only available for Great Britain as a whole.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table covering the last 10 separate years which shows the number of complaints made in England, Wales and Scotland, respectively, to the Wages Inspectorate about employers paying under the statutory rates set by wages councils; and if he will show the number of prosecutions and the number of convictions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The figures requested are given in the following table:

	1974	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Complaints received										
England	6,411	7,162	8,297	7,457	6,750	5,413	6,864	6,985	8,227	8,027
Wales	579	786	928	818	807	610	731	607	841	618
Scotland	893	946	1,196	1,089	1,056	947	869	1,055	1,032	883
Prosecutions										
England	1	2	1	3	16	12	8	10	6	2
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	1	—
Convictions										
England	1	2	1	3	16	12	8	8	6	2
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	1	—

Labour Statistics

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for Employment why he has changed his practice in respect of answering questions relating to statistics on unemployment; if he will now make it his practice to publish in the *Official Report* the details sought by hon. Members on unemployment statistics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I wrote to the hon. Gentleman about this subject on 19 October and apprised him of the arrangements made to provide prompter, comprehensive access by hon. Members to unemployment statistics. One consequence is that parliamentary written questions seeking information which could be obtained from the computer data base through the House of Commons Library will be referred to the Library.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales have agreed that similar arrangements shall apply in respect of unemployment statistics relating to their areas, and to adopt a similar practice with regard to parliamentary questions. They have already written to all Members with constituencies in Scotland and Wales respectively. Detailed information on Northern Ireland will continue to be provided as at present by the Northern Ireland Office.

The new arrangements include a computer databank of the relevant information, including information back to June 1983 for parliamentary constituencies, local authorities and the new travel-to-work areas. A terminal link is now available in the House of Commons Library. This facility will provide more convenient and speedier access to data previously only available through this Department.

The new system is being introduced in stages. Until the middle of 1985, data available through the terminal will relate only to parliamentary constituencies, local authority districts, counties, travel-to-work areas and job centre areas as well as national and regional figures. Disaggregation by age and duration of unemployment will not be initially available for parliamentary constituencies, local authority districts, or new travel-to-work areas. By the middle of 1985, however, individual ward data will be available, thus information will be available via the computer for any area capable of definition in terms of local authority wards. Simple analyses, for example, ranking areas, are also available.

Community Scheme

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to permit the Manpower Services Commission to transfer places on the community scheme from areas where the take-up is less than 100 per cent. to areas such as Barnsley and district where the scheme is oversubscribed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: This has already been done, and I refer the right hon. Member to my statement on 26 March at column 29, which outlined out plans for a regional allocation of places on the community programme up to October 1986.

Wages Inspectors

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give a breakdown of the number of wages inspectors employed in England and Wales and Scotland, respectively, for the current year and for each of the past seven years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is given in the table:

	Outdoor inspectors in post		
	England	*Wales*	*Scotland*
October 1978	124	6	13
October 1979	138	7	15
October 1980	134	6	15
October 1981	100½	5	12
October 1982	98	5	13
October 1983	99	4	13
September 1984	97	5	13

In Wales and Scotland all inspector posts are currently filled. In England five vacant posts are in the process of being filled.

SCOTLAND

Housing Finance

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the total amount of income to local authority housing revenue accounts from housing support grant, rate fund contributions, rents and other sources, respectively, in 1984-85;

(2) what was the total amount of local authority housing revenue account expenditure in Scotland on loan charges, supervision and management, repairs and maintenance, respectively, in 1984-85;

(3) what was the total amount of local authorities' rate fund contribution to their housing revenue accounts in Scotland in 1984-85; and what was the average amount of rate fund contribution to the housing revenue account per council tenant in that year.

Mr. Younger: The latest available information is contained in section 5 of "Rating Review, Part 1, Estimates of Income and Expenditure 1984-85," published by the Scottish branch of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the total income in local authorities' housing revenue account in Scotland came from rents, housing support grant and rate fund contributions, respectively, in 1979-80, 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Younger: The information for each year since 1979-80 is as follows:

Year	*Rents*	*Housing Support Grant*	*Rate Fund Contributions*	*Other Income*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
1979-80	44	39	14	3
1980-81	45	37	13	5
1981-82	55	25	16	4
1982-83	62	16	18	4
1983-84	67	11	18	4
1984-85	70	8	18	4

Sources:

1979-80—1983-84 Local authority returns to Scottish Development Department.

1984-85—Rating Review, part 1 (June 1984), published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, Scottish branch.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total housing support grant paid to Scottish local authorities in 1984-85; and what was the average amount of housing support grant per council tenant in that year.

Mr. Younger: Under the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1984, grants totalling £52·5 million have been apportioned to appropriate local authorities in respect of expenditure in 1984-85. On the basis of local authority returns of housing stock, this is an average amount of £61 per council house. Housing support grant is paid in respect of property not tenants.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are drawing unemployment benefit in Scotland and have not worked since leaving school at the latest convenient date; and what is the comparable total on the same date in each of the last five years.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to my letter of 22 October. Information for Scotland on claimants who have not entered employment since completing full-time education is available in the House of Commons Library. However, apart from the figures for under-18-year-olds —for which adjustments have been made at the all-Scotland level—some of the statistics are not directly comparable because of the change from a registrant to a claimant based count in October 1982.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of people in Scotland who have been out of work for 52 weeks or more at the latest convenient date; and what was the comparable total on the same date in each of the last five years.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to my letter of 22 October. This information is available in the House of Commons Library, although the figures are not directly comparable due to the change in the basis of the count in October 1982.

Student Grants

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has sent to the principal of Herriot-Watt university in answer to letters he has received from him concerning the proposed measures relating to students' grant allocations.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received one letter from the principal of Heriot-Watt university about the Government's proposals in respect of students' allowances in 1985-86, but has not yet had the opportunity to reply to him. He will, however, do so shortly.

Fines

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of persons admitted to prison in Scotland for the non-payment of fines in the latest year for which figures are available; what percentage they were of the total number of admissions of convicted prisoners; and what was the average sentence served by those admitted for non-payment of fines in that year.

Mr. Younger: In 1983, there were 9,329 persons received into penal establishments in default for payment of fines. This represented 46 per cent. of persons received under sentence. Information on the average sentence served by those admitted in default of payment of fines is not available; but the average sentence imposed for this reason was 22 days.

Prisoners

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of prisoners admitted to Scottish prisons in the latest year for which figures are available who were sentenced to periods of three months and 30 days or less, respectively; and what percentage this was of the total number of admissions of prisoners serving sentences in that year.

Mr. Younger: The information is as follows:

Length of sentence	*Adult*	*Under-21*
(1) Total	7,925	1,463
(2) 30 days/one month or less	1,690	173
(3) 90 days/3 months	1,718	375
(2) and (3) as percentage of (1)	43	37

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the scale of payments made in terms of section 17(2) of the Prisons (Scotland) Act 1982 or other legislation to prisoners released or about to be released from Scottish prisons; and if he will give the total sum so disbursed for the latest convenient period for which figures are available and the average payment per prisoner during that period.

Mr. Younger: The rates of discharge grant currently paid are as follows:

	£
Homeless inmates	58·35
Inmates returning home:	
Aged over 18	24·55
Aged under 18	16·50

The total sum disbursed for this purpose in the finacial year 1983-84 was £352,315. Details of the average payment per prisoner eligible for a discharge grant are not available.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if a prisoner serving a sentence for the non-payment of a fine is entitled to remission on that sentence for good conduct.

Mr. Younger: A fine defaulter serving a term of imprisonment of more than five days may be granted remission of part of his term of imprisonment not exceeding one third of that term on the ground of his industry and good conduct.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the European Commission, following changes in the assisted areas map, about the eligibility of parts of Scotland and in particular the Highlands and Islands for European regional development fund aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: As I indicated in my reply to the hon. Member on 3 December at column *42*, the recent changes to the assisted area map have not affected the eligibility of the board's area for European regional development fund assistance. This has been accepted by officials of the Commission.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce statistics for the assisted places scheme in the current school session in Scotland.

Mr. Younger: At the beginning of the current school session there were 2,173 pupils receiving assistance under the assisted places scheme. Additional pupils will be admitted to assisted places throughout the 1984-85 school session.

Of the 2,173 pupils now in the scheme, 1,222—56 per cent.—are attending a fee-paying school prior to taking up an assisted place. The corresponding proportion for the new intake of pupils joining the scheme at the beginning of the current school session was 53 per cent.

Lower income families continue to benefit substantially from the scheme. In 1984-85, 1,132 pupils—53 per cent. of those in the scheme—will be receiving full fee remission because they have a family income of £6,046 per annum or less. A further 202 pupils—9 per cent.—have family incomes between £6,047 and £7,000 per annum and 250—12 per cent.—between £7,001 and £8,000.

Scottish Development Agency

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* past and present Scottish Development Agency investments in companies in each of the Scottish constituencies.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *372*]: Information on SDA investment expenditure in each Scottish constituency is contained in the following table:

SDA current investments by constituency as at November 1984*

Constituency	*Number*	*Value* £
Aberdeen North	6	302,174
Aberdeen South	24	1,418,876
Angus East	20	1,609,018
Argyll & Bute	6	80,538
Ayr	14	402,461
Banff & Buchan	19	253,510
Caithness & Sutherland	1	4,941
Carrick, Cumnock & Doon Valley	24	3,525,086
Clackmannan	8	58,319
Clydebank & Milngavie	24	499,254
Clydesdale	18	173,646
Cumbernauld & Kilsyth	21	1,193,118
Cunninghame North	42	1,557,213
Cunninghame South	10	344,711
Dumbarton	21	784,163
Dumfries	30	504,925
Dundee East	3	69,905
Dundee West	24	383,953
Dunfermline East	13	117,580
Dunfermline West	14	477,683
East Kilbride	23	513,473
East Lothian	25	361,672
Eastwood	2	60,294
Edinburgh Central	17	581,924
Edinburgh East	3	54,850
Edinburgh Leith	16	1,201,552
Edinburgh South	5	455,192
Edinburgh West	6	385,149
Falkirk East	8	167,973
Falkirk West	19	674,313
Fife Central	13	370,188
Fife North East	10	67,757
Galloway & Upper Nithsdale	21	541,879
Glasgow Cathcart	7	24,332
Glasgow Central	50	9,012,335
Glasgow Garscadden	3	14,618
Glasgow Govan	15	355,236
Glasgow Hillhead	7	53,923
Glasgow Maryhill	4	426,532
Glasgow Pollok	8	66,073
Glasgow Provan	3	16,585
Glasgow Rutherglen	20	2,804,264
Glasgow Shettleston	27	266,526
Glasgow Springburn	3	14,405
Gordon	15	501,837
Greenock & Port Glasgow	14	726,754
Hamilton	15	1,343,091
Inverness, Nairn & Lochaber	13	1,771,638

Constituency	Number	Value £
Kilmarnock & Loudoun	28	1,104,797
Kincardine & Deeside	7	143,633
Kirkcaldy	17	624,050
Linlithgow	4	78,307
Livingston	34	1,799,170
Midlothian	15	190,028
Monklands East	15	163,906
Monklands West	2	24,387
Moray	20	912,870
Motherwell North	16	145,053
Motherwell South	7	44,905
Orkney & Shetland	8	193,062
Paisley North	12	488,267
Paisley South	2	104,684
Perth & Kinross	34	789,156
Renfrew West & Inverclyde	29	1,822,723
Roxburgh & Berwickshire	42	734,757
Stirling	22	1,174,912
Strathkelvin & Bearsden	3	179,733
Tayside North	6	378,892
Tweeddale, Ettrick & Lauderdale	27	960,682
Total	1,064	48,653,413

* (i) Investments include: Mortgages, Site Loans, Rural Loans, Shares, Loans to Large/Small Businesses and Leg-Up Loans.
(ii) The figures provided show net current investment and exclude receiverships.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Rent and Rate Rebates

Mr. Fry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are in receipt of rent and rate rebate but not supplementary benefit at the latest count.

Mr. Newton: Standard housing benefit is payable to claimants not in receipt of supplementary benefit. It is estimated that as at autumn 1983, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of households in Great Britain receiving standard housing benefit was as follows:

	Number
Rent rebate	1,830,000
Rent allowance	390,000
Rate rebate	3,660,000

These figures are not cumulative. A claimant in receipt of a rate rebate may also be in receipt of a rent rebate or a rent allowance. I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) on 29 November at column *570* for information on those receiving help with both rent and rates.

Claimants (Industrial Disputes)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been spent by his Department in each of the past five years, in cost terms, on advising claimants about the effects on their entitlements of industrial disputes.

Mr. Newton: Advice is given to claimants about the effects of industrial disputes on their entitlements by the publication of leaflets and forms, through liaison with trades unions, local organisations etc. and in response to specific inquiries from individuals. I regret that the total cost of providing this information is not available but the cost at 1983 prices of printing the leaflet SB2 (Supplementary Benefit and Trade Disputes) in each of the past five years was as follows:

	£
1979	2,400
1980	4,000
1981	—
1982	7,000
1983	3,400

Pharmaceutical Industry

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are employed in the pharmaceutical industry; what is the current value of pharmaceutical exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The estimated number of people employed in the United Kingdom pharmaceutical products industry (standard industrial classification 2570) at September 1984 was 82,300. Earlier published figures related to a different classification and are not, therefore, comparable.

In 1983 the value of export trade in medicinal and pharmaceutical products as defined in United Nations standard international trade classification 54 was £1,073 million. In the first nine months of 1984 export sales totalled £876 million.

Public Duties (Payments)

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the treatment of payments made to people who are in receipt of state benefits, including local authority councillors, for carrying out public duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: There have been four representations in recent months about the fact that these payments are treated as earnings for social security benefit purposes. We have no proposals for changing the position.

Social Security (Costs)

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the estimated total costs of administering social security; how many social security staff are employed by his Department; what are the estimated savings in staff and administrative costs as a result of computerisation; how long it will be before computerisation is complete; and what is the estimated cost of the whole computerisation programme.

Mr. Whitney: The estimated annual cost of administering the social security programme—including unemployment benefit which is administered by the Department of Employment on behalf of the Department—is some £1·5 billion for 1983-84. The number of staff engaged in the work is about 106,000, including about 28,000 in the Department of Employment.

Our plans for the application of new technology to social security were set out in the consultative document "Social Security Operational Strategy—A Framework for the Future", published in 1982. The operational strategy is not a single project but a technical and managerial framework within which new projects will be developed and existing systems maintained and updated in

prices (index 1949-50=100) and *(i)* break-even point as a percentage of average manual earnings, in the light of the latest information on earnings levels.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *579*]: The information is in the table.

Assumption on changes in price and earnings levels in 1984-85 are consistent with the "Autumn Statement 1984". In particular, earnings are assumed to increase by 7½ per cent. over 1983-84 in line with the underlying rate of increase assumed by the Government Actuary in his recent report.

	Single man		*Married man without children*		*Married man with 2 children under 11*		*Married man with 4 children under 11, child 11-16, child over 16*	
	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
(a) Tax threshold at current prices £	1,785	2,005	2,795	3,155	2,795	3,155	2,795	3,155
(b) Tax threshold at 1949-50 prices*	126·0	134·9	123·2	132·6	77·6	83·5	58·1	62·6
(c) Tax threshold as percentage of average manual earnings	23·4	24·7	36·6	38·9	36·6	38·9	36·6	38·9
(d) Tax free income at current prices £	1,785	2,005	2,795	3,155	3,428	3,844	4,061	4,534
(e) Tax free income at 1949-50 prices*	126·0	134·9	123·2	132·6	92·2	98·4	78·4	83·3
(f) Tax free income as percentage of average income	23·4	24·7	36·6	38·9	41·5	43·6	45·7	47·7
(g) Break even point at current prices £	1,785	2,005	2,795	3,155	4,905	5,453	7,016	7,750
(h) Break even point at 1949-50 prices*	126·0	134·9	123·2	132·6	110·8	117·6	104·9	110·5
(i) Break even point as percentage of average manual earnings	23·4	24·7	36·6	38·9	64·3	67·2	92·0	95·5

* 1949-50=100.

Development Land Tax

Mr. Heddle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the percentage of time district valuers devote to work in connection with development land tax valuations and associated matters.

Mr. Moore: Yes, about 3 per cent. This figure includes time spent on such associated matters as administration, management and training.

Mr. Heddle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will estimate the percentage of the total yield from development land tax that is collected through deemed disposals.

Mr. Moore: The percentage collected through deemed disposals is probably in the region of 15 per cent., but the information on which to base a precise estimate is not readily available.

Mr. Heddle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what additional revenue is received from the development land tax that would not otherwise have been collected through corporation or capital gains tax; and if he will express the cost of collecting development land tax as a percentage of that additional revenue.

Mr. Moore: The information on which to base a precise estimate is not available but the additional current revenue received could be in the region of £50 million. The estimated cost of collecting development land tax is 10 per cent. of that additional revenue. Some of that cost would remain if the tax were collected through other taxes.

Freeports

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on progress towards the establishment of freeports.

Mr. Hayhoe: The six experimental free zones announced on 2 February at column 411 were designated by Treasury orders, which came into operation on 6 August. They are free to begin trading on completion of satisfactory security arrangements. The zones at Southampton and Liverpool have now opened.

Employers (Tax Concessions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional costs which would fall on employers in the event of reduction of pension scheme tax concessions and the removal of tax benefits.

Mr. Moore: Any additional costs would depend on the extent of any reduction in relief and on the individual circumstances of each pension fund.

Take-away Food (Value Added Tax)

Mr. Parry asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the effect on the take-away food industry of the imposition of value added tax; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Glyn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the revenue from the imposition of value added tax on take-away foods; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the tax on *(a)* sales and *(b)* profits.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to my answer on 12 November to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) at column 89.

The limited information available suggests that during the first few months of VAT on hot take-away food, the overall level of sales by small catering businesses was slightly down on the same period in 1983. Although some businesses have fared less well than others, it is impossible to say to what extent this is due to VAT rather than to other factors. There has been substantial real growth in the take-away food industry in recent years, and this long term trend can be expected to continue.

Cigarettes

Mr. Pavitt asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much extra revenue in real terms the Treasury would receive in a full year from an increase in taxation imposed by the next Budget of 5p, 10p, 15p, 20p and 25p, respectively, per packet of 20 cigarettes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The estimated net revenue changes, at 1985-86 prices, are:

Change in price of 20 cigarettes (pence)	*Full year revenue yield (£ million)*
5	160
10	320
15	475
20	625
25	770

For the larger price increases the estimates are subject to considerable margins of uncertainty.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the number of cigarettes sold in the United Kingdom in 1983 and his estimate for the number which are likely to be sold in 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Official statistics of cigarette sales are not collected. However, according to Customs and Excise returns, 102·6 billion cigarettes chargeable with excise duty were cleared for domestic consumption in 1983.

No estimate is available for 1984 as projections for cigarette clearances are not made.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Rowe asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the stamp duty payable by off-market dealers in unlisted securities.

Mr. Moore: The Board of Inland Revenue is advised that as the law stands securities dealt in on the unlisted securities market are not listed securities for the purpose of section 100(4)*(b)* of the Finance Act 1980. Until further review, where such stock is transferred to a qualified dealer full ad valorem duty will not normally be payable. The Board of Inland Revenue will be issuing a statement of practice to this effect.

TRANSPORT

Experimental Road Surfacing Materials

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the experimental road surfacing materials which are in use on roads for which he has responsibility; and what assessment has been made of their effectiveness.

Mrs. Chalker: The Transport and Road Research Laboratory has 153 lengths of experimental surfacing under observation on heavily trafficked roads. The influence of different types and proportions of bitumen —including additives such as organic polymers—stone and sand on road performance is being assessed in terms of resistance to skidding and rutting, riding quality, tyre noise and, with certain special materials, spray reduction. Formulations of 11 proprietary surfacing materials are included.

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the assessment by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory of the use of an experimental road surfacing material on the A1 the name of which has been supplied to him.

Mrs. Chalker: Five variants of the proprietary material, the name of which has been supplied, were laid on A1 in 1975 alongside eight other non-proprietary surfacings. Measurements indicated that the surface texture, required for high-speed skid resistance, of the sections surfaced with the named material was lower than that specified by DTp and did not increase with time. The material did, however, provide good riding quality for rather longer than a standard bitumen macadam surfacing, but at a higher first cost. Results of the assessment have been published in TRRL supplementary report SR476.

Level Crossings

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he is satisfied with the progress being made in the conversion of the miniature warning light equipped level crossings to other means of control; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many level crossings on public roads are still controlled by the miniature warning light system.

Mr. David Mitchell: There are currently 42 level crossings on public roads which are equipped with miniature warning lights (MWL) and 58 on private roads. The main feature of this form of protection is that the user operates the barrier or gate himself, with the MWL giving a warning of the approach of a train. When these crossings were first introduced the conditions of suitability were that the road usage was to be light and essentially local in character, so that most of those using the crossing would be familiar with it.

Following an accident at Naas crossing in 1979, the railway inspectorate reviewed all the MWL crossings. Whilst recognising that at most locations the original conditions still applied, the inspector recommended that no more should be installed on public roads, and none has been. He further recommended that existing ones should, in the long term, be converted to other forms of protection.

At the time of publication of his report, in mid-1981, six crossings had been identified as being no longer fully suitable for MWL. At two the road usage was no longer light or local: these two crossings have been converted. Plans to convert the other four are well advanced; most will be done during 1985. It is the Railways Board's view, shared by the inspectorate, that there is no cause to divert funds to the wholesale conversion of MWL crossings from work on crossings whose modernisation is being given a higher priority.

Dartford Tunnel

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from representatives of the Automobile Association, the National Chamber of Trade, the Confederation of British Industry and the Movement for London in relation to future traffic circulation making use of the Dartford tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Representatives of the Automobile Association, the Confederation of British Industry and

	1983-84 (Actual)	1984-85 (Forecast)
Total	123·5	137·2
Other payments		
Milk Outgoers Scheme	—	10·0
Grant Total	354·0	348·4
Contributions from the guidance section of EAGGF	67·4	52·6

* Excludes expenditure on Brucellosis eradication incentives (£1·9 million in 1983-84 and £0·8 million in 1984-85) and on horticultural protected crops adaptation aid (0·6 million in 1983-84).

Market Regulation (Expenditure)

Mrs. Roe asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide details of expenditure in 1983-84 and 1984-85 by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and the agricultural departments on market regulation under the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jopling: Details are given of the outturn for 1983-84 and the latest forecast of outturn for 1984-85:

	Outturn 1983-84 £ million	Latest forecast of outturn 1984-85 £ million
(i) Expenditure by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce		
Cereals	120·8	357·8
Beef and Veal	263·9	322·5
Pigmeat	−14·8	−10·1
Sugar	53·2	63·1
Processed Products	28·3	32·9
Milk Products	561·3	333·0
Oil Seeds	87·2	54·6
Sheepmeat	158·3	123·1
Others	21·0	29·2
	1,279·2	1,306·1
(ii) Expenditure by the Agricultural Departments		
Milk Non-Marketing Premiums	13·3	12·7
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	15·7	27·8
Annual Premium on Ewes	66·3	77·5
	95·3	118·0
Grand Total	1,374·5	1,424·1

Expenditure includes the beef and sheepmeat variable premium schemes—net of clawback for sheepmeat and charges on beef exported and sold into intervention—the premium schemes for the non-marketing of milk and the conversion of dairy herds, suckler cow premium scheme, annual premium on ewes, refunds on imports and exports, net of levies, the butter and school milk subsidies, and the net cost of buying commodities into intervention less proceeds from sales. It also takes account of certain receipts treated as negative expenditure, namely, monetary compensatory amounts levied on intra-Community trade and the co-responsibility and supplementary levies on milk producers. Of the estimated outturn for 1984-85 £1,087·1 million is expected to be financed from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund (EAGGF), the balance being financed from Exchequer funds. In 1983-84 £1,132·9 million was financed from EAGGF. Some of the expenditure shown above benefits consumers and trade interests rather than United Kingdom producers.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Loyden asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amounts of foodstuffs currently being stored in the European Economic Community under the intervention policies of the common agricultural policy and the cost of storing those foodstuffs.

Mr. MacGregor: The latest information on Community intervention stocks and the amounts set aside to meet the costs of holding stocks in the 1984 Community budget are set out below. It must be emphasised that the budget figures cover the whole of 1984 and do not relate solely to the current level of stocks.

Product	Stock level '000 tonnes	Date	Cost to Community of holding stocks in 1984* million ECU
Public intervention			
Butter	1,026	15 November 1984	323
Skimmed Milk Powder	816	15 November 1984	132
Wheat	5,975	22 November 1984	297
Barley	1,506	22 November 1984	
Rye	337	22 November 1984	
Durum	837	22 November 1984	
Beef	547	31 October 1984	203
Olive Oil	83	31 October 1984	48
Oilseeds	20	31 October 1984	0·9
Assisted private storage			
Cheese	105	15 November 1984	64
Butter	178	15 November 1984	96
Pigmeat	26	31 October 1984	41
Dried Fruit	46	end November 1984	†
Beef	143	16 November 1984	17

* As provided for in 1984 Supplementary and amending budget.
† Figures not available because budget does not identify expenditure in this sector in sufficient detail.

Seal Population (North Sea)

Mr. John Townend asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has of the seal population in the North sea; what information he has as to the gross food requirement of the seal population there; and what information he has as to the amount of fish destroyed but not consumed by the seals.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply and will do so as soon as possible.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Winnick asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the locations in London and the west midlands where the intervention stores for surplus EEC agriculture produce are sited and the amount of food stored, broken down into each class of produce; and how long such products have been held in such stores.

Mr. Jopling: At 31 October the position was:

Location	*Commodity*	*Quantity tonnes*
London		
Hornsey	Beef	6
Hackney	Beef	920
	Butter	1,712
Stratford	Beef	157
Southall	Butter	1,122
Acton	Butter	696
Tottenham	Butter	672
West Midlands		
Coventry	Bread Wheat	1,191
Kingswinford	Skimmed Milk Powder	2,040
Walsall	Beef	158
	Butter	2,711
Wolverhampton	Beef	457
	Butter	6,833

Because stocks are not constant, it is not possible to give meaningful figures for storage periods.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mrs. Norah McCabe

Mr. Parry asked the Attorney-General if the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland received from the coroner, under the Prosecution of Offences (N.I.) Order 1972, a report on the circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs. Norah McCabe on 9 July 1981.

The Solicitor-General: No. The police had already fully reported the facts to the Director who had taken his decision before the inquest was held.

Mr. Parry asked the Attorney-General if he was consulted by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland about any prosecutions arising out of the death of Mrs. Norah McCabe on 9 July 1981.

The Solicitor-General: No.

Mr. Parry asked the Attorney-General if he will now state why no prosecution has been commenced by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland in respect of the death of Mrs. Norah McCabe on 9 July 1981.

The Solicitor-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland carefully considered all the evidence available to him in this case, including the full version (as distinct from the edited version shown recently on television in this country) of the film that was taken by the Canadian news cameramen who were present and filming at the time of the incident in question. He concluded that the evidence did not warrant the institution of proceedings against any person in respect of Mrs. McCabe's death.

Mr. Parry asked the Attorney-General what are the criteria applied by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland in making a decision whether or not to bring a prosecution against a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for offences of violence against members of the public; and if these criteria are different in any way from those which are applied in decisions concerning the prosecution of members of the public or of members of a police force in England and Wales.

The Solicitor-General: The criteria applied by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland in these cases are exactly the same as those applied in comparable cases involving members of the public or members of a police force in England and Wales.

DEFENCE

Airborne Early Warning

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the remaining Shackleton airborne early warning squadrons; and which system he expects to provide radar defence against low level attack in 12 months, 24 months and 36 months from now.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

WALES

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many multiple sclerosis sufferers there are in Wales; and how many specialist centres for the treatment of multiple sclerosis sufferers there are in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Since multiple sclerosis is not a notifiable disease detailed information on the numbers of sufferers is not held centrally. People with multiple sclerosis are a sub-group, albeit a large one, of a group of patients who suffer from disabling neurological conditions. Statistics obtained from district health authorities on the numbers of admissions to inpatient or attendances at outpatient departments are unlikely to reflect in full the incidence of the disease.

There are no specialist centres for multiple sclerosis sufferers in Wales. It is for district health authorities to provide and develop appropriate clinical facilities for those with multiple sclerosis, as indeed for other patients with disabling neurological conditions. Service provision is normally made available by district general hospitals.

School Books

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the financial cost in 1983-84 to the local education authorities of Wales of their purchasing of school books.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Reliable estimates of expenditure on school books are not available. Expenditure on school books and equipment by local authorities in Wales is provisionally estimated to have been £14·0 million in 1983-84.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the percentage of all school book costs in 1983-84 in the local education authorities of Wales provided by parental contribution.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information is not available centrally.

Youth Service

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of cash spent by the local education authorities of Wales on the youth service.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The latest available information refers to 1982-83 and is as follows:

	£ million
Youth Service Current	5·241
Youth Service Capital	0·172

Local Education Authorities (Expenditure Policies)

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate on the effects of local education authority expenditure policies in Wales in 1983-84.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The Welsh Office has published the report today. Copies are available in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Armagh, in November; if he will give the number of persons involved and the number of times each person was searched; whether any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; and in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being concluded.

Mr. Scott: During November 33 strip searches were carried out on 22 female inmates in Her Majesty's prison, Armagh. Individual prisoners were searched the following number of times:

Number of Prisoners	*Number of Searches in each case*
11	2
11	1

No prohibited articles were found during these searches and no prisoner refused to be searched.

Incident (Linden Street)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will now set up an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs. Norah McCabe on 9 July 1981;

(2) if any police disciplinary action has been taken against any officers who took part in the Royal Ulster Constabulary Land Rover patrol in the vicinity of Linden street, Belfast, on 9 July 1981;

(3) of the Royal Ulster Constabulary officers who took part in a Land Rover patrol in the vicinity of Linden street, Belfast, on 9 July 1981, how many *(a)* are still serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and *(b)* have been promoted in rank since that date;

(4) how many formal complaints have been made about incidents of police use of plastic baton rounds in each year since 1979; in how many cases the complaint has been upheld; and in how many cases disciplinary action has been taken against the officers involved;

(5) how many claims for damages have been made to date for alleged injury by plastic bullets fired by *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland; what have been the results so far; in how many cases liability has been admitted; in how many cases the courts has made the findings of liability; and what is the total sum of damages paid to date.

Mr. Hurd: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax (Telephone Bills)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to remove value added tax on telephone bills for elderly and disabled people.

Mr. Hayhoe: No. It remains Government policy to assist those in financial need through the system of grants and allowances which the recipients can spend in the way best suited to their individual needs rather than by indiscriminate reliefs from value added tax which give equal benefits to those who need financial help and those who do not.

Tax Changes

Mr. Fisher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make available a list of *(a)* tax changes already announced and due to take effect from April 1985 and *(b)* other provisions on which proposed legislation has been announced.

Mr. Moore: Yes, I am arranging for a list to be prepared. As soon as it is ready I will place a copy in the Library, and write to the hon. Member.

Money Supply

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in the real money supply since the first quarter of 1974.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Chile

Dame Judith Hart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the British executive director of the International Monetary Fund to oppose any proposal to approve a waiver of the performance criteria for Chile's current standby arrangement on 7 December.

Mr. Lawson: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Dame Judith Hart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has reviewed the bilateral or multilateral financial relationships between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Chile since the recent declaration of a state of siege in Chile.

Mr. Lawson: Her Majesty's Government keeps its relationships with Chile under constant review so that our relations with that country properly reflect both our concerns and our interests there.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Awards

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what responses he has sent to the chairman of Leeds university council and the vice-chancellor of Kent university in reply to their recent complaints made to him concerning students' grant allocations and contributory parental income towards tuition fees.

Mr. Brooke: We have no record of having received letters from the chairman of the Leeds university council or the vice-chancellor of Kent university complaining about these matters.

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now seek to meet representatives of the major commercial banks in order to discuss the possibility of devising a special student loan facility as a supplement to grants.

Mr. Brooke: I would refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend's statement on 5 December 1984 at columns 360-61. We have no doubt that the possibility of a special student loan facility will be one of the matters to be examined in the review which the Government will be undertaking.

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the cost to the universities of his proposals for amending student grants in terms of *(a)* adverse cash flow and loss of interest on moneys in hand, *(b)* increased bad debts and *(c)* extra administration costs.

Mr. Brooke: The student grant proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 5 December 1984 at columns 360-61 will not give rise to any such costs.

Institute of Hearing

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the progress of the work of the Institute of Hearing.

Mr. Brooke: At the Medical Research Council's Institute of Hearing Research the programme of research continues to progress well. A copy of the latest report published last year, which summarises the work being carried out at the institute's headquarters and its outstations, is available in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

EC (Food Surpluses)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Prime Minister, following her answer to the hon. Member for Dundee West, 22 November, *Official Report*, column 221, on denaturation of common market food surpluses in Britain, if she will *(a)* publish the names of the towns, cities or regions where such practices are carried out and *(b)* seek to end such activities and ensure that these surpluses are released instead to the Ethiopian famine effort.

The Prime Minister: *(a)* During the year ended 31 October 1984 denaturing has been carried out at the following locations:

Skimmed Milk Powder
- Renfrew
- Poole
- Wincham
- Thurnham
- Earls Croom
- Keynsham
- Kilmarnock
- Bovey Tracey
- Darlington
- Cupar
- Bucksburn
- Belfast
- Heanor
- Camborne
- Stamford
- Melmerby
- Leiston
- Betley
- Wellington
- Derby
- Northallerton
- Tymawn
- Hull
- Turriff
- Bridgewater
- Stowmarket

Wheat
- Mathwold
- Kings Lynn
- Skegness
- Wisbech

(b) No wheat is currently being denatured. The only skimmed milk powder being denatured is old stock which is not suitable for food aid. The Government and the Community are already taking more effective action to assist the drought-striken areas of Ethiopia than that proposed by the hon. Member.

ENVIRONMENT

Tenants' Charter

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to make recommendations to local housing authorities that they should monitor the effectiveness of the tenants' charter by maintaining lists.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend does not consider that this would be cost-effective.

could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Clear-up rates for recorded offences of violence against the person do not distinguish racial from non-racial attacks.

I shall write to the hon. Member with the breakdown of the figures for police divisions within N district.

Stop and Search

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of stop and searches done in each police district within N division of the Metropolitan police for each year between 1979 and 1983 and for each month in 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the available information is as given in the table. The table shows the number of persons or vehicles recorded as stopped; figures for stops of persons and stops of vehicles are not separately identifiable. Statistics showing the number of occasions on which a search was conducted are not available. Monthly figures are not collected centrally.

Stops of persons or vehicles in N District of the Metropolitan Police District

*Number**

Police station/district	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Highbury Vale	3,200	2,600	3,000	2,700	†6,800
Holloway	4,100	8,200	9,500	8,200	8,600
Islington‡	3,800	4,500	5,600	7,300	5,300
Kings Cross Road‡	5,700	6,800	8,700	8,100	7,400
Caledonian Road‡	1,600	400	—	—	—
N District Total	18,300	22,400	26,800	26,400	28,100

* The figures are rounded because they are based on information recorded in station registers for operational purposes and as this form of recording is unsuitable for the preparation of statistical summaries the resultant figures may be subject to some error. Components may not add to the total because they have been rounded independently.

† The rise in 1983 is largely due to a tightening up in recording procedures.

‡ Caledonian Road station closed 17 March 1980. Stops in this area were included thereafter in the station areas of Islington and Kings Cross Road.

Nuclear Attack

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he proposes to ensure that the British civilian population could be adequately protected from a nuclear attack; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is impossible to predict with any certainty the size of a nuclear attack, the targets it would include, or its effects. They would depend on the political and strategic intentions of an enemy at the time. The Government's policy of deterrence aims to prevent an attack of any sort happening.

But in the unlikely event of a nuclear attack, no part of the country could be judged safe from all its effects, and the Government's plans for the protection of the population therefore include a national system of warning and monitoring; the implementation by local authorities of their plans made under the 1983 regulations, including the utilisation of buildings and other structures for public shelter; and for improvement by the public of the shelter already afforded by their own homes. The existing guidance to both local authorities and the public is being revised for issue next year.

This Government do not seek to minimise the consequences of a massive nuclear attack: they would be horrific. But civil defence preparations, which the Government have strengthened considerably over the past five years, could save millions of lives and greatly reduce injury and suffering. Civil defence is a basic humanitarian duty of any Government and any local authority.

Courts (Fines)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Government are considering the introduction of a day fine system in the courts.

Mr. Mellor: Not as a matter of high priority.

Prisoners (Parole)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the prisoners in the categories affected by the changes in administration of the parole system for the release of certain categories of prisoners on licence have been granted parole because of exceptional circumstances since the changes were made in October 1983; and what are the criteria used in deciding whether such exceptional circumstances exist.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) on 26 November at column *348*.

Soliciting and Loitering

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of persons convicted of soliciting or loitering under the Street Offences Act 1959, and subsequently committed to prison for default of payment of the fines in respect of the following courts *(a)* Nottingham, *(b)* Old Street, *(c)* Sheffield, *(d)* Birmingham, *(e)* other courts recorded and *(f)* courts not recorded for the years 1982, 1983 and the first six months of 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The information available, which is incomplete, is given in the following table:

Prostitutes committed into custody by magistrates' courts in default of payment of a fine

*Magistrates' court**	*1982*	*1983*	*1984†*
Nottingham City	2	6	4
Nottingham County	—	—	—
Old Street	—	7	17
Sheffield	1	1	13
Birmingham	6	10	4
Other courts recorded	32	91	73
Courts not recorded	42	53	42
Total	83	168	153

* In the case of an offender not given time to pay who was also previously remanded in custody this is not necessarily the same as the court committing in default.

† January to June.

Prostitutes

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to reduce the number of prostitutes imprisoned for fine default.

Mr. Mellor: We have encouraged magistrates' courts to do what they properly can to reduce the imprisonment

of fine defaulters generally, by relating the amount of fines to offenders' means and by prompt follow-up action when default first occurs.

Metropolitan Police (Identification Parades)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has of the practice by the Metropolitan police of using London railway stations for the purpose of conducting identification parades; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The procedures for formal identification parades held in the Metropolitan police district and in other police forces are governed by the rules laid down in the Home Office circular 89/1978, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Formal identification parades take place in police stations or, exceptionally, in a prison.

The administrative guidance which accompanies the rules contemplates the situation where a witness may be allowed the opportunity of seeing a suspect in a group of people to test the witness's ability to identify the person whom he said he saw on a previous occasion. It is the practice of the Metropolitan police and other police forces to adopt this procedure when it is not practicable to arrange an identification parade, for example, because the suspect refuses or there are insufficient people of similar appearance willing to take part in a formal identification parade. Identification of this sort may take place in a railway station or other similar place where large numbers of members of the public can be expected to be present. The courts have accepted this procedure, which is clearly to be preferred to direct confrontation by a witness. The arrangements for this procedure are governed by the Commissioner's general orders which require that the rules governing identification parades should be followed so far as is practicable; they also stress the need to establish identification in the fairest possible way. The published draft code of practice for identification to be made under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 covers this procedure.

Police (Free Facilities)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to his Department of *(a)* free transport, *(b)* free prescriptions and *(c)* free dental treatment for police in the Metropolitan area for each of the last five years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Metropolitan police officers are allowed free travel on London Regional Transport Underground trains and red buses for crime prevention purposes. This arrangement, introduced in 1975, involves no cost to the Metropolitan police fund or the Home Office. Under the Police Regulations 1979, police forces in England and Wales, including the Metropolitan Police, reimburse the cost to their officers of NHS prescriptions and (within NHS maximum rates) dental treatment. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that records of payments for the last three years in the Metropolitan police are not kept in a form which enables the amounts involved to be separately identified and such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Records for earlier years have been destroyed.

Winson Green Prisoners (Dental Treatment)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made for dental treatment for prisoners on remand at Winson Green prison.

Mr. Mellor: All inmates at Birmingham prison including those on remand have access when necessary to the services of a dentist who attends twice weekly; should emergency treatment be required, inmates may be taken to the local dental hospital. The prison rules also provide that if an unconvicted prisoner desires the attendance of a dentist of his own choice and will pay any expense incurred, the governor shall, if he is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the request and unless the Secretary of State otherwise directs, allow him to be visited and treated by that dentist in consultation with the prison medical officer. If the hon. Member has any particular case in mind I shall be happy to look into it.

Greenham Common (Policing Costs)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Thames valley about the cost of policing the off-base exercises by units of the 501st Tactical Missile Wing at Greenham common, since such exercises began; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *4.1*]: The chief constable tells me that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 December 1984

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk

Mr. Watson asked the Minister of Agriculture, isheries and Food whether he is satisfied with the rrangements made within the European Economic ommunity for enforcement of the dairy quota scheme.

16. **Mr. Colin Shepherd** asked the Minister of griculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied that the uropean Commission will be able to enforce collection f superlevy on milk production in excess of quota in all ember states.

Mr. Jopling: I have repeatedly stressed in the Council f Agriculture Ministers that I regard it as a matter of the ighest importance that the milk supplementary levy ystem should be properly applied and enforced roughout the Community. The Commission has said it ready to take legal action against any member state hich does not apply the system or does not apply it roperly. I shall continue to insist that the arrangements ust be respected and that the Commission takes its sponsibilities.

22. **Mr. Latham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, sheries and Food whether he will make a statement on e operation of milk quotas to date.

34. **Mr. Maude** asked the Minister of Agriculture, sheries and Food if he will make a statement on the eration of the milk quota system.

Mr. Jopling: In order to ensure that claims for second ota and exceptional hardship applications can be dealt ith as quickly and as fairly as possible, I am trebling the embership of the diary produce quota tribunal. I am ntinuing to press in Brussels for greater flexibility tween direct sales and wholesale quota. Some 3,270 oducers have now been invited to participate in the tgoers scheme. Quota given up by outgoers will be llocated in due course to small producers and to ceptional hardship cases.

35. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Minister of griculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is satisfied th the implementation by the Italian Government of the mmunity measures on dairy quotas.

Mr. Jopling: Italy has conducted a census of milk oducers in order to obtain the necessary information for plementing dairy quotas and has also announced an tgoers' scheme. Italy is not required by EC regulations make a levy collection till the end of the marketing year. hall continue to press for every member state to apply e levy according to the rules agreed and welcome the mmission's assurances that it will take legal steps ainst any member state failing to do so.

38. **Mr. Strang** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further representations he has received about the implementation of milk quotas in the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: I have received many representations from milk producers and others who are anxious to ensure that the milk supplementary levy system is implemented fairly throughout the Community. I have repeatedly stressed, in the Agriculture Council and elsewhere, that I regard this matter as one of the greatest importance. The Commission has said that it intends to open infringement proceedings against any member state which does not apply the system or does not apply it properly. I shall continue to insist that the Commission fully takes its responsibilities in this.

Departmental Publications

13. **Mr. Hannam** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will explain the reasons for the delay in issuing his Department's new publication Civil Defence and the Farmer (0 11 241233 5) which was shown on list No. 7, 1984, by Her Majesty's Stationery Office on 17 February.

Mrs. Fenner: The listing of this publication by Her Majesty's Stationery Office on 17 February was premature. No definite date can yet be given for its publication because the text is still subject to amendment on a number of points including the results of the Home Office review of the blast and radiation effects of a nuclear attack.

26. **Mr. Malone** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will change the name of his new publication from "Home Defence and the Farmer" to "Civil Defence and the Farmer".

Mrs. Fenner: We will consider this suggestion.

44. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to complete his review of his publication, "Home Defence and the Farmer".

Mrs. Fenner: The review of this publication is now virtually complete but awaits further information on certain outstanding matters including the results of the Home Office review of the blast and radiation effects of a nuclear attack.

Veterinary Inspection Centres

14. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what conclusions he has reached on the current review of veterinary inspection centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The study report on the Ministry's veterinary investigation service is still under consideration in my Department and no conclusions have yet been reached. There will be full opportunity for consultations with outside interests.

Land Use

15. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any annual estimate is made in his Department of the extent of the change of land use in the countryside from natural habitat to more productive agricultural use.

Mrs. Fenner: Most land in this country which has not been developed for non-agricultural use or afforested is already in productive agricultural use.

Sheep Producers (National Aids)

17. **Mrs. Roe** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had about the French Government's intention to introduce national aids for their sheep producers.

Mr. MacGregor: None. We are not aware that the French Government intend to introduce such aids.

Departmental Budget

18. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans any further changes in his Department's budget following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.

Mr. Jopling: The changes in planned expenditure for 1985-86 were set out in the statement I gave on 12 November in reply to my hon. Friend, the Member for Wealden (Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith), as supplemented by my statement of 29 November concerning the payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances. The expenditure plans for 1986-87 and 1987-88 will be published in the new year when I also plan to make a further statement about agricultural R & D.

Imported Eggs

19. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is satisfied that the regulations regarding imported egg consignments ensure that substandard eggs do not have access to the market.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes. I can confirm that the regulations are as effective as is reasonably practicable.

Cereal Surpluses

20. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for dealing with cereal surpluses arising from over production in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: This is a Community matter which must be tackled by the Community as a whole. The Government will continue to argue for a clear and long term policy of cereals price restraint.

Farm Wardens

21. **Mr. Forth** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider delegating authority for the appointment and training of farm wardens to local authorities in consultation with the National Farmers Union.

Mrs. Fenner: No. Farm wardens would provide the link between farmers and the Ministry's wartime organisation and their selection and training is a matter for my Department.

40. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who will provide the training of his farm wardens when they are appointed.

Mrs. Fenner: Farm wardens will be trained by the appropriate local officers of my Department.

Potatoes (Surplus Crop)

23. **Mr. Harris** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to help the Potato Marketing Board deal with the current season's surplus crop.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government have authorised the implementation of market support arrangements based on a stockfeed programme and will be sharing the disposal costs with the Potato Marketing Board.

Rationing

24. **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will release more information about rationing when the new consolidated circular is issued.

Mrs. Fenner: The information on food rationing in wartime to be included in the consolidated circular will be decided following consideration of comments on the draft circulated earlier this year which is at present the subject of discussion with those concerned.

Nuclear Attack (Protection)

25. **Mr. Nell Thorne** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he can give to farmers wishing to learn how to protect their livestock and crops in the event of a nuclear attack.

Mrs. Fenner: Advice on this matter will be given when my Department publishes a revised version of the booklet "Home Defence and the Farmer".

Local Agricultural Control Organisation Manual

27. **Mr. Ashby** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his updated local agricultural control organisation manual has been produced and distributed throughout his Department.

Mrs. Fenner: The manual has been issued within the Department in draft.

Cereal Exports

28. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the provision of British credit guarantees for cereal exports.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade announced on 3 December a number of improvements in the provision by Export Credits Guarantee Department of credit guarantees for the export of grain and malt. I welcome these changes, which should contribute to the United Kingdom's increasingly successful export performance.

"Food and Agricultural Controls in War"

29. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to issue the revised circular ES1/1979 "Food and Agricultural Controls in War".

Mrs. Fenner: A final version will be issued as part of the Home Office consolidated circular on civil defence on completion of the consultations with local authorities about the draft of that circular issued for comment in July this year.

Chemical Weapons (Crops and Livestock)

30. **Mr. Speed** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will include in his revised edition of "Home Defence and the Farmer" information on the effect of chemical weapons on crops and livestock.

Mrs. Fenner: No. The Government are a party to the 1972 convention banning biological weapons. We are playing a leading part at the conference on disarmament at Geneva to achieve a comprehensive verifiable ban on the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons. We will keep the House informed of progress.

Racing Pigeons (Vaccination)

31. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many racing pigeons have been vaccinated against paramyxovirus II; and what information he has as to the average cost per bird.

Mrs. Fenner: Vaccine sales suggest that well over 2·5 million racing pigeons have been vaccinated against paramyxovirus 1 which is the strain of the virus which has affected pigeons. The cost of vaccination is about 36p to 40p per bird.

EC (Surplus Butter)

Mr. Cockeram asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Her Majesty's Government will seek authority from the European Economic Community for further sales of cheap surplus butter in 1985.

Mr. Jopling: Stocks of surplus butter have built up because the Community has set support prices at levels which encourage production and discourage consumption. The freeze in the target price for milk and the introduction of quotas agreed at the 1984 CAP price fixing were important steps towards securing a better balance in the market and so avoiding the need for special disposal measures. Special short term sales of butter on the Community market tend to disrupt normal supplies, force fresh butter into intervention stocks and are costly to the Community budget. We opposed the present scheme and would not favour its repetition later in 1985.

Less-favoured Areas

33. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the present state of hill farming in less-favoured areas.

Mrs. Fenner: We are satisfied that the present level of support to farmers in the less-favoured areas is proving highly effective in maintaining the long-term viability of hill farms whilst at the same time stemming the decline in rural population. Our policy in this regard will be greatly assisted by the extension to the United Kingdom's less-favoured areas which we achieved earlier this year. This has paved the way for the Government to provide to upland farms for the first time both higher rates of capital grants and headage payments on cattle and sheep. The proposed new structures measures, currently being discussed in the Community will, if agreed in their present form, make possible the continuation of Community support for hill farming largely unchanged.

North Sea Herring

36. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in agreeing shares of North sea herring between Norway and the European Community.

Mr. MacGregor: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave this afternoon to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie).

Soil Survey

37. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his plans for future funding of the Soil Survey of England and Wales.

Mrs. Fenner: I am unable to add anything to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Mr. Spicer) on 26 November 1984 at column *406*.

"Advice to the Farmer"

39. **Mr. Robert Banks** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposals in "Advice to the Farmer" produced by North Yorkshire county council, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mrs. Fenner: These background reference notes contain soundly based advice to farmers, much of it taken from an American publication, on how to protect their farms against radioactive fallout.

Departmental Emergency Plans

41. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider the downgrading of the security classification of his Department's emergency plans.

Mrs. Fenner: No. My Department's emergency plans already bear the lowest security classification appropriate to their contents.

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (Report)

42. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the recommendations in Professor Bell's report on the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service.

Mr. Jopling: I have no plans at present to discuss formally the recommendations contained in Professor Bell's report with the president of the National Farmers Union. However, I regularly meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss general agricultural matters and that gives us the opportunity to discuss the report. I have invited all interested parties to let us have their views on the contents of the report by 4 January 1985.

Farm Animal Welfare Council (Codes of Practice)

43. **Sir Michael Shaw** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made by the Farm Animal Welfare Council on the revision of the codes of practice.

Mrs. Fenner: The council has completed its revisions of the welfare codes. Revised codes for cattle and pigs

were published in 1983. As regards the poultry codes, I refer to the reply given on 22 November at c. *247* to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd).

Agricultural Training Board

45. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provision Her Majesty's Government are making to help the work of the Agricultural Training Board.

Mr. Jopling: The Agricultural Training Board receives considerable financial and practical assistance from my Department. Provision has been made for a grant-in-aid to the board of £7·65 million in the current financial year and the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service gives assistance on training matters at both national and local level. The Manpower Services Commission also makes a contribution towards specific projects undertaken by the board and training groups.

Horses and Ponies (Welfare)

Mr. Greenway asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the measures he takes to secure the welfare of horses and ponies.

Mrs. Fenner: The Protection of Animals Acts 1911 to 1964 provide the main welfare protection for horses and ponies for which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is responsible. When they are on agricultural land, equines are protected by part I of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 which is the responsibility of the Agriculture Ministers. As for the welfare of equines in transit, protection is provided by the Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) Order 1975 which is enforced by the local authorities. In 1979, Agriculture Ministers issued a code of practice for the guidance of operators of horse, pony and donkey markets, sales and fairs.

Council of Agriculture Ministers

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers held in Brussels on 3 and 4 December.

Mr. Jopling: Together with my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State in my Department, I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 4 December.

The Council agreed guide prices for fishery products for 1985 on the basis of a compromise proposal by the Presidency, which was generally satisfactory from the United Kingdom point of view.

It was agreed that the prohibition on fishing for mackerel to the west of Scotland north of 58°N from 1 to 31 December 1984 should be lifted, an accordance with the latest scientific advice. This decision was a very important one for our pelagic fleet as most of the mackerel catches off the west coast are still being taken north of 58°. This means that this fishery will be able to continue, within the United Kingdom quota of 234,700 tonnes, for the rest of the year. There was also general agreement to postpone the deadline for a decision on an increase in the minimum mesh size in the English Channel until 1 July 1987 but we reserved our position pending completion of Parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

The council approved the arrangements for 1985 negotiated with Sweden under the EC/Sweden framework agreement. There were also informal discussions on the continuing negotiations between the Community and Norway on the arrangements for 1985 under the EC/Norway agreement. I urged the Commission to stand firm on the question of Norway's allocation of North sea herring next year and this was agreed. In a discussion of the continuing negotiations between the Community and the Faroe islands, we emphasised the importance we attached to a reduction in the Faroes intercepting fishery on Atlantic salmon.

The council discussed the problem raised by overfishing by some member states of the Community's allocation of saithe in the North sea. An increase in the Community availability was adopted on a basis agreed with Norway which will allow three member states to continue or to resume fishing. The United Kingdom received an additional quota of about 400 tonnes. I asked the Commission to report to the Council in due course on the results of the year's activities of its Inspectorate of Inspectorates in supervising the enforcement of Community rules by the member states. It undertook to do so. I also asked the Commission to prepare a report to the Council on the general question of overfishing of quotas and any appropriate arrangements for compensation by the member states responsible. This was generally welcomed and could be very important in encouraging greater discipline in future.

There was a discussion of the supply and demand situation within the Community for herring on the basis of a report by the Commission and it was agreed in principle to open a small additional tariff-free quota for the period 1 January to 15 February 1985 for the purposes of manufacturers of specialised products.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experiments will be carried out on animals to test the safety and efficacy of new and existing products as proposed in the Government's Food and Environment Protection Bill; what species of animals will be used; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: No final decision has been taken on the type of tests that may be required but they are likely to be broadly similar to the guidelines laid down in the pesticides safety precautions scheme.

Grants and Subsidies (Expenditure)

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of expenditure in 1983-84 and 1984-85 by the agricultural departments on agricultural grants and subsidies, excluding market regulation, under the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jopling: Details are given of the outturn for 1983-84 and the latest forecast of outturn for 1984-85:

	Outturn 1983-84 £ million	Latest forecast of outturn 1984-85 £ million
Price Guarantees		
Wool	0·6	−4·3
Potatoes	9·3	0·4
	9·9	−3·9
Support for capital and other improvements		
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Scheme	104·1	94·8
Guidance Premiums	4·0	3·6
Farm Accounts	1·4	1·1
Farm Structure	0·5	0·5
Northern Ireland Agricultural Development Programme	9·6	13·6
Agriculture and Horticulture Grant Scheme	96·2	84·1
Co-operation Grants	3·8	5·1
Others	1·0	2·3
	220·6	205·1
Support for agriculture in special areas		
Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances	91·5	97·4
Additional benefit to farmers in special areas under AHDS, NIADP and AHGS	26·4	30·8
Others	5·6	9·0
	123·5	137·2
Other payments		
Milk Outgoers Scheme	—	10·0
GRAND TOTAL	354·0	348·4

Some of this expenditure attracts contributions from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. These are mainly received in the following year. In 1984-85 £52·6 million is expected to be received from the Fund compared with £67·4 million in 1983-84.

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE NOTE
ANNUAL REVIEW OF AGRICULTURE 1985

Table I: Public expenditure under the CAP and on national grants and subsidies by the intervention board for agricultural produce and the agricultural departments†*

	1983-84 (Actual) £ million	1984-85 (Forecast) £ million
I Market Regulation under the CAP	1,374·5	1,424·1
II Price Guarantees	9·9	−3·9
III Support for Capital and Other Improvements	220·6	205·1
IV Support for Agriculture in Special Areas	123·5	137·2
V Other Payments	—	10·0
GRAND TOTAL	1,728·5	1,772·5
Receipts from EAGGF Guarantee Section	1,127·6	1,082·0
Guidance Section	72·7	57·7
TOTAL	1,200·3	1,139·7

* Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and the Welsh Office. Expenditure in Northern Ireland, borne on the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, is excluded apart from that on the Milk Outgoers Scheme.

† The figures in tables I, II and III may not add up to the totals shown due to roundings.

Table II

Market regulation under the cap

£ million

	Expenditure* 1983-84 (Actual)	Expenditure* 1984-85 (Forecast)	EAGGF contributions† 1983-84 (Actual)	EAGGF contributions† 1984-85 (Forecast)
(I) Expenditure by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce				
Cereals	120·8	357·8	207·9	194·4
Beef and Veal	263·9	322·5	176·0	215·7
Pigmeat	−14·8	−10·1	−14·8	−10·1
Sugar	53·2	63·1	53·2	63·1
Processed products	28·3	32·9	28·3	32·9
Milk products	561·3	333·0	319·6	280·5
Oilseeds	87·2	54·6	87·2	54·6
Sheepmeat	158·3	123·1	158·3	123·1
Eggs	0·3	0·2	0·3	0·2
Poultry and Meat	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·2
Fruit and Vegetables	2·1	2·0	2·1	2·0
Hops	1·0	0·9	1·0	0·9
Herbage seeds	3·3	3·0	3·3	3·0
Others	14·2	22·9	18·5	23·7
Total	1,279·2	1,306·1	1,041·0	984·2
(II) Expenditure by the Agriculture Departments				
Milk Non-marketing Premiums	13·3	12·7	13·3	12·7
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	15·7	27·8	12·3	12·7
Annual Premium on Ewes	66·3	77·5	66·3	77·5
Total	95·3	118·0	91·9	102·9
Grand Total	1 374·5	1,424·1	‡1,132·9	‡1,087·1

* Includes net monetary Compensatory Amounts of −£9·2 million in 1983-84 and −£10·2 million in 1984-85.

† Contributions are from the Guarantee Section of EAGGF except that 40 per cent. in respect of milk non-marketing premiums which comes from the Guidance Section.

‡ In 1983-84 £1,127·6 million from Guarantee Section and £5·3 million from Guidance Section: £1,082·0 and £5·1 million respectively in 1984-85.

Table III

*Other expenditure by the agricultural departments**

£ million

	1983-84 (Actual)	1984-85 (Forecast)
Price Guarantees		
Wool	0·6	−4·3
Potatoes	9·3	0·4
Total	9·9	−3·9
Support for Capital and Other Improvements		
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Scheme	104·1	94·8
Guidance Premiums	4·0	3·6
Farm Accounts	1·4	1·1
Farm Structure	0·5	0·5
Northern Ireland Agricultural Development Programme	9·6	13·6
Agriculture and Horticulture Grant Scheme	96·2	84·1
Co-operation grants	3·8	5·1
Others	1·0	2·3
Total	220·6	205·1
Support for Agriculture in Special Areas		
Hill livestock compensatory allowances	91·5	97·4
Additional benefit under AHDS, NIADP and AHGS	26·4	30·8
Others	5·6	9·0

Juvenile Fines and Compensation Orders (Payment by Parents)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many parents were ordered to pay fines imposed on juveniles in 1982, 1983, and so far in 1984; and how many in each year were imprisoned for default;

(2) how many parents were ordered to pay compensation orders imposed on juveniles in 1982, 1983 and so far in 1984; and if any were imprisoned for default.

Mr. Mellor: The recording of these cases may be incomplete in the information available to me which is given in the following table. To include summary motoring offences would involve a disproportionate cost. Preliminary indications are that such orders were being made much more frequently in the early months of 1984.

Parent or guardian ordered to pay a fine or compensation order for indictable and summary (excluding motoring) offences at all courts in England and Wales and persons received into prison for default of payment*

Number of persons

Year	*Parent or guardian ordered to pay*		*Parent or guardian received into prison in default of payment*	
	Fine	*Compensation*	*Fine*	*Compensation*
1982	700	850	6	—
1983	4,350	4,600	2	—

* Including cases where the fine or compensation was not the principal disposal.

Unemployment and Violent Crime

Sir Anthony Grant asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he is aware of into the relationship between the level of unemployment and the incidence of violent crime; and if he will publish any statistical analysis he has received concerning such a relationship in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Mellor: I am not aware of any research—in this country at least—into the relationship between the level of unemployment and the incidence of violent crime. Various studies examining the relationship between the level of unemployment and recorded crime in all categories were reviewed in an article in Home Office research bulletin No. 14, published in 1982, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. In short, the article reported that more studies found no evidence of a significant relationship between the level of unemployment and crime than found some evidence of such a relationship.

Civil Defence College

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to expand the numbers of tutorial staff at the Civil Defence College, Easingwold, in 1985.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Not at present.

Young Persons (Prosecutions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will defer implementing his proposals for an independent prosecutor in respect of young persons aged under 17 years until Her Majesty's Government's review of the proposals of the Social Services Committee in its report "The Care of Children" is available.

Mr. Mellor: No. This reform will not affect the operation of the existing arrangements for consultation between the police and other agencies before any decision to prosecute a juvenile is taken; it will indeed provide an opportunity for such decisions to be independently reviewed. Nor will it prejudice the Government's further consideration of the issues which the Select Committee raised concerning procedures for dealing with juveniles alleged to have committed offences. (The Government's response to the Committee's specific recommendations was given in Cmnd. 9298, published in July).

Shops (Opening Hours)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, following the recommendation of the Auld committee of inquiry that all legal restrictions on the opening hours of shops should be abolished, what representations he has had from local authorities as to the enforcement of existing legislation prior to him introducing appropriate amending legislation.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Television Licences

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has any plans to extend the system of concessionary television licences to cover other forms of residential establishment;

(2) if he will list those categories of premises the residents of which are entitled to concessionary television licences.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The kinds of accommodation whose residents may qualify for the concessionary accommodation for residential care television licence are laid down in the Wireless Telegraphy (Broadcast Licence Charges and Exemption) Regulations 1984. They are essentially:

(i) old persons' homes;
(ii) disabled persons' homes;
(iii) residential homes for mentally disordered persons;
(iv) sheltered housing schemes provided specially for retirement pensioners; physically disabled persons or mentally disordered persons by local authorities under prescribed housing legislation, or by development corporations or housing associations.

There are at present no plans to extend the range of establishments which qualify for the accommodation for residential care licence.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total value of concessionary television licences issued in each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) how many concessionary television licences were issued in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The number of concessionary accommodation for residential care licences in force at the end of the last three financial years, and the total estimated value of the concession in each of those years, are as follows:

Year ended 31 March	Number of licences	Value £ million
1982	16,391	10
1983	17,537	13
1984	18,581	14·5

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are taken into account when deciding to grant concessionary television licences to the residents of particular establishments.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 29 November at column *542*.

Coal Industries Dispute

Mr. Robert Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of policing the miners' strike in the Merseyside area at the latest date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that up to 27 October the additional costs to the Merseyside police authority resulting from the policing of the miners' dispute in the county were some £3·9 million.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many miners have received injuries on picket lines during the miners' dispute to the latest date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is not possible to provide an accurate figure for the number of miners injured, because not all cases would be reported to the police.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimate of the cost of policing the miners' strike at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information on the total costs of the dispute to date is not available. The Home Office has so far paid to police authorities in England and Wales advances of police grant, and of the special payment which my right hon. and learned Friend is making available, on expenditure totalling £95·8 million.

Women (Attacks)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the number of reported attacks on women and the police clear-up rate for each Metropolitan police district for each year since 1979 and for each police area within N division in each month of 1984 to date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Racial Harassment

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the Metropolitan police procedures on dealing with racial harassment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The present Metropolitan police procedures for dealing with racial incidents, including racial harassment, were introduced at the end of April 1983 and the details were made public at that time. I am sending the hon. Member a copy of the relevant Metropolitan police press release.

In addition to these procedures a new programme of policing skills training has been established at district training centres, part of which is designed to help officers respond more sympathetically and positively to racial incidents. This training will be given to all officers up to the rank of superintendent. These arrangements apply throughout the Metropolitan police district.

In five districts (Tower Hamlets, Newham, Bexley and Greenwich, Harringay and Ealing and Hillingdon) where racial attacks have been particularly worrying, a review of current procedures, using a new method of crime analysis, has been set in hand. The object is to find the root cause of the problem and to involve all relevant agencies in the area in tackling it. The lessons of these reviews will be applied, as appropriate, throughout London.

As I have previously informed the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) in reply to a question, my right hon. and learned Friend and I will keep the House informed of progress.

Racial Attacks

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the reported incidents of racial attack and police clear-up rate for each Metropolitan police district for each year since 1979 and for each police area within N division.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The figures for racial incidents in the Metropolitan police area by district from 1 May 1982 to 31 October 1984 are given in the table:

Racial incidents in the Metropolitan Police area by district for the period 1 May 1982 to 31 October 1984

District	1982 (from 1 May 1982)	1983	1984 (to 31 October 1984)
A	4	5	5
B	7	2	6
C	3	2	2
D	1	4	8
E	51	40	34
F	29	13	9
G	30	30	18
H	199	238	319
J	58	53	33
K	77	132	146
L	43	29	31
M	31	29	23
N	30	32	50
P	34	34	26
Q	97	70	89
R	123	112	90
S	45	56	42
T	53	86	57
V	38	61	28
W	96	78	54
X	87	73	64
Y	52	37	32
Z	81	60	41
Airport (Heathrow)	3	4	3
TOTALS	1,273	1,280	1,289

The Metropolitan police have not kept separate figures for racial attacks since May 1982 when they introduced new procedures for dealing with racially motivated incidents and broadened the definition of incidents to be recorded to include those which do not necessarily involve the commission of a criminal offence. Figures for racial attacks before May 1982 are not readily available and

New Towns

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific new developments are going to be financed in the 21 new towns of England and Wales resulting from the assets acquired from the sale by development corporations of commercial and industrial property.

Sir George Young: The accounts of the development corporations and the Commission for the New Towns (HC/ 83/84/ 610 and 611) show that in 1983-84 in the 21 new towns in England there were capital receipts of £151,198,000, which supported capital investment of £192,464,000. About £77 million of these capital receipts came from the disposal of industrial and commercial assets. An analysis of the capital expenditure by each corporation is contained in the first schedule to each set of accounts. The accompanying annual reports highlight the more significant individual projects. In the current and future financial years, capital receipts will continue to support generally the housing, sewerage, roads, commercial, industrial and amenity investment of the new towns. The two new towns in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

STOLport

Mr. Fry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to give his final decision on the planning application and inspector's report regarding the development of a STOLport in docklands.

Mr. Macfarlane: My right hon. Friend is consulting the parties about new evidence received since the public inquiry. He will give his decision as soon as possible after that consultation is completed.

Stansted and Heathrow

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the inspector's report on the Stansted and Heathrow terminal 5 inquiries.

Mr. Gow: The inspector's report will be published on Monday 10 December when copies will be placed in the Library and in the Vote Office and in those public libraries where the transcripts were deposited. It will be posted to the applicants, to the local planning authorities in whose areas the sites of the proposed developments lie, to section 29 parties and to the organisations and individuals represented at the inquiries.

The inspector's report is very long. A shortened version, comprising extracts from the report, will be published separately. That version will include all the inspector's conclusions and recommendations. Those receiving the full report will receive the shortened version.

Further copies of the full report and of the shortened version will be available as soon as possible.

Buses

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the representations he has received from transport users supporting his bus service deregulation proposals.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have been asked to reply.

I have received numerous responses from transport users for and against various aspects of the White Paper on buses.

SCOTLAND

North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board (Fishing Beats)

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will estimate the profits which will accrue in the first year following sale to the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board, following its sale of several fishing beats on the river Conon, Ross-shire.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This is a commercial matter for the board. The sale price has not been disclosed at this stage.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he is satisfied with the conditions pertaining to the recent sale of fishing beats on the river Conon, Ross-shire, by the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board in so far as they affect future access to the beats by local fishermen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I understand that the new owner of the three Brahan beats plans to offer the fishings for let on a weekly basis to previous tenants and local interests, and certain weeks in July, August and September will be resold. The new owners of the Coul beat have indicated that they will give priority to previous tenants and to local interests for any fishing that may be available for letting. The board has made it clear that it hopes to come to satisfactory arrangements with local angling clubs, hotels and others, before the remaining beats are disposed of in order to maintain access by local anglers and visitors. I am satisfied that a reasonable balance has been struck between the case for continuing local access and the need to dispose of an asset irrelevant to the board's main business.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he expects to be paid into the Consolidated Fund as a result of the sale of several fishing beats on the river Conon, Ross-shire, by the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There will be no payment into the Consolidated Fund. The proceeds of the sale will be used in the general financing of the board's business, thereby keeping borrowings below what would otherwise have been required.

HOME DEPARTMENT

BBC (Licence Fee)

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what further information he has sought to date from the British Broadcasting Corporation in support of its application for an increased licence fee; what further information he plans to seek; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information was supplied by the British Broadcasting Corporation to support its request for an increase in the licence fee;

(3) what was the level of licence fee requested by the British Broadcasting Corporation mentioned in his answer of Tuesday 20 November, *Official Report*, column 105, and the period the increase is designed to cover.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The BBC has submitted an application for an increase in the licence fee but in accordance with past practice my right hon. and learned Friend does not propose to disclose the details of the request submitted or the precise way in which he will examine it. He will, however, take account of the findings of the independent consultants appointed by the BBC, at his suggestion, to examine the scope for the BBC to provide its existing services at their present standard but at lower cost through increased efficiency in the use of resources. In reaching a view on the application he will seek to balance the needs of the BBC with the interests of the licence fee payer.

Penal Establishments (Improvements)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will list all penal establishments at which improvements or refurbishments are being carried out, or are planned, indicating for each *(a)* the date planning started, *(b)* when the scheme started or is planned to start, *(c)* the work to be done and *(d)* whether the scheme includes integral sanitation.

Mr. Mellor: The information readily available in relation to major capital schemes in the current five-year programme to improve or replace living accommodation at existing penal establishments is set out in the following table. Schemes to improve or replace ancillary facilities are in progress or planned at a further 54 establishments.

Name of Establishment	*Scheme*	*Year of Start*	*Whether integral sanitation included*
Acklington	Camp under redevelopment as a category C prison	1975	Yes
	Additional living block	1985	Yes
Albany	Restoration following disturbances and improved access to wings	1983	Access to sanitation available by electric unlocking
Ashwell	Camp under redevelopment as open prison	1983	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Aylesbury	Construction of new living block and refurbishment of existing wings	1989	Yes
Bedford	New Gate complex, kitchen and living block	1986	Yes
Birmingham	Refurbishment of B1 landing	1984	No
	Construction of new living block	1987	Yes
Brixton	Refurbishment of F wing	1981	No
	Conversion of dormitory to cells	1983	No
Brockhill	Conversion of D wing to cells	1986	Yes
Campsfield House	Redevelopment as closed YCC	1987	Yes
Cardiff	New living block	1987	Yes
Castington	Camp under redevelopment as closed YCC	1976	Yes
Channings Wood	Camp under redevelopment as category C prison	1975	Yes
	Additional living block	1985	Yes
Dartmoor	Refurbishment of existing wings	1984	Yes
Deerbolt	Camp under redevelopment as closed YCC	1975	Yes
Erlestoke	Camp under redevelopment as semi-secure YCC	1980	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Feltham	Construction of new closed YCC	1976	Yes
	Construction of new remand accommodation	1983	Yes
Glen Parva	Construction of new closed YCC and remand and allocation centre	1975	Yes
Guys Marsh	Camp under redevelopment as semi-secure YCC	1982	Yes
Hatfield	Replacement of dormitories with cubicular living units	1982	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Haverigg	Camp redevelopment	1987	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Highpoint	Camp under redevelopment as category C prison	1975	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
	Additional cellular living block	1981	Yes
Hollesley Bay	Construction of secure unit	1979	Yes
	Redevelopment of open accommodation	1985	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Holloway	Redevelopment	1974	Yes
Huntercombe	Redevelopment	1985	Yes
Kirkham	Camp redevelopment	1987	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Leeds	Construction of new living blocks and refurbishment of existing wings	1986	Yes
Leicester	Refurbishment of recesses in wings	1985	No
Leyhill	Camp under redevelopment as open prison	1982	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Lincoln	Construction of new living block	1988	Yes
Liverpool	Refurbishment of existing wings	1985	Yes
Morton Hall	Redevelopment as closed YCC	1986	Yes
New Hall	Replacement of dormitories	1983	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Northeye	Construction of new accommodation	1975	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Nottingham	Construction of new living block	1989	Yes
Parkhurst	Redevelopment	1986	Yes

Name of Establishment	Scheme	Year of Start	Whether integral sanitation included
Ranby	Camp under redevelopment as category C prison	1982	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Rudgate	Camp under redevelopment as open prison	1985	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Stafford	Refurbishment of existing wings	1982	Yes
Standford Hill	Construction of new living accommodation	1983	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Sudbury	Camp under redevelopment as open prison	1984	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Swinfen Hall	Construction of new living units	1987	Yes
Usk (Prescoed)	Camp under redevelopment as open YCC	1982	Access to sanitation available from cubicles
Wandsworth	Refurbishment of existing wings	1986	Yes
Wetherby	Redevelopment as closed YCC	1986	Yes
Wormwood Scrubs	Refurbishment and redevelopment	1986	Yes

Certificates of Unruly Character

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is proposed to make any changes in respect of the present powers of the courts relating to the issue of unruly certificates.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend proposes to make an order defining more restrictively than does the Certificates of Unruly Character (Conditions) Order 1977 the circumstances in which a 15 or 16-year-old boy may be remanded to a prison department establishment. In particular, he proposes that the power should be confined to cases where the boy has been charged with murder, attempted murder, rape, or certain other equally serious offences. He is also considering whether there are other ways in which the range of cases where remand to a prison department establishment is possible might be reduced to the minimum.

Racism Awareness

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he, other Ministers in his Department or any other members of his Department have attended racism awareness training courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: Ministers and the officials concerned seek continuously to advance their awareness of race relations matters. To this end they carry out a regular programme of visits to ethnic minority communities and maintain direct contact with many ethnic minority organisations throughout the country. In addition many members of my Department have attended race relations courses and seminars and the subject is also covered in a range of more general training courses provided both internally and externally.

Representation of the People Bill 1984

Mr. Kaufman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it remains his intention that the proposals in clause 1 of the Representation of the People Bill 1984 should come into operation immediately upon Royal Assent.

Mr. Mellor: No. Clause 27(2) brings the provisions of the Bill into force on such day or days as my right hon. and learned Friend appoints by order made by statutory instrument.

Bolton (Exercises)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil defence exercises and Royal Observer Corps exercises have been carried out in each of the last five years in the Bolton metropolitan district council area; and which authorities have been notified in each case.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am not aware of any. All county authorities have notification of exercises involving the Royal Observer Corps.

Conventional Warfare (Policy)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the removal of population in the vicinity of nuclear power stations in the event of a war fought with conventional weapons.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Local authorities are responsible for plans to protect the population in their area and are guided in this by the Goverment. The planning assumptions for civil defence are set out in Home Office Circular number ES 1/1984 (a copy of which is in the Library of the House). It is expected that the use of conventional weapons would be confined to targets of military significance and it is unlikely that an enemy would give high priority to industrial or civilian targets (that is, including nuclear power stations). I also refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy on 12 and 26 November at c. *92-3* and *370-71*.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police forces in England and Wales which currently hold stocks of plastic baton rounds; how many such baton rounds are held by each force; what form of training for their use is supplied; how many officers have been so trained; if he will place in the Library a copy of the current instructions relating to their use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The following police forces are understood to hold stocks of plastic baton rounds:

Metropolitan Police
Avon and Somerset
Essex
Humberside
Lancashire
Leicestershire

Lincolnshire
Merseyside
North Wales
North Yorkshire
Sussex
Warwickshire
Wiltshire

It would not be conducive to operational effectiveness to give details of the number of baton rounds held by individual forces or the full text of guidelines on their operational use that have been issued to chief officers of police.

However, the guidelines stipulate that baton rounds, which must be of a type authorised by the Home Office, are to be used only with the express authority of the chief officer of police (or, in his absence, his deputy), under the direction and control of a senior officer whom he has designated as officer in charge and by police officers who have been trained in the use of the equipment and know its characteristics.

They are to be used only as a last resort in cases where conventional methods of policing have been tried and failed or must, from the nature of the cirucumstances obtaining, be unlikely to succeed if tried, and where the chief officer judges such action to be necessary because of the risk of loss of life or serious injury or widespread destruction of property. Whenever practicable, a public warning of their use is to be given.

Nothing in the guidelines affects the principle set out in section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 that only the minimum force necessary in the circumstances must be used. The degree of force justified will vary according to the circumstances in each case.

I shall write to the hon. Member about police training in the use of baton rounds.

Metropolitan Police (Clear-up Rates)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the clear-up rate for murder in the Metropolitan police area in each of the last five years; and what it has been in the three police authority areas with the best clear-up rate for murder and the three areas with the worst, excluding the Metropolitan and City of London police.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1984, c. *4*]: In cases of homocide it is not possible, in the absence of a court decision, to distinguish between offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide. In the years 1979 to 1983 the clear-up rates for offences of homocide recorded in the Metropolitan Police District were 93 per cent., 95 per cent., 87 per cent., 77 per cent. and 89 per cent. respectively. Annual figures for other police force areas are subject to wider variation, especially for smaller police force areas, owing to the small numbers involved, variations in the type of case being dealt with, and because offences cleared up in one year may have been recorded in a previous year. Hence, the variation between police force areas is illustrated by the following table which gives for all offences of homocide recorded by the police aggregate figures for 1979 to 1983 for all police force areas.

Offences of homocide recorded by the police, 1979-83
England and Wales

Police Force Area	*Total recorded*	*Number cleared-up*	*Clear-up rate per cent.*
Avon and Somerset	52	49	94
Bedfordshire	29	27	93
Cambridgeshire	21	19	90
Cheshire	43	43	100
Cleveland	33	33	100
Cumbria	25	24	96
Derbyshire	36	34	94
Devon and Cornwall	63	60	95
Dorset	27	26	96
Durham	27	26	96
Essex	74	72	97
Gloucestershire	14	18	129
Greater Manchester	135	133	99
Hampshire	58	57	98
Hertfordshire	34	32	94
Humberside	79	74	94
Kent	59	55	93
Lancashire	74	73	99
Leicestershire	33	29	88
Lincolnshire	22	21	95
London City of	2	2	100
Merseyside	103	101	98
Metropolitan Police	855	754	88
Norfolk	25	25	100
Northamptonshire	41	34	83
Northumbria	74	73	99
North Yorkshire	32	33	103
Nottinghamshire	54	52	96
South Yorkshire	64	62	97
Staffordshire	34	32	94
Suffolk	18	16	89
Surrey	13	12	92
Sussex	55	54	98
Thames Valley	78	75	96
Warwickshire	26	26	100
West Mercia	41	40	98
West Midlands	205	201	98
West Yorkshire	149	140	94
Wiltshire	23	20	87
Dyfed Powys	17	18	106
Gwent	34	33	97
North Wales	32	31	97
South Wales	63	66	105
England and Wales	2,976	2,805	94

* The ratio of offences cleared-up in the period to offences recorded in the period.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Scientific Conferences (USA)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Government about their refusal to allow certain British scientists assisting this Government in high technology to attend some scientific conferences in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have expressed to the United States Government our concern over undue restrictions on the access by British scientists and technologists to conferences and seminars in the United States. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to keep closely in touch with developments in the United States and with leading scientific organisations in the United Kingdom.

TRANSPORT

Bitumen (Costs)

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport what effect he expects the recent rise in the price of bitumen to have on the road construction and maintenance programme in 1985-86.

Mrs. Chalker: It is too early to assess the net effect of the recent increase in the price of bitumen on output in road construction and maintenance in 1985-86, because the price of bitumen is only one of many factors which determine overall costs.

Railways (Safety)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ask the Railway Inspectorate to report on the effectiveness of the safety devices on the three light signal system.

Mr. David Mitchell: There are a number of safety devices associated with colour-light signals. They include such things as the replacement of the previous signal to Danger if a lamp bulb should fail, and the automatic warning system. The effectiveness of these safety devices is commented on, where appropriate, in the Railway Inspectorate's published accident reports. Their relevance to recent accidents will be covered in the inquiry reports, so there would be no particular gain from a separate study or report.

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of rail accidents involving passenger trains during 1982, 1983 and 1984 showing how many deaths resulted; what were the causes of these accidents; and whether he is satisfied with the measures being taken to reduce rail accidents.

Mr. David Mitchell: The numbers of significant passenger train accidents on all railways in Great Britain during 1982, 1983 and 1984 are shown in the table. Significant accidents, as defined in the Department's published Annual Report on Railway Safety, are those which are actually or potentially hazardous to passengers. They include all derailments and most collisions but exclude minor incidents: details of the latter are given in the annual reports. Separate causes of all the accidents in the table cannot be readily shown, but in general about half are caused by errors and omissions on the part of railway staff, a third by mechanical defects, and the remainder by a variety or combination of causes.

Significant Passenger Train Accidents

Year	*Number of Accidents*	*Fatalities*		*Passenger Journeys (Millions)*
		Passenger	*Staff*	
1982	66	Nil	2	1,126
1983	78	2	Nil	1,260
1984*	62	17	2	1,220

* In the case of the number of accidents the 1984 figures are provisional, based on accident returns made up to 5 December 1984. Thirteen of the passenger fatalities occurred in one accident (Polmont). In the case of passenger journeys, the 1984 figure is estimated for the whole year.

Measures to reduce accidents are the responsibility of the railway authorities. The Railway Inspectorate monitors all aspects of railway safety and reports regularly on the safety situation — in its annual report and in the published reports on individual accidents. These reports show that, overall, the railways have been becoming progressively safer during the past decade.

Public Transport

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of passenger miles travelled in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* Thurrock borough council area by public transport in 1977, 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1984; and what information he has as to the deficit or surplus per passenger mile on these services.

Mr. David Mitchell: The information requested is not available for individual boroughs. The stage carriage returns for bus operations submitted by Essex county council contain no information about passenger miles but the following figures have been extracted from the returns.

	1977-78	*1979-80*	*1981-82*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Passengers carried (000)	85,777	79,976	76,997	70,150	66,629*
Revenue support payments (other than concessionary fares) (£000)	1,209	1,680	2,235	3,121	3,735*
Revenue support per passenger carried (pence)	1·4	2·1	2·9	4·4	5·6*

* estimate.

Buses

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the response of Eastern National and London Country bus companies to the White Paper, "Buses" (Cmnd. 9301.)

Mr. David Mitchell: I am not aware of any response from Eastern National and London Country but it is in any case for the authors of responses to the White Paper to make them public if they wish.

Dartford Tunnel

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the repayment of debt on the Dartford tunnel and the consequent abolition of the tolls.

Mrs. Chalker: The tunnel is the responsibility of the Kent and Essex county councils. I understand that the councils estimate that tunnel debts will be repaid during the financial year 1993-4. However, the Dartford Tunnel Act 1984, which repeats earlier legislation, also requires maintenance and reserve funds to be established before tolls can cease. The councils' most recent estimate is that those funds will be established during the financial year 1996-97. The estimates are obviously sensitive to the actual level of traffic growth over the next 10 years.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Transport when formal plans for a third Dartford tunnel will be drawn up.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) on 3 December at column *34*.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the design capacity of the Dartford tunnel in terms of vehicle usage per hour.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall answer this question shortly.

EMPLOYMENT

Young Workers Scheme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence he has available as to the size of firms which are providing jobs under the young workers scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information from a sample survey carried out in early 1983 suggests the distribution of approved applications under the young workers scheme, but by size of establishment and not by size of firm. The information is as follows:

Size of establishment (employees)	*Percentage*
1 to 10	57
11 to 24	23
25 to 49	9
50 to 99	4
100 to 199	4
200 to 499	2
500 plus	1

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what evidence he has on the breakdown of jobs provided under the young workers scheme by standard industrial classification.

Mr. Alan Clark: Since the young workers scheme started in January 1982, approved applications have been categorised by standard industrial classification divisions. The breakdown for October, the latest date for which information is available, is:

Young workers scheme approved applications—monthly breakdown by standard industrial classification

SIC division number and division	*October per cent.*
0 Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3
1 Energy and water supply industries	1
2 Extraction of minerals and ores other than fuels; manufacture of metals, mineral products and chemicals	2
3 Metal goods, engineering and vehicles industries	9
4 Other manufacturing industries	14
5 Construction	15
6 Distribution, hotels and catering; repairs	29
7 Transport and communication	3
8 Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing	8
9 Other services	16

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been taken on to the young workers scheme after they have been on either *(a)* the youth opportunities programme or *(b)* the youth training scheme with the same employer.

Mr. Alan Clark: The only information currently available is a sample survey conducted between February and April 1983 which suggested that 32 per cent. of young workers had been on a youth opportunities programme, 26 per cent. with the same employer.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people on mode B youth training schemes are currently employed in psychiatric hospitals; in what capacity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: All young people on mode B of the youth training scheme are unemployed trainees. They may spend part of their training period in work placements in a wide variety of establishments, which may include psychiatric hospitals. However, no central records are maintained of the number of placements of this kind which are in use.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female young people have completed the youth training schemes in the Hull travel-to-work area, by year, since the inception of the scheme; and if he will indicate those who obtained permanent employment with the employer with whom they trained and of the rest of the number who obtained permanent employment within (i) six months, (ii) 12 months and (iii) are still unemployed following the completion of their training.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information is not available in the form requested. The number of young people who completed their expected time on the youth training scheme in the county of Humberside between 1 April 1984 and 31 October 1984 was 2,585, of whom 1,532 were males and 1,053 were females. Information on the subsequent destination of these young people is not available.

Community Programme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to extend the Manpower Services Commission community programme to two years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ernie Roberts asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many building trade operatives are registered as unemployed in the Hackney, North and Stoke Newington parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about occupations is not available in the unemployment benefit office records on which the unemployment count is now based.

Unemployment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment how the rise in the level of unemployment in the west midlands region currently compares with that of London and the south-east; and how it has compared with the same area in each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimates of unemployed claimants by region are available in the House of Commons Library. Comparisons are affected by the 1983 Budget provisions which enable some men, mainly aged 60 and over, to receive the long term rate of supplementary benefit and national insurance credits without having to sign on at an unemployment benefit office.

Liverpool Skillcentre

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the implications for employment of his plan to close the Liverpool skillcentre; how many instructors will be made redundant; what will be the savings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 December 1984, c. *258*]: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend on 29 November at columns 1108-16. Proposals for the future of the skillcentre network have been put to the Manpower Services Commission by the skillcentre training agency and the Commission has yet to consider them.

Around 450 of the staff who would be affected nationally are in the instructional grades including some 37 at Liverpool skillcentre. The Manpower Services Commission would discuss detailed proposals with the relevant trade unions with a view to achieving the proposed changes with as little disruption to staff as possible.

The closure of Liverpool skillcentre would result in an annual saving to the agency in premises costs alone of about £400,000. The proposals as a whole would ensure the agency achieved full cost-recovery from 1986-87, thus ending the need for a subvention from the taxpayer.

Under locally run adult training programmes as a whole we plan to more than double the number of people who will be trained in Liverpool and Sefton from around 2,000 in 1984-85 to around 4,400 in 1985-86.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Credit Cards (Fraud)

Mr. Wiggin asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek information from the Office of Fair Trading on its inquiries into the practices of credit card companies in seeking to prevent fraud; what representations he has received from credit card companies about the handling of these inquiries by the Office of Fair Trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: Under the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976, the Office of Fair Trading has a statutory duty to register restrictive agreements coming within the scope of the Act and to refer these to the restrictive practices court. I understand that earlier this year the credit card companies approached the office for preliminary discussions on the possible application of the Act to a proposed joint arrangement concerning credit card fraud. The office was unable to give a view without further details, which the companies agreed to provide if they wished to proceed. The companies have so far not followed this up with the office. I have received no representations from the credit card companies on this subject.

Ring Main Plugs

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is considering legislation to require that all ring main plugs sold are so designed as to permit the use of only one fuse rating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: No. Such a regulation would involve redesign of both plugs and fuses, but would not in itself ensure that particular groups of appliances were fitted with fused plugs of particular ratings. In any case, the additional protection for the consumer would be negligible.

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is considering legislation to prohibit the use of electrical appliances with fused plugs without the plug being fitted with the capacity of fuse which maximises the protection of the appliance.

Mr. Fletcher: No. There are clear and serious objections to safety legislation covering the use of consumer products in people's homes rather than the commercial supply of such goods. Moreover, such a requirement, even if it were enforceable, would provide negligible additional protection to consumers.

Regional Policy

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the £400 million which he plans to continue to spend each year on regional policy to improve job prospects in areas of high unemployment he expects will be allocated to the west midlands; and which sectors he envisages will be primarily eligible for grants allocation.

Mr. Trippier: The distribution of expenditure on regional industrial policy will continue to be determined by demand within the assisted areas. Parts of the west midlands are now intermediate areas, so firms in those parts now qualify for regional selective assistance for which all sectors of industry are now eligible on the same basis. Only firms in development areas are eligible for regional development grants which are expected to account for about half the total expenditure of about £400 million in 1987-88.

Job Creation

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of funding has been allocated for the purpose of supporting capital intensive projects during 1984; and how many new jobs have been created as a result.

Mr. Trippier: The concept of capital-intensity is not specifically employed in the allocation of funds. However, in the Government's view the old scheme of regional development grants had, in practice, too great a bias in favour of capital. The changes announced on 28 November by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, are intended to reduce this bias.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry upon what assumptions he has based his statement that introducing the new regional aid policy will cost nearly £300 million per year less than continuing the present one.

Mr. Trippier: On the basis of the previous policy and expected investment intentions it is estimated that nearly £700 million would have been spent on regional industrial policy in 1987-88. The expected savings of nearly £300 million in that year are mainly attributable to the introduction of the new RDG scheme. That will enable savings to be made by the exclusion of replacement investment from grant, by the application of the grant per job ceiling in relation to large undertakings and as a result of the abolition of special development areas and their higher rate of capital grant. These savings will be partly offset by the job grant alternative to capital grant, the extension of the regional development grant scheme to some service activities, the increase in the total coverage of the assisted area map, and the increase in regional selective assistance for modernisation projects.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of costs will be incurred arising from the proposed replacement of the former system of regional aid by the new system.

Mr. Trippier: The changes in regional industrial incentives will involve extra costs as the transitional provisions meant that, in effect, the new and old RDG schemes and the new and old assisted area maps will overlap. We expect expenditure on the old RDG scheme to be nearly £700 million over the next three financial years.

Polyurethane (Joint Ventures)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning ventures which have been jointly undertaken by chemical groups in the United Kingdom with enterprises in member countries of COMECON for the purpose of producing polyurethane for domestic and export markets.

Mr. Channon: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Vosper Shiprepairers Ltd. (Pension Fund)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements for the Vosper Shiprepairers Ltd. pension fund will be made following privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

SOCIAL SERVICES

General Practitioners (Prescriptions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to prevent general practitioners making available blank signed prescription forms to be filled in by non-medical staff.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The practice is contrary to the terms of service for doctors, and any evidence of it should be referred to the medical services committee concerned for consideration of whether a breach of those terms of service has occurred. A finding of breach of this kind would be a serious matter and should represent a significant deterrent to any practitioner contemplating such action.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much was spent on the provision of kidney machines in the National Health Service in 1983-84; and how that figure compares with 1978-79, in both cash and real terms.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally. The number of patients being treated by haemodialysis in the United Kingdom rose from 2,883 on 31 December 1978 to 3,708 on 31 December 1982, the most recent date for which information is available. It has been estimated that the capital cost of a kidney machine is between £5,500 and £8,500 depending upon specifications. A study undertaken in 1981 estimated the cost of maintaining a patient on haemodialysis at home at between £7,100 and £8,700 (£7,950 to £9,750 at 1983 prices) and the cost of maintaining a patient on haemodialysis in hospital at between £11,200 and £13,650 (£12,550 and £15,300 at 1983 prices). A study undertaken in 1983 suggested that the average cost of maintaining a patient on haemodialysis in a satellite unit at £8,700. These figures include the costs of staffing and consumables, the value of machines, equipment and home conversions expressed on an annual basis, and the average costs incurred as a result of medical complications.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much was spent by the National Health Service on kidney transplants in 1983-84; and how that figure compares with the figure for 1978-79.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally. The number of cadaver kidney transplant operations performed in the United Kingdom rose from 842 in 1979 to 1,160 in 1983, and the latter figure had already been passed in October 1984. A study undertaken in 1981 estimated the cost of a successful transplant at between £5,000 and £5,700 in the first year (£5,600 and £6,450 at 1983 prices) and at between £1,400 and £1,650 in subsequent years (£1,550 and £1,850 at 1983 prices). Changes in practice since then, particularly the introduction of the drug Cyclosporin A which significantly increases graft survival, will have increased the cost of post operative treatment.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to expand the number of kidney transplants and the number of kidney machines available to the National Health Service.

Mr. John Patten: Expanding the facilities for treating patients who suffer end stage renal failure is a matter for health authorities, but they have been told of the need for renal services to be developed as a priority within the acute sector. The Government are fully committed to the expansion of these services and we will shortly be announcing targets, agreed with health authorities, to ensure that this is achieved.

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many kidney patients are currently using CAPD2 renal dialysis peritoneal dialysis solution treatment in their homes; and what financial assistance is currently available to patients using such equipment in their own homes for running and maintenance costs.

Mr. John Patten: According to the most recent information from the European Dialysis and Transplant

Association, the number of renal patients in the United Kingdom being treated by continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis (CAPD) on 31 December 1982 was 1,136. Nearly all CAPD patients return to their homes after a short period in hospital when they are trained in the technique. CAPD does not involve the use of a machine and maintenance costs do not, therefore, arise. No financial assistance is provided specifically for CAPD patients but all equipment and fluids for the treatment are provided free of charge, and the patients are exempt from prescription charges.

NHS (Staff)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now publish figures showing firm manpower targets within the National Health Service for March 1985 and the trend for 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The manpower targets set for regional health authorities in England and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals for 31 March 1985 are set out in the table. These authorities have been advised that, nationally, manpower in March 1986 can be expected to be contained within the 1985 target level.

Manpower Targets for 31 March 1985

Region	*Target for 31 March 1985*
Northern	54,800
Yorkshire	61,700
Trent	75,000
East Anglian	30,500
North West Thames	57,600
North East Thames	72,500
South East Thames	65,000
South West Thames	49,200
Wessex	44,500
Oxford	34,400
South Western	53,100
West Midlands	84,400
Mersey	44,200
North Western	75,800
Total: Regions	802,700
Special Health Authorities for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals	11,700

All figures rounded to nearest 100.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the figures for unoccupied hospital beds in 1982-83, and the number of occupied beds in 1982, 1983 and 1984 in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region.

Mr. John Patten: The required information is given in the table. Figures for 1984 are not yet available. As I explained to my hon. Friend in my reply on 4 December at c. *174* aggregated bed occupancy is not a good indicator of efficient bed use.

National Health Service Hospitals

Regional health Authority	*Average daily number of occupied beds**		*Average daily number of available beds* not occupied**	
	1982	*1983*	*1982*	*1983*
Northern	19,243	19,405	5,437	5,323
Yorkshire	22,423	22,137	6,065	5,897
Trent	24,074	23,990	6,670	6,491
East Anglian	10,199	10,230	2,715	2,771
North West Thames	21,307	20,864	4,545	4,479
North East Thames	24,194	23,922	5,104	4,819
South East Thames	21,691	21,237	5,125	5,119
South West Thames	20,432	19,998	3,589	3,721
Wessex	14,702	14,500	3,845	3,809
Oxford	10,374	10,219	2,739	2,598
South Western	19,155	18,815	4,705	4,644
West Midlands	28,089	27,687	7,139	6,857
Mesey	16,847	16,470	3,673	3,378
North Western	24,579	24,449	6,099	5,935
Special Health Authorities and Boards of Governors	2,524	2,507	821	820
England	279,833	276,429	68,271	66,662

* Bed occupancy figures are based on a midnight count and do not therefore reflect the use of beds by patients who do not stay overnight.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new evidence persuaded him to reject the recommendation of paragraph 25 of the Greenfield report on generic prescribing in favour of the introduction of a limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Paragraph 25 of the Greenfield report on effective prescribing recommended rejection of a limited list of drugs across all therapeutic categories primarily on the grounds that the financial benefits were unproven. Our limited list proposals cover only a small number of therapeutic categories containing simple remedies and benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquillisers. Our proposals are the result of further detailed investigations and inquiries which show that in other countries with similar arrangements savings have been immediate and worthwhile and no damage has been caused to patient care.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) which other countries have limited list drug schemes;

(2) whether any research was done prior to the announcement on 8 November of his proposals for limited list prescribing of such schemes in *(a)* Denmark, *(b)* New Zealand, *(c)* Australia and *(d)* West Germany.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Limited list drug schemes have been introduced by most countries with advanced health care systems including Australia, Belgium, France, West Germany, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Spain and New Zealand. We have studied the operation of most of these schemes in depth.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how he proposes to evaluate the therapeutic equivalence between a branded and a generic product.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: When we reach final decisions on the range of drugs prescribable at public expense in a

small number of therapeutic categories, we do not intend to provide a direct generic equivalent to every branded product. Instead, an adequate range of effective, alternative, low cost generic products will be available on the NHS. On the general question of efficacy, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) on 4 December at column *163*.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what safeguards there will be for those patients who at present have free prescriptions to ensure that they can still obtain branded products;

(2) what safeguards he proposes to protect the position of chronically sick patients who are currently receiving branded drug products following the introduction of the limited list scheme;

(3) if he will make it his policy to ensure that the introduction of limited list prescribing does not lead to a system of two-tier medicine in the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We intend to produce a limited list which will cover all clinical needs. In drawing up the final version of this list, we need the help of the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry, and we will be discussing the details fully and carefully with them. This consultation will serve to ensure that medicines which are essential for the treatment of particular conditions are not excluded from NHS use.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many firms manufacturing which pharmaceuticals have written to him following his proposal to limit the range of drugs available on prescription from the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Sixteen companies manufacturing drugs likely to be affected by the proposal have written to us.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what proportion of the range of drugs which he proposes to cease being available on National Health Service prescriptions are manufactured in the United Kingdom; and how many are imported;

(2) when he proposes to list those pharmaceuticals and inform their manufacturers which will no longer qualify for the National Health Service list of prescribed drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The limited list of drugs in certain therapeutic categories to be used for National Health Service prescribing will not be finalised until after the consultation period ends on 31 January 1985.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has made of the number of jobs in the United Kingdom, by company, dependent upon the manufacture of pharmaceuticals he is proposing should cease to be available for prescription by the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 4 December at column *166*.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received, and from whom, criticising his decision to reduce the number of drugs available for prescription on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received over 250 letters criticising the proposals in some way. The majority of these have been forwarded by hon. Members on behalf of constituents and represent opinions from the medical and pharmaceutical professions, the pharmaceutical industry and the general public. Many are no more than copies of circular letters put out to all general practitioners by one of the drug companies, Roche Products Ltd.

We are also of course receiving letters in support of the proposals, mainly from members of the medical profession.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to discuss with representatives of the medical professions, and trade unions representing employees of manufacturers, his proposals to limit the range and number of drugs that can be obtained by prescription on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Full and careful consultation is taking place with the pharmaceutical profession, the medical professions and the pharmaceutical industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met with representatives of the British Medical Association yesterday. We have no plans to discuss the proposals with trade unions representing employees in the pharmaceutical industry as we are consulting medical and pharmaceutical opinion to decide on the final contents of a list which will cover all the clinical needs of patients.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many, and which, drugs proposed to be excluded from the list of approved drugs for prescription on the National Health Service contain one or more active ingredients not available on the list of permitted generic drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The drugs to be available on the National Health Service in the categories affected by the limited list proposals will not be finalised until full consultation has taken place. In the meantime it is not possible to identify any active ingredients that will not be available after 1 April 1985.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the future export potential of United Kingdom drugs manufacturers whose products will no longer be readily available in the National Health Service following the introduction of limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are not aware that exports of drugs will be seriously affected by the limited restrictions we propose to apply to NHS prescribing.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will take steps to invest the National Health Service with total product liability for drugs imported from other countries, following the introduction of limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The Government are discussing with other members of the European Community a draft directive for general product liability, prepared by the European Commission, for application in Member States. The introduction of limited list prescribing does not affect the Government's position on this.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessment he has made of the impact of limited list prescribing *(a)* on the profitability of pharmaceutical companies and *(b)* on employment in the industry.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The effect of the limited prescribing list proposals on both profits and jobs will depend on the composition of the final list of drugs which may be prescribed and how well companies are able to recoup in other ways sales lost to the National Health Service.

Saturated Fat Consumption

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if Her Majesty's Government accept the conclusion of a recent report by the committee on medical aspects of food policy that consumption of saturated fat should be reduced by 25 per cent.

Mr. John Patten: Yes, and the British Nutrition Foundation/Health Education Council's joint advisory committee on nutrition education is working urgently, at our request, to turn the report's recommendations into practical dietary guidance for families.

Hospital Kitchens (Health and Safety)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he takes to ensure that health and safety standards in hospital kitchens and wards are maintained; and if he will introduce legislation to enable prosecution of hospitals failing to observe such standards.

Mr. John Patten: Health authorities, in common with outside employers, are subject to control and inspection by the inspectorate appointed under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The Department is also concerned that health and safety standards in NHS hospital kitchens and wards are kept up. We have no reason to believe that health authorities are not carrying out their duties under the Act and we cannot agree on the need for further legislation in these matters.

As for food hygiene requirements, I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 29 November to the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) at column *576*.

NHS Privatisation (Redundancies)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many ancillary staff employees in the National Health Service have been affected by redundancies since the implementation of privatisation programmes for hospital cleaning, catering and laundry services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information about the numbers of redundancies in the National Health Service has not been collected centrally since 31 March 1981. Since 1 April 1984 our Department has recorded centrally those who, because they are aged over 50 with at least five years service, qualify for premature payment of superannuation benefits. Returns for the first six months of 1984-85 show that the number of ancillary staff so qualifying as a result of competitive tendering in domestic, laundry and catering services was 99.

Dental Treatment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department's working group with which the British Dental Association has been helping to review evidence on the cost-effectiveness and application of fissure sealing has yet completed a full report on its findings; and when it will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The joint working party with the British Dental Association on the effectiveness of fissure sealants has yet to complete its discussions. It is therefore too early to say when its findings will be made public.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients have been listed by the National Health Service for dental treatment in 1984; what proportion of those patients had two or more appointments; and how these figures compare with those recorded in 1978 and in each year since 1978.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is not available.

Family Planning Clinics

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many family planning clinics are in operation throughout the county of Derbyshire.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At the end of 1983, 19 premises were used regularly for family planning sessions in the north Derbyshire and southern Derbyshire health districts.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department is taking to ensure adequate financial provision for the continuation of family planning clinics.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We regard family planning as an important element in preventive health care. As the hon. Member knows, substantial resources are already available to health authorities for the improvement of health services over all. It is important, however, that authorities themselves determine their priorities in the light of local needs.

Dental Estimates Board (Computer)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to implement his decision to bring forward the replacement of the computer at the Dental Estimates Board.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We expect to make an announcement shortly.

Children in Care

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the approximate number of children in care *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the midlands at the latest available date.

Mr. John Patten: The latest information available centrally relates to the position at 31 March 1983, and is as follows:

Children in care

	Number
England	82,165
West Midlands	8,864
East Midlands	6,820

Hospital Patients (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what financial assistance his Department gives to hospital patients for the purchase of new clothing.

Mr. John Patten: Health authorities are expected to provide clothing for those patients who are unable to provide it from their own resources and who are not obtaining it from any other source.

Mrs. J. L. Garer (Member's Correspondence)

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects a reply to be sent to the letter sent to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Health) on 18 July by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne concerning Mrs. J. L. Garer, of 123 Falmouth Road, Redruth.

Mr. Newton: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 13 August.

NHS Treatment (Limitations)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he plans to extend the proposed limitation on treatment available under the National Health Service beyond drug therapy; and whether he is considering limitations on the availability of surgical treatment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No.

EC (Social Security Agreements)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress is being made on extending reciprocal agreements within the EEC on social security to the non-employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: We intend, subject to the views of the other European Community member States to renegotiate the bilateral conventions on social security which the United Kingdom has with eight of the other member States, and to negotiate a new convention with Greece. We shall seek to reach agreement with each of the other member States that the conventions should cover insured non-employed people, and other people not covered by the EC social security regulations. A draft text on these lines has been sent to the Republic of Ireland for consideration, and work is proceeding on texts for revised conventions with the Federal Republic of Germany, France and the Netherlands.

Epidural Injections

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service hospitals in the London area allow midwives to administer top ups of epidural injections as an anaesthetic during childbirth.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not collected centrally.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. John Townend asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the total amount paid to date by his Department as benefits to striking miners in respect of mortgage interest;

(2) what is the total cost of housing benefit to striking miners to the most recent available date;

(3) what is the maximum any striking miner's family has received in any one week in social security benefit;

(4) what is the maximum any striking miner in any week, has received from social security in respect of mortgage interest.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested in respect of supplementary benefit could be obtained only at disproportionate cost; and in respect of housing benefit is not available since local authorities have no need to identify separately claims from people involved in a trade dispute.

Health Authorities (TUC Nominations)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nominations for health authorities were put forward by the Trades Union Congress during each of the last four years; which unions they were from; and how many of these nominees were appointed, region by region.

Mr. John Patten: The Trades Union Congress, and the managerial professional and staff liaison group, are consulted whenever appointments to health authorities fall due. The further details requested by the hon. Member are not readily available and would in any case be meaningless, since all health authority members are appointed for their personal qualities and not as representatives of particular interests.

Alcohol Consumption

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he had taken in response to the findings in the National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education Report of 1983 concerning the rise in alcohol intake and the increase in alcohol abuse.

Mr. John Patten: The document to which the hon. Member appears to be referring is the discussion paper on proposals for nutritional guidelines for health education in Britain which was prepared for the Health Education Council by the British Nutrition Foundation. The Department continues to maintain a close liaison with the Health Education Council on such matters.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many alcohol-related deaths have occurred in the United Kingdom since 1980 arising from cirrhosis of the liver; what proportion of such deaths were male; and what proportion were female.

Mr. John Patten: The table shows numbers and proportions of male and female deaths from chronic liver disease and cirrhosis registered in the United Kingdom in 1980 to 1983. Figures are shown separately for the numbers of deaths where alcohol was specifically mentioned in the cause of death but total figures are also supplied as some of the additional deaths are also associated with excessive drinking.

Deaths from cirrhosis of the liver: numbers and proportions by sex, 1980 to 1983
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis

	Total (ICD 571)		*With mention of alcohol (ICD 571·0-571·3)*	
	M	*F*	*M*	*F*
Numbers				
1980	1,438	1,258	561	357
1981	1,459	1,268	611	362
1982	1,413	1,232	615	363
1983	1,378	1,301	656	416
Proportions (per cent.)				
1980	53·3	46·7	61·1	38·9
1981	53·5	46·5	62·8	37·2
1982	53·4	46·6	62·9	37·1
1983	51·4	48·6	61·2	38·8

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many cases of foetal alcohol syndrome have been recorded during the last five years; and what further initiatives he plans to encourage women to refrain from drinking during pregnancy;

(2) what studies or surveys he plans to initiate on the appreciation by women of risks and harmful effects of alcoholic consumption during pregnancy; and what steps he will be taking to ensure that women receive during pregnancy adequate health education about alcohol consumption.

Mr. John Patten: In my reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 20 December at column *216* I outlined the Department's advice on this matter and indicated that the Health Education Council, in the light of its expertise in health education, had been invited to join the Department in considering how best to ensure that the state of knowledge can be communicated to those who need it.

Two recent Health Education Council publications "That's the Limit—A Guide to Sensible Drinking" and the "Pregnancy Book" contain specific advice on alcohol consumption during pregnancy and the council continues to promote awareness of its advice at both the national and local level.

Two research studies on the effectiveness of alcohol education for pregnant women are currently under way and the Department has commissioned a survey on "Women and Drinking" from the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys which includes specific reference to drinking and pregnancy and which it is hoped will be published in 1985.

There are currently no reliable statistics available on the incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 December 1984

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food and Environment Protection Bill

Ms. Harman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will fix dates for the start and completion of consultations with interested organisations concerning the regulation for part III of the Food and Environment Protection Bill.

Mrs. Fenner: It will not be possible to open definitive consultations on the regulations until the Bill is enacted, but we intend to open preparatory discussions with interested organisations early next year, with a view to regulations being laid in Parliament in time for their entry into force on 1 January 1986.

Pesticides

Ms. Harman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce monitoring of pesticide drift on farms to asses the damage done to wildlife.

Mrs. Fenner: It is important to differentiate between spray drift, which is most likely to affect growth of adjacent plants, and the possible direct effects of pesticide use or misuse on wildlife. My Department already monitors the national situation for both, through a system of reporting incidents of spray drift and by investigating, under the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme, all reported incidents of suspected poisoning of wildlife.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those insecticides cleared for use on cereals under the pesticides safety precautions scheme to which one or more insect pests of cereals are resistant.

Mrs. Fenner: There are no field insect pests of cereals in the United Kingdom known to be resistant to pesticides.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those fungicides cleared for use on cereals under the pesticides safety precautions scheme which are known or suspected to have insecticidal properties.

Mrs. Fenner: 'Missile' (active ingredient pyrazophos) is the only fungicide cleared under the pesticides safety precaution scheme for use on cereals which is known to have insecticidal properties. An indication of the insecticidal property is given on the product label.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to *(a)* the number of British insect pests with some resistance to pesticides and *(b)* the number of insecticides to which one or more pests in Britain are significantly resistant for each of the years 1954 to 1984.

Mrs. Fenner: This information is not readily available on an annual basis for all pesticide uses. However, since 1954, about 28 pest species have shown resistance to a range of organophosphorous insecticides. Resistance has involved about 25 insecticides over the same period. These figures cover agriculture and horticulture, public hygiene and food storage.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the costs to agriculture of pest resistance in total, and for each of insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, separately, in each of the years from 1970 to 1984.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that there is no quantitative basis for providing the information requested by the hon. Member. The development of resistance to a certain pesticide does not necessarily lead to a breakdown of control or added cost, because of the availability of alternative remedies; and fluctuations in production cannot readily be assigned to any one pest, weather pattern, or other influence.

Research and Development

Mr. Harris asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the present arrangements for obtaining the views of the fishing industry on research and development priorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have decided to revise the arrangements for seeking the industry's views on fisheries research and development work undertaken by, or on behalf of, our Departments. The new arrangements will take the following form:

(i) Representative organisations will be invited to contribute towards the work of the review groups set up periodically by the Customer Group for Fisheries Research and Development to consider longer term research and development needs in particular sectors of activity (for example, marine fisheries, fish utilisation);

(ii) Industry will, where appropriate, be invited to participate in the regular progress meetings undertaken by working groups set up by the co-ordinator of fisheries research and development;

(iii) Existing day-to-day contacts between the industry and research laboratories will be maintained and where necessary strengthened.

In addition, it will of course remain open to those in particular sectors of the industry to indicate at any time outside the framework of these arrangements any views they may wish to put to Departments regarding their research and development needs, their views on the success or otherwise of the application of research findings, and their assessment of where existing knowledge could be used more effectively. The fisheries Departments will also be glad to consider wherever practicable undertaking individual commissions on a repayment basis along the lines currently being developed by the Torry research station in relation to fish utilisation research.

In the course of our review, my right hon. Friends and I took advice from the Fisheries Research and Development Board. The consensus of view within the board was that the varied structure of the fishing industry, and the diverse nature of much of the research and

development work carried out within this sector, do not lend themselves readily to the type of broad overview which the board was asked to undertake. In the light of this, we have decided that the board should be wound up. At the same time, we would wish to place on record our appreciation of the contribution made by the present board since its appointment in 1981.

CIVIL SERVICE

Contract and Procurement Procedures

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Minister for the Civil Service whether he will publish a report on the 1983 multi-department review of Government contract and procurement procedures.

Mr. Hayhoe: A report by the central team in the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office) that co-ordinated the review will be published tomorrow by Her Majesty's Stationery Office under the title "Government Purchasing". The Government welcome the report and have set in hand action to implement its conclusions.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General why information concerning the average length of time taken to process legal aid applications is only available on a national basis and not on a regional basis.

The Solicitor-General: In order to produce the national figure a small sample of cases is examined annually in each area office. The samples taken together provide a statistically acceptable national figure but each sample taken on its own is not large enough to be statistically reliable. To produce reliable regional figures would at present require special sampling exercises to be carried out. This could only be done at disproportionate cost. The Law Society is, however, looking at ways of improving its collection of information and is hoping in due course to be able to provide this information on an area basis.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General why information concerning the number of complaints about delays in the processing of legal aid applications is not collected.

The Solicitor-General: There could be considerable practical difficulties in compiling a comprehensive record of complaints about delays. Any applicant for legal aid, or his solicitor, who is concerned about the time being taken to process his application may telephone or write (sometimes both) to the Law Society's area office, and he may approach the Law Society's headquarters direct. The complainant may also write simultaneously to his Member of Parliament or to the Lord Chancellor or both. For an accurate picture, complaints in each of these forms would need to be separately recorded and centrally collated. This could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Plastic Bullets (Injuries)

Mr. Parry asked the Attorney-General how many cases in the current year and for each of the last five years, involving persons injured by plastic bullets in Northern Ireland have been considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland; and what action was taken in each case.

The Attorney-General: The available figures are as follows:

Year	*Cases*	*Persons injured*	*Persons killed*	*Prosecution directed*	*No prosecution directed*
1981	81	76	7	1	79
1982	36	36	1	0	36
1983	3	3	0	0	2
1984	11	12	0	0	6

In seven cases a final direction pends the outcome of other proceedings or the submission to the director of additional evidence. The outstanding 1981 case awaits the outcome of civil proceedings.

Figures for periods prior to 1981 are not available save at disproportionate cost.

Jurors (Oath)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Attorney-General why it is proposed to remove mention of the sovereign from, and otherwise to reword, the oath taken by jurors; and what account has been taken of representations on this proposal.

The Attorney-General: The new oath has been introduced, by means of a practice direction given by the Lord Chief Justice, to achieve greater intelligibility and simplicity. There have been no formal representations.

PRIME MINISTER

Peking Official Visit

Mr. Adley asked the Prime Minister when she next intends to seek to pay an official visit to Peking.

The Prime Minister: I will pay an official visit to Peking between 18 and 20 December. I will be accompanied by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The purpose of my visit will be to sign the joint declaration on Hong Kong.

Mr. Adley asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on any initiative she may be considering further to promote trade between Britain and the People's Republic of China which she will be discussing while she is in Peking.

The Prime Minister: I see good prospects for increasing trade between Britain and China and I hope to discuss trade questions with Chinese leaders when I visit Peking.

Research and Development

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Prime Minister when the factual material assembled for the 1984 annual review of Government funded research and development will be published.

The Prime Minister: The annual review of Government funded research and development which was announced in the Government's response (Comnd. 8591) to a House of Lords Select Committee report "Science and Government", has now completed its second cycle. As envisaged in the original White Paper, Departments submitted their R and D plans to the Cabinet Office in the early part of this year: they were reviewed under the guidance of the interdepartmental committee of chief scientists. The material was also considered by the advisory council on applied research and development, which provided its independent advice to the Government. Several aspects of the 1984 review are subject to further study.

The Government wish to encourage informed debate on this important topic and are therefore again publishing the factual material assembled for the 1984 review together with a short commentary section. It will be published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office tomorrow, and I am arranging to have copies placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Parliament (Election Procedures)

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those electoral procedures for the European Parliament which have been fully harmonised in the European Economic Community.

Mr. Mellor: None. Under article 7(2) of the Community Act of 20 September 1976, procedures at European Parliament elections are for the time being governed in each member state by national provisions.

Data Protection

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the categories of information to be found on certificates which exempt personal data under section 27 of the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Waddington: There is no prescribed form for certificates issued under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984. If, in any particular case, a senior Minister determines that data are required to be exempt, either from the provisions of the Act as a whole or from the non-disclosure provisions, he will certify that to be the case under the provisions of section 27(2) or 27(4) respectively.

Drugs (Prisons)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dogs trained to detect drugs have been used to search prisons, in the last year for which figures are available; which prisons were involved; and how many times dogs have been used to search for drugs in prisons other than those where they are normally based;

(2) how many dogs trained for detecting drugs are available to the prison service; where these dogs are based; and whether he has any plans to increase the number of dogs used for drug searches in prisons.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend will write to the hon. Member.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now withdraw plastic baton rounds from all police forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. I would refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to his Question on Friday 7 December at column *306-7*.

Drug Offences (Juveniles)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles were convicted of drug offences in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The numbers of persons aged under 17 found guilty in the United Kingdom of drugs offences (including both principal and non-principal offences) in 1981, 1982 and 1983 were 230, 299 and 329 respectively. Combined information relating to those found guilty or cautioned in each year from 1973 to 1983 is published for all age groups in table 6 of "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs in the United Kingdom, 1983" (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 18/84) a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. The Government view with concern the recent increase in these figures and are taking a wide range of measures to combat drug misuse, including the preparation of a major education and prevention campaign directed at young people.

Seat Belts

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been for driving without a seat belt since January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The available information relates to 1983 and is published in table 5 of "Offences relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales 1983, Supplementary Tables", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Information for 1984 is not yet available.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been injured during the coal mining dispute in each of the past six weeks.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is not possible to say how many members of the public have been injured because not all their injuries are necessarily reported to the police. The information with regard to police officers is as follows:

Week ending Friday	Numbers
2 November	22
9 November	32
16 November	87
23 November	43
30 November	42
7 December	14

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to receive the report he commissioned from St. Andrews university on additionality orders for goods and services following overseas aid.

Mr. Raison: The research at St. Andrews' university to which the hon. Member refers is in fact entitled "The Impact of the Overseas Aid Programme on Britain's Domestic Economy". A report is expected in April 1985.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Science Facilities

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what additional sum he is making available to universities for improving science facilities following the "Autumn Statement".

Mr. Brooke: I would refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend on 5 December at columns 360-61.

Student Awards

Mr. Tracey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out the timescale and terms of reference for the review of the student support system announced on 5 December.

Mr. Brooke: The timescale and terms of reference of the review are under consideration, but an announcement on these matters will be made shortly.

Blind and Deaf (Teaching)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether, following his meeting on 28 November with seven organisations concerned with blind and deaf people, he has decided to accept the proposal of the advisory committee on supply and education of teachers for withdrawing the mandatory requirement for a specialist qualification which now applies to teachers of the blind and deaf and partially-hearing.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will announce their decisions on the ACSET report in due course.

Value Added Tax

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received from the teacher unions regarding the likely effect on the education service of the imposition of value added tax on books and journals; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has recently received a collective resolution on this issue from the National Union of Teachers, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Secondary Heads Association from whom he has also received an individual representation. He will be responding to the resolution shortly.

TRANSPORT

Vessels (Hazardous Cargoes)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department is doing to implement the recommendations of the advisory committee on major hazards to study the inter-relationships of various regimes of control for vessels carrying major hazardous cargoes into United Kingdom ports, operations in loading and discharging and the application of planning controls in such port areas.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that the Health and Safety Commission has accepted these recommendations and has set up a sub-committee to study further the major hazard aspects of the transport of dangerous substances. My Department intends to co-operate fully with this sub-committee in its work. At present the HSC is preparing regulations on the handling and storage of hazardous substances in harbour areas. The introduction of these regulations with complementary merchant shipping legislation will make a valuable contribution towards the inter-relationship of the various organisations concerned with the movement of dangerous goods.

Seafarers (Health and Safety)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many seafarers died in accidents on board ships including casualties to vessels in each of the three years since 1978; and what were the incident rates per 100,000 persons at risk.

Mr. David Mitchell: The number of merchant seamen who died as a result of a casualty, or of an accident on board a ship, including those who were recorded as being "missing at sea", is given in the following tables:

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Casualties	8	19	45	13	34
Accidents	63	28	22	25	10
Missing at sea	13	8	12	6	5
Totals	84	55	79	44	49
Accident rate					
Per 100,000 at risk	97	68	104	60	75

These figures are taken from the Department's annual publication "Casualties to Vessels and Accidents to Men".

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport in what ways the aims and functions of his Department covering the occupational health and safety of seafarers are

different from those imposed upon the Health and Safety Commission and the 1974 Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department aims to promote a high standard of occupational health and safety on board ships. To this end its functions include making and enforcing regulations, issuing guidance and information through notices and other publications, initiating research projects, collecting and analysing data and accidents on board ships and investigating accidents on ships.

These aims and functions are similar to those of the Health and Safety Commission in respect of shore-based industries and are intended to ensure that seafarers have comparable standards for safety as shore-based workers. My Department co-operates fully with the commission when preparing legislation on occupational health and safety.

Marine Inspectors (Investigations)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents investigated by the marine inspectors in each of the years since 1978.

Mr. David Mitchell: Information on investigations conducted by marine surveyors is not set out to provide this answer readily. The cause of death in all fatal accidents on merchant ships is inquired into by either a proper officer or a United Kingdom coroner or procurator fiscal. At the present time their reports are examined within marine directorate and, whenever the circumstances warrant it, a further investigation by marine surveyors is made and appropriate action is taken. Reports of all serious non-fatal accidents are made direct to Marine directorate where they are considered in the same way.

Roads (Compensation Scheme)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to introduce a scheme to compensate business adversely affected following the opening of new roads, such as diversions and by-passes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: There is no provision for payment either way in respect of businesses which may be affected by changes in traffic as a result of the opening of new roads. No business can reasonably expect a guarantee of any level of traffic past its premises. Its activity is likely to be affected by many factors, and I have no proposals for a change in the present statutory position.

Buses

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Transport which independent and joint transport users group *(a)* from within the six metropolitan areas and Greater London and *(b)* from elsewhere in the United Kingdom have written to him indicating their support for the proposals contained in Cmnd. 9300.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received a number of responses from transport user groups from all parts of the country for and against various aspects of the proposals in the White Paper "Buses". We are considering these with the other responses in preparing the forthcoming Bill.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any response to Cmnd. 9300 from joint transport user groups within the six metropolitan counties; and what broad conclusion was reached in that response.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received several responses from joint transport user groups within the metropolitan counties for and against various aspects of the proposals in the White Paper "Buses". We are considering these with the other responses in preparing the forthcoming Bill.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the representations he has received from individuals and organisations in the north-west region advocating increased use of Manchester airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am writing to my hon. Friend.

Driving Tests, Keighley

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is planning to make any changes in the arrangements for conducting driving tests at the Keighley test centre.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department has been reviewing the future of the Keighley driving test centre in the light of worsening traffic conditions. I shall write to my hon. Friend quickly about any proposed changes in the present arrangements.

A3 (Road Accidents)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of road traffic accidents on the A3 in the Surrey, South-West constituency in 1984; and if he will make a statement on the causes.

Mrs. Chalker: On the 10 kilometres of the A3 in the Surrey, South-West constituency there have been 38 personal injury accidents in 1984 up to 30 November. Of these, there were six fatal, seven serious and 25 slight.

As there are likely to be police proceedings arising from a number of those accidents, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the possible causes.

A3 (Improvement)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for improvement of the A3 in the Surrey, South-West constituency.

Mrs. Chalker: Improvement schemes at Milford and Hindhead are included in our main programme for start of works from April 1987 onwards. I hope to undertake public consultation on both schemes next year. Minor improvements at the A3/A283 junction at Milford and the Crossways junction at Hindhead are planned to start shortly. The dualling of the section between Witly junction and Rodborough Hill should be completed in the next few weeks.

Heavy Lorries

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for Transport what he proposed to do after 31 December 1986 following the agreement reached on lorry weights by the Council of Ministers on 10 May to allow for a derogation in favour of the United Kingdom from the implementation of a directive on 40 and 44 tonne lorries until that date.

Mr. Ridley: There is no agreement that would limit a United Kingdom derogation to 31 December 1986. This is a date by which the Council envisages that the conditions of such a derogation would be decided. We are not in any way committed.

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his intention to sign a European Economic Community document during the week commencing Monday 10 December which will in effect commit the United Kingdom to accepting 40 tonnes gross weight lorries on the roads within the next few years.

Mr. Ridley: No.

Serpell Report

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on the proposal in the Serpell report that there should be a reduction of routine track maintenance.

Mr. David Mitchell: Track maintenance is a matter for the British Railways Board. I know that the board is committed to maintaining its high safety standards.

Drink Driving

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what research is planned by his Department to facilitate the identification and treatment of the high-risk drinking or repeated excess alcohol offender.

Mrs. Chalker: New arrangements were introduced in May 1983 which enable the Department to identify, and consider the case of, anyone who is convicted twice within 10 years of driving with an alcohol concentration of more than 2·5 times the legal limit.

The next year should see, for the first time, a significant number of offenders coming within the scope of the prodedure. We are planning at that stage to start a study of the characteristics of such drivers to help determine the most effective way of treating any drink problem they may have.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conclusion reached in a recent Transport and Road Research Laboratory report about the risk of being caught whilst driving under the influence of alcohol; and whether he intends to take any action to increase drivers' perception of the risk of being detected.

Mrs. Chalker: The survey on which the report's conclusions are based was carried out some time ago. I hope that recent legislation and continued publicity and education will improve public awareness of all the risks of drinking and driving, including the risk of being detected for an offence.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to curb excessive drinking and driving during the Christmas holiday period.

Mrs. Chalker: The national advertising campaign designed to bring home the risks involved in drinking and driving was launched on 6 December. The campaign is particularly aimed at young drivers, who may not appreciate just how easily alcohol can impair their performance. It uses television, radio, posters and the press and will run until the new year.

Regional Airports

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the domestic and international routes available from all regional airports in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Liner Conferences (Regulations)

Mr. Higgins asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Conditions for Recognition) Regulations 1984; and what replies he has sent in response to them.

Mr. Ridley: We have received two responses raising a limited number of issues. We have considered these and replied to the points that have been made.

Compact Spare Wheels

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied that compact spare wheels now fitted as original equipment in a number of imported cars are as safe as ordinary spare wheels in all normally encountered driving conditions.

Mrs. Chalker: We have no evidence that the use of these tyres has contributed to accidents. Provided drivers use them within the limits of performance specified by the vehicle manufacturer, and replace them with the repaired tyre as soon as possible, I am satisfied they are unlikely to be a risk to road safety.

Bus Industry

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what response he gave at the recent meeting he had with the delegation of the National Bus Company to the concern expressed over threats to jobs.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has had no such meeting. Our policy will give bus operators a greater incentive to provide the transport which customers want by improving existing services and developing new ones. Growth in new services will create additional jobs.

Birmingham International Airport

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans have been made for the expansion of scheduled flight services from Birmingham international airport as from 1985.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Plans for new services are a matter for the airlines.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he intends to publish the results of the survey into the extent of vehicle excise duty evasion;

(2) if he will estimate how many cars are untaxed; and what he intends to do about it.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The results of the survey should be available very shortly, and it is my intention to publish them. They will include estimates of the numbers of unlicensed vehicles in use.

Motor Cyclists (Accident Statistics)

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of recorded accidents in Staffordshire involving motor cycles for each of the last 10 years; and how many motor cyclists were injured or killed in each of those years.

Mrs. Chalker: An analysis of injury accidents involving motor cyclists for so long a period would involve disproportionate cost. However, the following information is available.

Two-wheeled motor vehicles involved in accidents: Staffordshire 1974-1983

Year	Vehicles Involved	User casualties Killed	Injured	All
1974	992	15	960	975
1975	1,217	12	1,206	1,218
1976	1,407	24	1,389	1,413
1977	1,424	27	1,413	1,440
1978	1,431	30	1,430	1,460
1979	1,353	18	1,319	1,337
1980	1,499	26	1,519	1,545
1981	1,513	26	1,542	1,568
1982	1,467	22	1,501	1,523
1983	1,316	26	1,331	1,357

Lorry Weight Limit

Mr. Nelson asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government to maintain the weight limit for heavy lorries on United Kingdom roads at 38 tonnes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy not to accede to any agreement at the forthcoming meeting of European Economic Community Transport Ministers in Brussels on 11 and 12 December that will have the effect of raising the lorry weight limit in the United Kingdom to 40 tonnes at any specific or unspecified date in the future without first obtaining the agreement of Parliament: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: It remains the policy of the Government for the foreseeable future to maintain the weight limit at 38 tonnes.

It is not my intention to accept any commitment to an increase, unless and until such a proposal has been agreed by Parliament.

Merchant Shipping (Review)

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether all categories of vessels will be covered in the review of the prospects for United Kingdom merchant shipping to be carried out by his Department.

Mr. David Mitchell: This review is in two parts and is being conducted jointly with the MOD. The first, which has been completed, was a review of the numbers of vessels in particular categories that would be needed for defence purposes in preparation for and during war. The second part, which is about to begin, will seek to establish how many vessels of the appropriate types are likely to be available in the short and medium term and whether they will be sufficient to meet these needs. For reasons of security, I cannot give details of the categories of vessel under examination.

Dartford Tunnel

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the design capacity of the Dartford tunnel in terms of vehicles usage per hour.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to the reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *311*]: I understand from the Dartford tunnel management that the design capacity for the tunnel is 3,500 vehicles per hour in each direction. In view of the variation in traffic flow throughout the day and the present number of toll booths, there is currently a practical limitation on the tunnel's capacity of 65,000 vehicles per day. Work is under way to increase the number of toll booths, which should increase the capacity of the tunnel, to 85,000 vehicles per day.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nicaragua

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if has any plans to change the extent of United Kingdom diplomatic representation with Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: No.

El Salvador

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the number and the brief of any British military officers acting in either an official or unofficial advisory capacity to the Government of El Salvador; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: There are no British military officers acting either officially or unofficially in an advisory capacity to the Government of El Salvador.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his Answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column 592, if he will list the references of the papers relating to the wirebird endemic to St. Helena.

Mr. Renton: Some published references are as follows:

Author	Year	Subject	Publication	Volume	Pages
Baker E.	1868	The Birds of St. Helena	Zoologist	26	1472-1476
Basilewsky P.	1970	La Faune Terrestre de l'ile de Sainte Helene	Zoologist	181	77-130
Benson C. W.	1950	A contribution to the ornithology of St. Helena, and other notes from a sea voyage	Ibis	92	73-83

Author	Year	Subject	Publication	Volume	Pages
Cramps and Simmons, K. E. L. editions	1983		The birds of the Western Palearctic (Oxford University Press)		—
Haydock E. L.	1954	A survey of the birds of St. Helena	Ostrich	25	62-75
Huckle C. H.	1924	Birds of Ascension and St. Helena	Ibis	(11) 6	818-821
Johnsgard P. A.	1981		The Plovers Sandpipers and snipes of the World (University of Nebraska press)		
Layard E. L.	1867	Letter	Ibis (NS)	3	248-252
Melliss J. C.	1870	Notes of the birds of the island of St. Helena	Ibis (NS)	6	97-107
Pitman C. S. R.	1965	The eggs and nesting habits of the St. Helena sandplover and wirebird	Bulletin British Ornithological Club	85	121-129
Simmons G. F.	1927	Sinbads of Science	National Geographical Magazine	52	1-75

Minister of State (Speech)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the speech made on 9 December in Paris by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce), to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union.

Mr. Luce: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to my speech of 4 December. Yes; I have placed copies in the Library today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BT Share Issue

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why the prospectus issued in respect of the British Telecom plc share offer was not published abroad within the countries of the European Community, in addition to Japan and the United States of America.

Mr. Butcher: The offer for sale of shares in British Telecom was principally a United Kingdom offering. It was considered necessary in order to ensure the success of the offer to make sales in the United States, Canada and Japan. Investors from European Community countries were able to apply for shares under the UK offer and the Government did not consider that the cost of separate offers there would be justified by the likely demand for shares.

Manufacturing Companies (Overseas Output)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of total production of the top 50 British-based manufacturing companies is represented by overseas output.

Mr. Channon: This is not available, as no information is collected on the production of overseas branches and subsidiaries of United Kingdom companies.

Trailers (Imports)

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many trailers were imported from East Germany during the last 12-month period.

Mr. Channon: The information is as follows:

October 1983-September 1984

	Number
(a) Caravans (trailers and semi-trailers of the caravan type for housing or camping)	1,235
(b) Trailers and semi-trailers for the transport of goods (including agricultural use)	1,991
(c) Manure spreaders	2

Source: data corresponding to SITC/R2 Items 786.11, 786.12 and 786.81 (part) in the UK Overseas Trade Statistics.

VAT (Newspapers)

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate his Department has made of the effect upon local newspapers which have a cover charge of the imposition of value-added tax on their newspaper sales and advertising; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: None. But the Newspaper Society, which I have recently met at its request and whose members comprise the majority of local newspaper publishers, has commissioned work on the subject. It intends sending its conclusions to Ministers in due course.

Cynon Valley (Employment)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect on unemployment of the changes in the regional aid in Cynon Valley.

Mr. Trippier: The changes in regional industrial policy announced on 28 November are intended to relate grants more closely to job creation and to concentrate resources on those areas with the most severe problems. They are thus aimed at improving the long term employment opportunities in areas such as Cynon Valley, which will continue to enjoy the highest category of regional assistance.

Devon, North (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what sums in grant aid were received by individuals or companies in the Barnstable and South Molton travel-to-work assisted area during the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what sums in grant aid were received by individuals or companies in the Ilfracombe travel-to-work development area during the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information available in respect of national and regional industrial aid provided in the travel-to-work areas specified is given in the following table:

£'000

	*1984-85	1983-84	1982-83	1981-82	1980-81	1979-80	Total
1. Regional Development Grant (Part II of the Industrial Development Act 1982)							
Grant paid *(a)*:							
Ilfracombe travel-to-work area	—	112	107	26	—	110	335
Barnstable travel-to-work area *(b)*	—	—	—	483	737	314	1,534
2. Regional Selective Assistance (Section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982)							
Offers made:							
Ilfracombe travel-to-work area	—	—	—	—	—	365	365
Barnstable travel-to-work area *(b)*	5	280	90	15	552	376	1,318
3. National Industrial Assistance (Section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982) *(c)*							
Offers made:							
Ilfracombe travel-to-work area	—	—	71	—	—	—	71
Barnstable travel-to-work area *(b)*	—	62	84	14	1	76	237
4. Assistance under Science and Technology Act 1965							
Payments made:							
Ilfracombe travel-to-work area *(d)*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	298
Barnstable travel-to-work area *(d)*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	

* To 30 September 1984

Notes:

(a) Total of payments over £25,000 only. Grant payments of £25,000 or less are not attributable to travel-to-work areas.

(b) Barnstable travel-to-work area includes South Moulton.

(c) The Section 8 figures do not include payments under the Small Engineering Firms Investment Scheme 2. This information is not available below the level of region.

(d) Figures are for payments made in the postal areas of Ilfracombe and Barnstable.

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many new jobs he estimates were created in the Ilfracombe development area during the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) how many new jobs he estimates have been created in the Barnstable and South Molton assisted area during the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has no information about the numbers of new jobs created. Details of net changes in employment are available but, for areas smaller than regions, only for those years when censuses of employment are conducted. Between the June 1978 census of employment and the next one in September 1981, there was a net change of minus 100 employees in the Ilfracombe travel-to-work area and a net change of plus 1,600 employees in the Barnstable travel-to-work area, which at that time included South Molton.

Metering Approval Scheme

Mr. Hayward asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will publish the consultant's report on the setting up of a metering approval scheme under the Telecommunications Act 1984.

Mr. Pattie: I have received the report commissioned by the Department of Trade and Industry from the Metra consulting group and I have decided that it should be published. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The report, the preparation of which was supervised by a steering group, including representatives of public telecommunications operators and users, puts forward a number of costed options for the implementation of a metering approval scheme under section 24 of the Telecommunications Act. I have decided to seek the advice of the Director General of Telecommunications about which of these options should be pursued. Before any final decisions are taken I shall want to consider the director's advice in light of public comments on the report. I am therefore asking those who wish to express views on the contents of it to send them in writing to the Office of Telecommunications marked for the attention of Mr. K. Benson by 31 January 1985.

Small Firms

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the response to the small firms technical enquiry service.

Mr. Butcher: Yes. Since the service was started in 1982, more than 7,000 firms have requested assistance. The current rate of applications is about 4,000 per year.

Regional Policy

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the total public expenditure is consumed by regional preferential assistance.

Mr. Trippier: In the financial year 1983-84, total expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry was

£1,773 million, of which £417 million or 24 per cent. was spent on regional development grants and £61 million or 3 per cent. on reginal selective assistance.

China

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take further to promote trade between Britain and the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Channon: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Restaurant Dishes (Labelling)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to encourage the development of a code of practice concerning the labelling of dishes in restaurants and hotels to ensure that dishes consisting wholly or mainly of processed ingredients are not described on menus as fresh.

Mr. Butcher: I am not aware of any significant volume of complaint on this matter, but if the hon. Member has evidence of damage to the interests of consumers arising from inaccuracies on menus I shall be glad to draw it to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to increase the penalties for attaching a misleading description to food sold in hotels and restaurants, with particular reference to the description of dishes as fresh when they have been made from processed ingredients.

Mr. Butcher: The penalties for offences under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 have recently been increased to a fine of up to £2,000 on summary conviction. The maximum penalty on indictment is an unlimited fine or two years' imprisonment or both. I consider these penalties sufficient to deal with any problem of misleading descriptions of food.

Manufactured Exports

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the per capita value of exports of manufactures per head in terms of dollars for each of the main industrial countries in 1982 and 1983; and if he will explain the exchange rates used for converting the figures for the different years.

Mr. Channon: The information is as follows:

Country	*Per Capita Exports of Manufactures United States $*		*National Currency*	*Conversion Rates Equivalent in United States $*	
	1982	*1983*		*1982*	*1983*
United States of America	602	565			
Canada	1,541	1,705	1 Canadian $	=0·810314	0·811282
Japan	1,132	1,191	1000 Yen	=4·034300	4·201630
Belgium/Luxembourg	3,663	3,675	1000 Belgian Francs	=21·906000	19·631000
France	1,294	1,261	10 Francs	=1·528190	1·313230
Federal Republic of Germany	2,476	2,384	1 Deutsche Mark	=0·413999	0·390240
Italy	1,087	1,097	1000 Lire	=0·740480	0·658400
Netherlands	2,296	2,313	1 Guilder	=0·375014	0·351707
Sweden	2,582	2,603	1 Krona	=0·159313	0·130481
Switzerland	3,757	3,818	1 Swiss Franc	=0·494196	0·475750
United Kingdom	1,157	1,072	Sterling	=1·746428	1·514032

Source: OECD.

Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate his Department has made of the annual reduction in regional development grants to the Yorkshire and Humberside region as a result of the measures announced on 28 November.

Mr. Trippier: Estimates of the reduction in annual expenditure on regional development grants have not been made in respect of individual planning regions in England.

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions the Minister for Trade had with Commonwealth Caribbean leaders when he attended the Caribbean Basin meeting in Miami, on the purchase of new turboprop aircraft for Leeward Islands Air Transport and the possibility of United Kingdom funding, in view of the European Community aid offer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EC Exports and Imports

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list, at constant 1983 prices and for each of the last five years, the value of British exports to and imports from the rest of the European Community *(a)* in total, *(b)* in manufacturing, *(c)* in oil and *(d)* in services.

Mr. Channon: This information is not available at constant prices. Data at current prices are in the following tables.

United Kingdom Trade with European Community
£ Million Balance of Payments Basis

Total Visible Trade	*Exports*	*Imports*	*Visible Balance*
1979	17,309	19,934	−2,625
1980	20,427	19,655	+773
1981	20,861	20,849	+12
1982	22,997	24,379	−1,382
1983	26,460	28,967	−2,507
of which:			

Total Visible Trade	Exports	Imports	Visible Balance
*Manufactures**			
1979	12,030	14,585	−2,555
1980	13,285	14,508	−1,223
1981	12,517	15,165	−2,647
1982	13,720	18,158	−4,438
1983	15,043	22,172	−7,129
Fuels†			
1979	2,725	1,500	+1,224
1980	4,290	1,422	+2,868
1981	5,574	1,534	+4,040
1982	6,291	1,518	+4773
1983	8,127	1,504	+6,623

* Standard International Trade Classification Sections 5 to 8
† Standard International Trade Classification Section 3; mainly oil
Source: Department of Trade and Industry

United Kingdom Transactions in Services with the European Community

£ Million

	Credits	Debits	Balance
1979	3,582	3,691	−109
1980	3,836	4,052	−216
1981	3,912	4,427	−515
1982	3,881	4,772	−891
1983	4,197	5,216	−1,019

Source: CSO United Kingdom Balance of Payments (Pink Book)

Administrative Costs (EC Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the administrative expenses of his Department he estimates to be directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out by his Department as a result of membership of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 December 1984, c. *190*]: The proportion of the running costs of the Department of Trade and Industry directly or indirectly attributable to duties which must be carried out as a result of membership of the European Economic Community is not known and cannot be estimated without disproportionate cost.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a consumer's guide to new motor vehicles offered for sale in the United Kingdom, specifying the approximate proportion by value of British manufactures.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 December 1984, c. *244*]: Information about the United Kingdom content of new motor vehicles is provided to my Department on a commercially confidential basis. I am therefore unable to publish such a guide.

Polyurethane (Joint Ventures)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning ventures which have been jointly undertaken by chemical groups in the United Kingdom with enterprises in member countries of COMECON for the purpose of producing polyurethane for domestic and export markets.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *315*]: I am not aware that any chemical group in the United Kingdom is or has been involved jointly with any enterprise in a member country of COMECON in a venture for the production of polyurethane for domestic or export purposes.

Vosper Shiprepairers Ltd. (Pension Fund)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements for the Vosper Shiprepairers Limited pension fund will be made following privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *315*]: Vosper Shiprepair Ltd. employees are currently members of the British Shipbuilders pension scheme. Pension arrangements following privatisation will be a matter for the new owners of the company. The employees will be able to remain members of the British Shipbuilders pension scheme for a limited period while any new pension arrangements are introduced.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Urban Development Grant

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for urban development grant have been received to date since the scheme was introduced *(a)* from Belfast and *(b)* from Londonderry; what is the total expenditure paid out in grants for *(a)* Belfast and *(b)* Londonderry; and if the Department of the Environment has given consideration to extending the scheme to other areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information to 30 November 1984 is as follows:

	Applications received	Grant paid £ million
Belfast	583	1·5
Londonderry	161	0·1

In addition, offers of grant totalling 3·5 million in Belfast and £0·4 million in Londonderry have been made.

The scheme is targeted towards areas of greatest need and I do not consider it should be extended.

Divis Flats, Belfast

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has approved the demolition of Divis flats in Belfast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: Following a review of priority and difficult to let estates, carried out by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, I have approved the demolition of the St. Brendan's and Pound blocks of flats, a total of 87 units of accommodation, as part of a package of proposals to improve living conditions. It is not intended to demolish the remaining eight blocks of flats in the Divis complex.

RUC (Internal Security)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether Her Majesty's Government have

received any representations from senior officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary advocating the standing down of the Ulster Defence Regiment and charging the Royal Ulster Constabulary with total responsibility for internal security throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: No.

Security Forces (Plastic Bullets)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many members of the security forces in the current year, and for each of the last five years, have been *(a)* charged with criminal offences or *(b)* disciplined as a result of incidents in Northern Ireland involving injuries to persons caused by the use of plastic bullets;

(2) how many persons have been injured by the use of plastic baton rounds in the Province to the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

UDR (Firearms Certificates)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its reserve, currently hold private firearms certificates.

Mr. Scott: 866.

SCOTLAND

Peterhead Prison

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will investigate allegations made by the Peterhead prisoners' support committee in Glasgow of assaults by prison warders on inmates and destruction of their property.

Mr. Ancram: The Peterhead prisoners' support committee has not brought any such allegations to my attention. If this committee wishes to make allegations of criminal conduct by prison officers it should bring them to the attention of the police or the procurator fiscal. My right hon. Friend the Lord Advocate has overall responsibility for the investigation of allegations of crime in Scotland.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to alleviate problems resulting from overcrowding of cells, to reduce censorship of letters and to assess the necessity of the installation of new control units in Peterhead prison.

Mr. Ancram: Measures to remedy overcrowding in the Scottish penal system are already in hand and, provided the inmate population does not rise significantly above its present level, overcrowding should be virtually eliminated when phase II of Shotts prison becomes available for occupation early in 1987. Censorship of mail was abolished at two young offenders' institutions last year and the need for censorship where it is currently undertaken will be kept under review. There are no control units in Peterhead prison and we see no reason to introduce them. I am satisfied that the new 10-cell unit and the new regime for 'B' hall at Peterhead prison are necessary. These measures have been taken for the benefit both of the staff and the majority of the prisoners, who wish to serve their sentences quietly.

Remoter Rural Areas (Strathclyde)

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received details of the work of the joint working party comprising Startclyde regional council and Argyll and Bute, Clydesdale, Cumnock and Doon Valley, Cunninghame, Dumbarton, Kyle and Carrick and Monklands district councils to examine the problems of remoter rural areas in Strathclyde; if he will consider their proposals for a rural aid fund for Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend is aware of the work of the joint working party, but has not received formal proposals.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of fishing vessels of 26 metres or over, in respect of each European Community country eligible to fish for demersal species in the north of Scotland box, which were actually observed fishing there in the period April to October.

Mr. John MacKay: Details are given below of the number of different vessels which, in accordance with Community regulations, reported that they were entering the north of Scotland box to fish for demersal species in that period.

	Number
United Kingdom	31
France	57
Belgium	2

Health Boards (Staff)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of *(a)* hospital doctors, *(b)* hospital dentists, *(c)* community doctors and *(d)* community dentists employed by each of the Scottish health boards at (i) 30 September 1975, (ii) 30 September 1979 and (iii) 30 September 1982.

Mr. John MacKay: The numbers requested, expressed in whole-time equivalent terms, are set out in the table below:

Health Board	*Total*	*Hospital*		*Community*	
		Doctors	*Dentists*	*Doctors*	*Dentists*
30 September 1975					
Scotland	5,580·5	4,684·2	184·4	417	295
Argyll and Clyde	324·6	265·4	1·2	35	23
Ayrshire and Arran	197·9	161·4	2·5	20	14

Health Board	Total	Hospital		Community	
		Doctors	Dentists	Doctors	Dentists
Borders	475	35·5	—	3	9
Dumfries and Galloway	119·4	100·3	1·1	8	10
Fife	212·6	168·8	0·8	24	19
Forth Valley	185·4	148·4	2·0	19	16
Grampian	489·4	421·8	10·6	37	20
Greater Glasgow	1,833·7	1,612·1	73·6	106	42
Highland	197·7	150·1	5·6	19	23
Lanarkshire	295·0	226·9	2·1	36	30
Lothian	1,083·4	910·1	45·3	75	53
Orkney	7·0	3·7	0·3	1	2
Shetland	8·9	4·9	—	—	4
Tayside	558·0	463·8	39·2	31	24
Western Isles	20·0	11·0	—	3	6
30 September 1979					
Scotland	6,035·3	5,071·8	197·6	448·1	317·9
Argyll and Clyde	347·6	283·4	1·6	38·6	24·0
Ayrshire and Arran	211·9	173·0	3·5	18·8	16·6
Borders	61·0	44·7	—	6·8	9·5
Dumfries and Galloway	124·0	100·9	1·7	10·4	11·0
Fife	233·7	177·6	0·5	32·2	23·4
Forth Valley	205·8	167·6	1·8	18·5	17·9
Grampian	528·5	453·6	7·4	43·7	23·8
Greater Glasgow	1,878·7	1,665·9	75·4	91·8	45·6
Highland	211·1	163·4	6·2	17·4	24·1
Lanarkshire	416·7	348·6	3·2	35·1	29·8
Lothian	1,148·6	961·1	50·4	86·9	50·2
Orkney	8·6	4·5	0·1	1·0	3·0
Shetland	11·6	5·6	—	1·0	5·0
Tayside	627·6	511·0	45·8	43·9	26·9
Western Isles	19·9	10·9	—	2·0	7·0
30 September 1982					
Scotland	6,253·7	5,256·6	205·3	453·8	338·1
Argyll and Clyde	354·4	294·8	1·5	34·6	23·5
Ayrshire and Arran	242·5	200·6	2·8	21·7	17·4
Borders	59·4	43·5	—	6·8	9·1
Dumfries and Galloway	129·6	104·3	2·7	10·6	12·0
Fife	241·8	186·2	1·4	30·5	23·7
Forth Valley	224·7	183·2	2·0	16·9	22·6
Grampian	535·5	458·3	7·6	45·1	24·3
Greater Glasgow	1,952·9	1,720·8	84·3	97·6	50·2
Highland	208·4	163·6	5·2	17·6	22·0
Lanarkshire	434·5	356·5	4·2	37·0	36·8
Lothian	1,214·1	1,023·2	52·3	81·8	56·8
Orkney	10·0	4·9	0·1	1·0	4·0
Shetland	12·0	6·0	—	2·0	4·0
Tayside	615·3	499·9	41·1	48·6	25·7
Western Isles	18·7	10·7	—	2·0	6·0

Notes:
(a) Includes Honorary appointments.
(b) Includes General Practitioners holding part-time hospital appointments.
(c) Maximum Part-time staff are counted as 0·9 WTE for 1975 and 1979, and 1·0 WTE for 1982.

Teachers' Salaries (Review)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will set up an independent review of teachers' salaries.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend on 5 December 1984, column 333, to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg.)

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many miners on strike returned to work for the first time in the weeks commencing 12, 19 and 26 November, respectively.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that the number of employees of the board represented by the NUM who returned to work for the first time since joining the strike were as follows:—

Week commencing 12 November: 5,032.
19 November: 5,959.
26 November: 2,159.

Civil Plutonium

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from Mr. John Lyons, General Secretary of the Electrical Power Engineers' Association, concerning the use made by the United States of America of exported British civil plutonium; what response he will be making; if he will publish the representations and his response in the *Official Report*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Mr. Lyons wrote to my right hon. Friend on 30 November. He enclosed his correspondence with United States Congressman Richard Ottinger. My right hon. Friend replied on 5 December. Copies of Mr. Lyons' letter, the enclosures and the reply have been placed in the Library.

Coal Production

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much coal has been produced in each of the past six weeks.

Mr. Peter Walker: The latest available figures for coal production were published in a Department of Energy press notice on 5 December 1984. They show that 3·5 million tonnes of coal were produced in October.

Since the end of October 16,300 former strikers have returned to work, and another nine pits have started producing coal. There are now 64 pits where coal is being produced.

THE ARTS

Government Expenditure

31. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what recent representations the Minister for the Arts has received about Government spending on the arts.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and noble Friend has received no general representations of this kind recently.

Local Government Reform

35. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts, in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council what plans the Minister for the Arts has for the continuation of Thames day, south bank weekend, and the open foyer policy at the Royal Festival Hall.

Mr. Waldegrave: The London borough councils will be free to organise events such as Thames day and the south bank weekend after the abolition of the GLC. The consent of the Arts Council would be required for the use of the South Bank complex for these events. The future of the "open foyer" policy at the Royal Festival Hall will be a matter for the Arts Council.

Royal Opera House

36. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if he will publish in the *Official Report* a breakdown of the application by the Royal Opera House of Government funds made available to it through the Arts Council in each of the last three years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The following is the information:

The Royal Opera House meets its expenditure out of total income which falls into three categories:

	1981-82 £ *million*	*1982-83* £ *million*	*1983-84* £ *million*
Arts Council funding	9·3	10·4	11·3
Other grants and donations	1·0	1·0	1·5
Income from box-office, etc.	6·2	6·6	7·1
	16·5	18·0	19·9

This total income was applied thus:

	£ *million*	£ *million*	£ *million*
Performance and rehearsal	7·3	8·4	9·4
Production and staging	4·6	4·6	5·1
Premises	1·1	1·3	1·3
Front-of-house	0·6	0·7	0·7
Other general costs	1·8	2·0	2·2
Touring	1·1	1·0	1·2
Overall expenditure	16·5	18·0	19·9

Arts Council

Mr. Arnold asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what is the total of forward financial commitment made to date by the Arts Council in respect of the financial year 1985-86; and if he will indicate *(a)* how much is a firm contractual commitment and *(b)* how much is in any respect provisional.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Arts Council has discussed possible fundings for 1985-86 with a large number of arts bodies, but has not committed itself to disburse money which has not yet been voted by Parliament.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Forestry Commission

27. **Mr. Canavan** asked the right hon. Member for Taunton answering on behalf of the Public Accounts Commission what is the estimated cost to the National Audit Office in the current financial year of auditing the accounts of the Forestry Commission.

Mr. du Cann: The Forestry Commission produces two accounts each year, the Appropriation Account relating to the funds voted by Parliament for the commission as a whole, and separate trading accounts for its forestry management activities which are published in its annual report. The estimated cost in the current financial year of auditing these accounts, together with value for money examinations under the National Audit Act 1983, amounts to £86,000, of which about half is reimbursed by the Forestry Commission in respect of the trading accounts.

WALES

Investment

12. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many inquiries about investment he has received in the last 12 months from possible foreign investors originating in *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* Japan, *(c)* the European Economic Community and *(d)* other countries.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: During the last 12 months WINvest—the organisation responsible for co-ordinting inward investment—received 264 inquiries consisting of

166 from the United States of America, six from Japan, 49 from the European Economic Community and 43 from other countries.

Education

13. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of education in Wales.

21. **Mr. Raffan** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of financial provision for education in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: There will always be room for improvements in the education system, and I would encourage authorities to make very effort to get value for money and maximum benefit from the resources available. In real terms local authority spending on education in Wales, excluding school meals and milk, was almost exactly the same in 1983-84 as in 1976-77, despite a significant decline in pupil numbers.

Coal Industry Dispute

14. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the National Coal Board; and if the current dispute in the industry was a matter discussed.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I am kept well informed about the progress of the current dispute although I have not met the chairman formally since it began.

A465 (Glynneath and Aberdulais)

15. **Mr. Coleman** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made in arriving at a decision concerning the construction of the section of the A465 trunk road between Glynneath and Aberdulais; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: When my right hon. Friend saw the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) earlier this year, he acknowledged the need for improvement of the A465 at this point, but he explained that it was necessary to reduce the cost of the proposed scheme in order to improve its economic viability. My Department is continuing to seek ways of doing so and a decision will be taken as soon as possible.

Garden Festival

16. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to invite applications to host the garden festival to be held in Wales 1992.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Early in the new year.

Dairy Industry

18. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of the dairy industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 15 November, at columns 325-26.

Labour Statistics

19. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what the latest unemployment figures are for Gwynedd; and how this compares with the figures five years ago.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 8 November 1984, there were 15,033 unemployed claimants in Gwynedd. In November 1979 the registrant-based figure, which is not comparable, was 7,142.

Welsh Language

20. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to improve the legal and educational status of the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has responded positively to the desire to enhance the status of the Welsh language, as is shown by the quadrupling of financial support for the language since 1979. I am not convinced that legislation would enhance the broad support the language now attracts.

Freeport (Cardiff)

22. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the freeport experiment in Cardiff.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In common with the other five freeports in the United Kingdom, Cardiff freeport was formally designated on 6 August 1984, initially for a period of seven years. I understand from the operators that considerable interest has been shown in the freeport. Some 200 inquiries have already been received.

Advanced Technology

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up special organisations or machinery to attract into Wales sophisticated industries with advanced technology and to encourage the contribution of university colleges in this area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In January 1983 I announced the establishment of WINvest which is responsible for attracting into Wales inward investment including, though not confined to, high technology companies. WINvest works closely and effectively with other bodies which have a contribution to make in this respect, not least, where appropriate, university colleges.

Earlier this year, following a proposal I made, WINtech was set up by the Welsh Developmeent Agency. WINtech's main objectives are to encourage the development of new products and adaptation to technological change within Welsh industry; to encourage innovation through co-operation between industry and institutions of higher education; and to support WINvest in encouraging new investment in Wales by high technology companies.

Advance Factories

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many advance factories have been erected in Wales, in the county of south Glamorgan and in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan, respectively, from 1979 to the

latest convenient date; how many are planned for completion during the next two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In the period May 1979 to November 1984 inclusive, the Welsh Development Agency, Development Board for Rural Wales and Cwmbran Development Corporation have built a total of 1,400 advance factories in Wales. Of this number the WDA constructed 117 units in the county of South Glamorgan and 33 units in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is not possible to forecast accurately the number of advance factories that may be provided over the next two years. However, at present the three bodies together have a total of 250 advance units that are either being built or have been approved for construction in Wales.

These figures do not include local authority or private sector factory provision. Advance factory building has made, and will continue to make, an important contribution to improving the industrial infrastructure of Wales and to the attraction of new industries and employment opportunities.

Dairy Quotas

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to review the Welsh dairy sector and take steps to inaugurate an improved dairy quota.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: All sectors of the industry are reviewed every year in consultation with the unions as part of the annual review procedure. We are continually monitoring the implementation and effects of dairy quotas and measures taken by the Government to ease the position of producers.

Integrated Operations Area

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales on what basis he considered worthwhile a submission to the European regional development fund supporting the concept of an integrated operations area for Clwyd.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: A study into the feasibility of an integrated operation in Clwyd was commissioned from independent consultants by Clwyd county council, with financial assistance from the European Commission, and is one of several studies supported by the Commission with a view to clarifying the nature and relevance of integrated development in different areas. I welcome the initiative.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what views were expressed by the European Commission regarding the concept of an integrated operations area in south-east Wales on the most recent occasions that he has been in contact with them;

(2) if he still supports the concept of an integrated operations area in south-east Wales; and what plans exist to help bring it about.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The concept of integrated operations in the Community remains under discussion, and in our contacts with the Commission an important aim has been to identify the ways in which the concept could apply in Wales. The provisional draft document relating to industrial south Wales submitted to the Commission in 1980 formed an early stage in this overall process. While no firm conclusions have yet been reached, we remain ready to see progress on any initiative which would increase the effective application of Community aid to Wales.

EMPLOYMENT

Miners (Pay)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the average annual increase in wages for miners since 1979 compared with average pay increases over the same period for private sector workers generally.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimates from the new earnings survey show that between April 1979 and April 1983 the average gross weekly earnings of full-time male manual employees working a full week in the coal-mining industry increased at an average annual rate of 11·1 per cent. The comparable increase for full-time male manual employees in the private sector was 11 per cent. A valid comparison cannot yet be made for the period after April 1983 as the 1983 pay agreement for manual employees in the coal-mining industry has yet to be settled.

Asbestos

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of health and safety construction inspectors' resources and time have been devoted to administering and enforcing the Asbestos Licensing Regulations 1983; and how much of the work previously carried out by the construction inspectors has had to be postponed or abandoned following the additional work load of the licensing regulations 1983.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is not available. Construction inspectors are continuing to give attention to other priorities including the basic inspection programme in high risk activities such as steel erection, demolition and roofwork and investigation of serious accidents and complaints.

Youth Training Scheme

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what evidence he has as to the number and proportion of trainees who were placed with private training agencies in the youth training scheme up to September;

(2) what proportion of places under the youth training scheme is provided in each area manpower board area by private training agencies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available in the form requested.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of places and programmes under the youth training scheme is provided by private training agencies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The only information available relates to 1983-84 schemes and is contained in a survey of managing agents and sponsors carried out in October 1983. A copy of a report on the survey is available in the Library.

Earnings (Statistics)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing for each year since 1979 for average weekly earnings the lowest decile and the highest decile expressed as percentages of the median.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is set out in respect of full-time adult male and female employees working a full week in table 30 of the report, New Earnings Survey 1984, part B, a copy of which is in the Library.

Redundancy Payments Office, Glasgow

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of talks held on 4 December over the future of the Glasgow redundancy payments office.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. It would not be helpful for me to make a statement on a procedural matter which is essentially for this Department's internal Whitley machinery.

Retraining

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if the Government intend to expand the loan scheme available to individuals wishing to undergo industrial training;

(2) how many individuals have applied for Government retraining loans.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There is not at present a scheme of training loans which is open for applications. The Government intend to introduce an experimental pilot scheme in 1985-86, subject to the response to the recent consultation paper. Any decision to extend or expand the scheme would be taken in the light of the outcome of this experiment.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many building trade operatives were registered as unemployed *(a)* in Hackney and *(b)* in the parliamentary constituency of Hackney, South and Shoreditch on the last occasion for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested, in respect of registrants at jobcentres, is available in the House of Commons Library. The latest figures relate to September 1982.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in the number of unemployed people since May 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 8 November 1984, the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,223,000, an estimated increase of 2,004,000 since May 1979. The figures are affected by the 1983 Budget provisions which enable some men, aged 60 and over, to receive the long term rate of supplementary benefit and national insurance credits without having to sign on at an unemployment benefit office. Between April and August 1983 an estimated 161,800 men were affected.

Jobcentres

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals have been made for restructuring the jobcentre network.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Proposals for the development of the employment service were published last month following a period of public consultation. A copy of the full proposals was placed in the Library. Hon. Members were sent details of how the proposals affected their constituencies.

The proposals aim to make jobcentres more accessible to jobseekers by opening 82 jobcentres in new locations, thus increasing the overall number of jobcentres to 1,065. The proposals also provide for substantial investment in new technology in jobcentres both to improve job vacancy handling and to help staff in providing information and advice. Efficiency will be further improved by the limited centralisation of some specialist services. These changes would reduce the cost of the service by about £8 million a year by 1989.

The Manpower Services Commission hopes to reach final decisions on these proposals shortly.

Health and Safety

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action he intends to take resulting from the findings contained in the recently published annual report of the Health and Safety Executive on the increase in the number of deaths of employees at their places of work.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The figures published in the annual report of the Health and Safety Commission for 1983-84 showed fewer fatal injuries to employees at work in 1983 than in 1982. Final 1983 data are not yet available but it is not expected that they will show an increase over 1982.

Short Brothers

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees Messrs. Short Brothers have at each of their three plants at Sydenham, Castlereagh and Newtownards.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department's employment statistics are collected under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 which specifically prohibits the disclosure of any details about individual firms.

Unemployment (London)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the present level and percentage rate of unemployment in London; and what are the comparable figures for blacks.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Kelsey (Unemployment Benefit)

Mr. Ashton asked the Secretary of State for Employment why Mr. Kelsey of 1 Suffolk Road, Bircotes, near Doncaster, is still being refused unemployment benefit after being dismissed from Harworth colliery last

June; when his appeal is expected to be heard; why the clerk to the appeals tribunal is still waiting for papers from the Department of Employment, Doncaster; and what is the average waiting time for appeals of this nature.

Mr. Alan Clark: Mr. Kelsey resigned from Harworth colliery and was not dismissed. He was disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit by the independent adjudicating authorities because he had, prior to his resignation, lost employment through a stoppage of work due to a trade dispute at his place of employment and that disqualification lasts so long as the stoppage continues. (Social Security Act 1975, section 19.1).

Mr. Kelsey's appeal to the Social Security Appeal Tribunal is in connection with his claim to supplementary allowance, not unemployment benefit, and my officials have been delayed in providing papers in connection with the appeal because they are still awaiting replies to their further enquiries of the National Coal Board.

A date for the hearing has not yet been set. Appeal tribunals deal with a wide range of benefits and information is not available on the average waiting time for appeals of this nature.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Departmental Select Committees

Mr. George asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission how many visits were made by each of the departmental Select Committees, including visits by Sub-Committees, in the last Session, abroad and within the United Kingdom; and what is the total cost for each Committee for this Parliament to date, together with global figures for each Committee and for all departmental Committees for the last Session.

Mr. Beith: I shall reply shortly.

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal how many witnesses have appeared before each of the departmental Select Committees in the last session of Parliament; how many times they have given evidence; what is the rank of the official witnesses concerned; and if he will give similar information for *(a)* Cabinet Ministers, *(b)* other Ministers and *(c)* others.

Mr. Biffen: The information is as follows:

Agriculture Committee

39 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 37 on one occasion
- 2 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence on two occasions

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 2 Permanent Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence once
- 5 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Principal gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Chief Agricultural Officer gave evidence once

Defence Committee

121 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 96 on one occasion
- 15 on two occasions
- 6 on three occasions
- 2 on four occasions
- 1 on five occasions
- 1 on six occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence twice
- 2 other Ministers gave evidence three times

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Second Permanent Secretary gave evidence once
- 3 Deputy Secretaries gave evidence once
- 4 Under Secretaries gave evidence once
- 2 Under Secretaries gave evidence twice
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence three times
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence four times
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence six times
- 2 Executive Directors (Middle Band) gave evidence once
- 7 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Assistant Secretary gave evidence three times
- 2 Senior Principals gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence twice
- 1 Higher Executive Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Naval Architect gave evidence once
- 1 Field Marshal gave evidence twice
- 3 Major Generals gave evidence once
- 1 Brigadier gave evidence once
- 3 Colonels gave evidence once
- 2 Lieutenant Colonels gave evidence once
- 1 Vice-Admiral gave evidence twice
- 2 Rear Admirals gave evidence once
- 2 Rear Admirals gave evidence twice
- 1 Rear Admiral gave evidence four times
- 1 Commodore gave evidence once
- 1 Commodore gave evidence twice
- 4 Captains gave evidence once
- 3 Captains gave evidence twice
- 1 Captain gave evidence five times
- 5 Commanders gave evidence once
- 3 Air Vice Marshals gave evidence once
- 1 Air Commodore gave evidence three times
- 1 Group Captain gave evidence once
- 2 Wing Commanders gave evidence once
- 1 Sqadron Leader gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Constable MDP (Ministry of Defence Police) gave evidence three times
- 2 Assistant Chief Constables MDP gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Chief Constable MDP gave evidence twice
- 2 Superintendents MDP gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Inspector MDP gave evidence once
- 1 Inspector MDP gave evidence once

Note: The above list corrects the information given in the Written Answer of 1 August 1984 (col. *290*.)

Education Committee

105 witnesses have given evidence of which:
- 101 on one occasion
- 3 on two occasions
- 1 on three occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence twice
- 2 other Ministers gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence once
- 2 Deputy Secretaries gave evidence twice
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence three times
- 3 Under Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Education officer (Prison Department) gave evidence once—main Civil Service equivalent grade not known

Employment Committee

42 witnesses have given evidence of which:
- 34 on one occasion
- 8 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence once
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence twice
- 1 other Minister gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence twice
- 2 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence twice

Energy Committee

38 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 36 on one occasion
- 1 on two occasions
- 1 on three occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence on three occasions

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 5 Under Secretaries gave evidence on one occasion
- 5 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence on one occasion

Environment Committee

128 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 112 on one occasion
- 2 on two occasions
- 4 on three occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence once
- 1 other Minister gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence three times
- 5 Under Secretaries gave evidence once
- 2 Under Secretaries gave evidence three times
- 5 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Chief Planner gave evidence once
- 2 Directors (Civil Accommodation and London Region) (PSA) gave evidence once
- 1 Principal Finance Officer gave evidence once
- 2 Senior Principal Scientific Officers (DOE and Natural Environment Research Council) gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Scientific Officer (DOE) gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence twice (DOE)
- 1 Economic Adviser gave evidence once (DOE)
- 1 Principal Scientific Officer (DOE) gave evidence once
- 1 Director (Research and Development Forestry Commission) gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Director (Warren Spring Laboratory, Department of Trade and Industry) gave evidence once
- 1 Secretary of Acid Rain Review Group (Warren Spring Laboratory, Department of Trade and Industry) gave evidence once
- 1 Secretary (Natural Environment Research Council) gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Chief Scientific Officer (NERC's Institute of Terrestrial Ecology) gave evidence once
- 3 Scientists (2 from Forestry Commission's Research and Development Division and the Secretariat Division and 1 from Warren Spring Laboratory, Trade and Industry) gave evidence once

Nationalised Industries
- 2 Chairman (CEGB and NCB) gave evidence on one occasion
- 2 Directors of the Coal Research Establishment, NCB each gave evidence on one occasion
- A Director of Technology, Planning and Research Division, CEGB, gave evidence on one occasion
- An official of Technology, Planning and Research Establishment CEGB, gave evidence on one occasion

Countryside Commission
- The Director gave evidence on one occasion
- The Assistant Director gave evidence on one occasion
- A Countryside Officer gave evidence on one occasion

London Docklands Development Corporation
- The Chief Executive gave evidence on one occasion
- The Housing Co-ordinator gave evidence on one occasion

Foreign Affairs Committee

36 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 31 on one occasion
- 3 on two occasions
- 1 on four occasions
- 1 on six occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence four times
- 2 other Ministers gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence six times
- 4 Deputy Secretaries gave evidence once
- 2 Under Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence twice
- 7 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 2 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence twice
- 3 Principals gave evidence once

Home Affairs Committee

57 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 54 on one occasion
- 3 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence on one occasion

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Under-Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Under-Secretary gave evidence twice
- 3 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Prison Governor 1 gave evidence once
- 1 Prison Governor gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Prison Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Principal Medical Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Senior Psychologist gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Prison Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence twice

Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration

106 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 106 on one occasion
- 1 Minister gave evidence on one occsion

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 3 Under-Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Under-Secretary gave evidence once
- 2 Assistant Under-Secretaries gave evidence once
- 4 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 2 Her Majesty's Inspectors gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Chief Planner gave evidence once
- 3 Principals gave evidence once

Scottish Affairs Committee

64 witnesses gave evidence of which:
- 62 on one occasion
- 2 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence twice

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Secretary and Chief Economic Adviser (Industry Department for Scotland) gave evidence once
- 2 Under Secretaries gave evidence once
- 2 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Director, Building Directorate, gave evidence once
- 1 Economic Adviser gave evidence once

Social Services Committee

190 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 184 on one occasion
- 6 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence twice
- 2 other Ministers gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence twice
- 2 Under Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence twice
- 3 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Senior Principal Medical Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Principal Medical Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Principal Nursing Officer gave evidence twice
- 1 Principal Social Work Service Officer gave evidence twice
- 1 Deputy Chief Medical Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Chief Nursing Officer gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence once

Trade and Industry Committee

99 witnesses have given evidence of which:
- 87 on one occasion
- 12 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence on one occasion
- 3 other Ministers gave evidence on one occasion

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Principal Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Chief Economic Adviser gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Senior Principal gave evidence twice
- 1 Principal gave evidence twice
- 1 Deputy Chief Scientific Officer gave evidence twice

Transport Committee

95 witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 82 on one occasion
- 5 on two occasions
- 1 on three occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence twice
- 2 other Ministers gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence once
- 4 Deputy Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Under Secretary gave evidence twice
- 2 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence once

Treasury and Civil Service Committee

66 witnesses gave evidence, of which:
- 30 on one occasion
- 7 on two occasions
- 4 on three occasions
- 2 on five occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence once
- 1 other Minister gave evidence on two occasions

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence on two occasions
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence on three occasions
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence on two occasions
- 1 Deputy Secretary gave evidence on three occasions
- 5 Under-Secretaries gave evidence once
- 1 Under-Secretary gave evidence on two occasions
- 2 Under-Secretaries gave evidence on three occasions
- 2 Under-Secretaries gave evidence on five occasions
- 5 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence one
- 2 Assistant Secretaries gave evidence on two occasions
- 1 Senior Principal gave evidence once
- 1 Principal gave evidence once

Sub-Committee

38 Witnesses have given evidence, of which:
- 37 on one occasion
- 1 on two occasions

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence on one occasion
- 1 Permanent Secretary gave evidence on two occasions
- 1 Second Permanent Under-Secretary gave evidence once
- 1 Assistant Secretary gave evidence once

Welsh Affairs Committee

76 Witnesses gave evidence, of which:
- 72 on one occasion
- 4 on two occasions
- 1 Cabinet Minister gave evidence once

The ranks of official witnesses and the number of times they gave evidence are:
- 2 Under Secretaries gave evidence twice
- 1 Assistant Secretary gave evidence twice
- 1 Principal gave evidence twice

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal which of the reports of departmental Select Committees were debated in the House in the last parliamentary Session; when they were debated; what percentage of the total number of reports this represents; and which reports have been mentioned on the Order Paper as relevant to a debate.

Mr. Biffen: No reports of the present departmental Select Committees have been the subject of specific motions debated in the House.

The following reports have been referred to on the Order Paper as relevant to a debate:

First Report of the Defence Committee, on the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984: 18 and 19 June 1984.

Third Report of the Defence Committee, on Ministry of Defence Reorganisation; 22 October 1984.

Eighth Report, Session 1981-82 of the Education, Science and Arts Committee, "Public and Private Funding of the Arts": 14 June 1984.

First Report, Session 1982-83, of the Education, Science and Arts Committee, "Prison Education", together with the Second Report of the Committee Session 1983-84, "Observation on the Government Reply to the First Report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee", Session 1982-83: 4 July 1984.

First Report of the Employment Committee, on GCHQ: 27 February 1984.

Second Report from the Energy Committee on the Department of Energy's Supplementary Estimate for £230,000,000 in respect of the Coal Industry; 8 March 1984.

Second Report of the Environment Committee on the Department of the Environment's Main Estimates 1984-85 on 4 July 1984.

Third Report of the Environment Committee on the Property Services Agency Main Estimates 1984-85 on 17 July 1984.

Second and Fourth Reports of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on Grenada and FCO and ODA Supply Estimates 1984-85 respectively: 17 July 1984.

First Report of the Social Services Committee, Griffiths NHS Management Inquiry Report: 4 May 1984.

First and Third Reports from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on the Government's Economic Policy: Autumn Statement and the Government's Expenditure Plans 1984-85 to 1986-87; 6 March 1984.

Fourth Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on the 1984 Budget: 10 April 1984.

Seventh Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on the Fontainebleau Summit Agreement: 10 July 1984.

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal what is the number of formal evidence sessions and deliberative sessions for each of the departmental Select Committees and their Sub-Committees for each year since 1979.

Mr. Biffen: The information is as follows:

Committee	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984**
Agriculture						
Evidence	0	19	16	14	9	17
Deliberative	2	16	9	9	3	6
Defence						
Evidence	0	29	20	26	17	30
Deliberative	0	17	19	20	7	18
Education, Science and Arts						
Evidence	0	20	40	30	14	21
Deliberative	3	25	11	18	4	13
Employment						
Evidence	0	22	27	23	12	14
Deliberative	3	9	10	5	3	13
Energy						
Evidence	0	16	23	19	14	16
Deliberative	2	25	16	27	8	13

Committee	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984*
Environment						
Evidence	0	11	4	19	14	30
Deliberative	3	25	21	12	8	14
Foreign Affairs						
Evidence	1	22	15	22	9	28
Deliberative	1	16	25	11	14	27
Overseas Development Sub-Committee						
Evidence	0	16	13	13	5	—
Deliberative	0	13	21	21	9	—
Home Affairs						
Evidence	2	16	11	17	5	15
Deliberative	1	15	19	11	8	12
Race Relations and Immigration Sub-Committee						
Evidence	2	26	20	16	7	15
Deliberative	1	9	22	7	12	7
Scottish Affairs						
Evidence	1	18	17	19	12	16
Deliberative	3	18	17	11	3	10
Social Services						
Evidence	0	19	38	23	19	29
Deliberative	3	22	13	19	3	14
Trade and Industry						
Evidence	0	26	20	15	10	23
Deliberative	2	11	15	13	9	12
Transport						
Evidence	0	30	25	18	16	30
Deliberative	2	17	11	12	6	13
Treasury and Civil Service						
Evidence	1	22	14	25	11	15
Deliberative	3	21	25	13	15	8
Sub-Committee						
Evidence	0	11	13	14	0	13
Deliberative	0	13	6	11	7	8
Welsh Affairs						
Evidence	0	27	26	21	8	13
Deliberative	1	17	7	7	6	8

*To date.

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal how many staff were employed within each Department during the last session to liaise with a Select Committee; what is the grade of each civil servant; and whether the number employed or their grade has been altered since 1979 to 1983.

Mr. Biffen: I shall reply shortly.

Mr. George asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the number of temporary Select Committee assistants appointed for each of the departmental Select Committees and their Sub-Committees; and what are their salary scales and the periods for which they have been appointed.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

Specialist assistants — previously titled Select Committee temporary assistants—have been appointed to departmental Select Committees in the following numbers:

Select Committee	Number of specialist assistants
Treasury and Civil Service	2
Education, Science and Arts	1
Social Services	1
Environment	1
Transport	1

The starting salaries of specialist assistants are determined on appointment according to age, qualifications and experience, and are at present within the salary range—including inner London weighting of £1,300—£11,782 to £14,444 per annum (Civil Service senior executive officer scale) and £9,793 to £12,029 per annum (higher executive officer scale).

Appointments to the posts are made for periods of between two and four years. The present incumbents of the first two Committees have been employed for varying periods totalling between two and four years; vacancies exist in the three remaining Committees at present, but recruitment is proceeding in the case of the Environment and Transport Committees.

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish a table showing how many memoranda were presented by Government Departments to each Select Committee in the last Session; and how the figures compare with the average presented to each Committee during 1979 to 1983.

Mr. Biffen: The information is as follows:

Committee	Session 1983-84	Average per Session 1979 to 1983
Agriculture	7	12
Defence	54	23
Education, Science and Arts	2	25
Employment	4	2
Energy	19	17
Environment	32	12
Foreign Affairs	47	*50
Home Affairs	6	9
Race Relations and Immigration Sub-Committee	18	15
Scottish Affairs	5	17
Social Services	17	13
Trade and Industry	10	43
Transport	13	13
Treasury and Civil Service	55	†43
Sub-Committee	8	
Welsh Affairs	8	7

* In addition an average of 30 memoranda were submitted to the Overseas Development Sub-Committee.

† It is not possible to apportion memoranda between the Committee and the Sub-Committee for this period.

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal what is the average period that has elapsed from the publication of reports of departmental Select Committees to receipt by the Committee of the Government response for each year since 1979.

Mr. Biffen: No reports were made in 1979. The average interval in days in subsequent years is as follows:

Committee	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Agriculture	125	116	89	279	197
Defence	70	69	78	116	85

Committee	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Education, Science and Arts	147	264	81	318	109
Employment	51	168	135	—	25
Energy	—	153	130	205	60
Environment	111	89	*252	*246	†107
Foreign Affairs	52	153	101	68	85
Home Affairs	101	101	104	258	49
Scottish Affairs	103	56	106	‡	91
Social Services	132	111	225	86	98
Trade and Industry	105	50	87	150	47
Transport	135	123	190	198	81
Treasury and Civil Service	45	115	111	‡	43
Welsh Affairs	91	149	82	281	56

* Reply held in abeyance pending nomination of Committee.
† 1 reply in two parts.
‡ Replies not expected.

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish a table showing the average period that elapsed from the publication of reports of each of the departmental Select Committees to the response by Government Departments in the last Session of Parliament, 1983-84.

Mr. Biffen: The elapse of time where replies have been received is as follows:

Committee	Average interval in days
Agriculture	—
Defence	85
Education, Science and Arts	109
Employment	25
Energy	60
Environment	107
Foreign Affairs	60
Home Affairs	35
Scottish Affairs	91
Social Services	98
Trade and Industry	46
Transport	81
Treasury and Civil Service	43
Welsh Affairs	56

Mr. George asked the Lord Privy Seal what was the percentage attendance rate and percentage turnover of members of each of the departmental Select Committees and their Sub-Committees in the last Session of Parliament; and how the figures compare with the average for the last Parliament.

Mr. Biffen: The information is as follows:

Percentage

Committee	Last Session		Last Parliament	
	Attendance	Turnover	Attendance	‡Turnover
Agriculture	68	18	77	31
Defence	69	0	73	36
Education, Science and Arts	76	9	71	11
Employment	81	0	71	66
Energy	73	0	64	45
Environment	77	9	69	27
Foreign Affairs	73	9	78	*72
Home Affairs	82	9	81	36
Race Relations and Immigration Sub-Committee	83	20	89	40
Scottish Affairs	72	0	78	85
Social Services	72	0	70	64
Trade and Industry	63	33	76	27
Transport	73	0	70	18
Treasury and Civil Service	77	9	88	36
Sub-Committee	79	†	70	71
Welsh Affairs	83	9	78	27

* For the Overseas Development Sub-Committee in the last Parliament the average attendance was 72 per cent. and the turnover during the Parliament 67 per cent.
† The membership of the Sub-Committee has varied in size and composition.
‡ For the duration of the Parliament.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Parliament (Budgetary Discipline)

Mr. Forth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make available the finally adopted text on budgetary discipline and the Council's communication to the Eurpean Parliament.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Yes. A copy of the text, as adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December, together with the text of the president of the Council's letter to the president of the European parliament has now been placed in the Library of the House. The budgetary discipline text is unchanged from the Council's common position which I made available on 16 November.

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Arnold asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his future plans for the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Moore: The business expansion scheme, which runs until April 1987, is still only in its second year of operation. It is, therefore, too early to contemplate any major changes at present. But we are closely monitoring the scheme, and have been most encouraged by preliminary results, announced in the House by my right hon. Friend on 13 November at column 552.

Personal Allowances and Taxation

Mr. Squire asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the saving in the financial year 1985-86 if only the first £2,005 of the married man's tax allowance were uprated in line with the increase in the retail price index under the formula introduced in section 22(2) of the Finance Act 1977, assuming that that increase is 4·75 per cent.

Mr. Moore: On the assumption that the restriction did not apply to the married age allowance, the extra tax due for 1985-86 would be about £160 million, of which some £130 million would be collected in 1985-86.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Peter Rees: For 1984-85, the PSBR is projected to be around £8½ billion. This corresponds to about 2½ per cent. of the GDP, the lowest percentage for over 10 years.

Farmers (Value Added Tax)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what are the arrangements for the payment or refund of value added tax in the case of United Kingdom farmers; and how these compare with the arrangements in West Germany;

(2) whether the arrangements for reimbursement of value added tax to West German farmers agreed by the EEC Council of Ministers provides for the repayment to be restricted to the amount of input value added tax; and whether the same facility has been granted to United Kingdom farmers who supply farm products to the West German market.

Mr. Hayhoe: As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 30 November the special arrangements agreed for West German farmers are not concerned with rebate of VAT. The Council of Ministers decided that the VAT mechanism should be used to make payment of a special aid to farmers in the Federal Republic of Germany. Such payments of special aid are not available to United Kingdom farmers.

There are no special arrangements for United Kingdom farmers, but most of their outputs are zero-rated. Those registered for VAT bear no tax on their zero-rated outputs, and can recover the input tax they incur in accordance with the normal VAT rules.

In West Germany I understand that a special scheme is available to farmers which in broad terms involves payment of VAT at a special flat rate without recovery of input tax. Such a scheme is provided for under the sixth VAT directive agreed by the Council of Ministers in 1977.

Children's Clothing and Footwear

Mr. Best asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any work has been done to assess the impact on low income families with children of ending the zero rating of value added tax for children's clothing and footwear.

Mr. Hayhoe: The potential effects of VAT changes on particular groups are assessed and taken into account in any review of the scope of the tax. The Government favour a shift in the burden of taxation from taxes on earnings to taxes on spending, but we have no set views at present on how this might best be done.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. George asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of copies of each of the departmental Select Committee reports sold to the public, distributed to Departments and distributed to members of Parliament via the Vote Office, respectively, in the last Session of Parliament.

Mr. Hayhoe: The estimate is as follows:

Select Committee	*Number of reports published*	*Average number of each report sold*	*Average number of each report supplied to Vote Office*
Agriculture	3	415	125
Defence	4	605	181
Education and Science and Arts	3	531	125
Employment	3	385	125
Energy	15	508	133
Foreign Affairs	5	546	125
Home Affairs	2	370	125
Trade & Industry	5	456	125
Social Services	7	776	125
Transport	5	462	125
Treasury and Civil Service	13	499	142
Scottish Affairs	5	436	125
Welsh Affairs	4	366	125
Environment	12	538	125
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration	6	403	125

Notes:

1. Reports are not provided free to Departments.
2. All copies are regarded as sold except those provided to the Vote Office on initial publication.

Commercial Bills

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the Bank of England's stock of commercial bills since the reply of 21 July 1983, *Official Report*, column *178;* and whether short-term monetary interest rates are now above or below the level appropriate to the Government's monetary policy.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Riding Hats (VAT)

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will exempt children's British Standards Institute standard approved riding hats from value added tax and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: No. A specific relief for children's approved riding hats would be inconsistent with the essential nature and purpose of the tax.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why tax rebates for the financial year 1983-84 are being withheld from striking miners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Personal Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will construct an index, with 1978-79 equalling 100, of the changes in the level of income tax and national insurance contributions for each subsequent year for a taxpayer on *(a)* two-thirds, *(b)* three-quarters, *(c)* average *(d)* twice *(e)* five times and *(f)* 10 times average earnings for households where the taxpayer is (i) married and (ii) married with two children, assuming in all cases that the wife is in paid employment and earning the average part-time wage received by women.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *579*]: The table shows income tax plus national insurance contributions less child benefit, where appropriate, as a percentage of gross earnings. The calculations assume that the taxpayer has no reliefs other than the appropriate personal allowances and that national insurance contributions are at the not contracted out rate. Earnings have been assumed to increase at 7½ per cent. between 1983-84 and 1984-85 in line with the underlying rate of increase assumed by the Government Actuary in his recent report.

The weekly level of wife's earnings assumed is as follows:

	£
1978-79	26·30
1979-80	30·90
1980-81	36·30
1981-82	39·90
1982-83	43·10
1983-84	46·00
1984-85	49·50

(Percent)

	*Multiple of average earnings**					
	½	¾	*1*	*2*	*5*	*10*
Married with no children						
1978-79	20·1	21·6	25·1	29·7	49·3	65·5
1979-80	19·3	20·6	23·7	27·2	40·5	50·0
1980-81	20·4	21·7	24·7	28·3	41·9	50·7
1981-82	23·0	24·2	26·9	31·1	44·4	52·0
1982-83	23·1	24·4	27·2	30·9	43·7	51·6
1983-84	22·5	23·8	26·8	30·2	42·7	51·1
1984-85	21·7	23·1	26·2	29·9	42·7	51·1
Married with two children (both under 11)						
1978-79	12·8	15·0	19·8	26·6	47·7	64·6
1979-80	11·6	13·6	18·0	23·9	39·1	49·3
1980-81	13·5	15·4	19·6	25·4	40·7	50·1
1981-82	15·8	17·6	21·6	28·2	43·1	51·3
1982-83	15·8	17·6	21·8	27·9	42·4	51·0
1983-84	14·9	16·9	21·2	27·1	41·4	50·5
1984-85	14·0	16·0	20·6	26·7	41·3	50·4

* for full-time male workers in all occupations paid at adult rates.

Money Supply

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in the real money supply since the first quarter of 1974.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *298*]: The increase in the real money supply is the change in the nominal money supply deflated by the change in the measure of the price level over the same period. There are a variety of measures of the nominal money supply. Target ranges for the growth rates of two monetary aggregates—weekly averaged MO and sterling M3—were set out in the 1984 financial statement and budget report. Information on these measures of the nominal money supply since 1969 can be found on page 80 of the March 1984 "Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin" and on pages 146 and 147 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends*, respectively.

Information on movements in various measures of the price level can be found on pages 114 to 117 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends*.

Chile

Dame Judith Hart asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the British executive director of the International Monetary Fund to oppose any proposal to approve a waiver of the performance criteria for Chile's current standby arrangement on 7 December.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *299*]: No. Decisions on adjustment programmes within the IMF board relate solely to their economic merits, and in any event in this case the proposed waiver is purely technical.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing Benefit

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been spent in each of the past five years on advising claimants on new provisions in housing benefit and statutory sick pay.

Mr. Whitney: I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 23 November [*Official Report*, Vol. 68, c. *524-6*]. In 1982-83 the Department spent £300,000 on a national press campaign and the production of a public information television item about the new housing benefit scheme. In addition, a notification was sent to all existing claimants. Local authorities have had responsibility for housing benefit publicity since the scheme's introduction, although information is not available centrally on the amount of money they have spent.

The Department also spent £447,000 on press and television items explaining the statutory sick pay scheme following its introduction in 1983-84. A poster and leaflets for claimants costing £37,000 were also issued. The cost of advice given by the Department's local office in response to claimant's enquiries is not available.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which part of the spending of his Department shows the greatest percentage increase; and by how much.

Mr. Fowler: Between 1983-84 and 1984-85 (latest estimate) the largest increase is on the NHS where spending has risen by 7·3 per cent.

Rent and Rate Rebates

Mr. Fry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost to public funds of includng water rates in the rate rebate scheme.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the level of disregarded income for each spouse under the rent and rate rebate scheme in the year to November 1984; and what were the rent and rate rebate needs allowances levels for *(a)* a couple, *(b)* a single person and *(c)* each dependent child in the year to November 1984.

Mr. Whitney: Information on the level of disregarded income for each spouse under the housing benefits scheme is not available as this will vary according to individual circumstances. For the year ending November 1984 the earnings disregard was £17·45 a week for the principal earner and £5 a week for the second earner. Details of the full range of income disregards are in schedule 2 (as amended) to the Housing Benefits Regulations 1982.

The needs allowances requested for the year ending November 1984 were:

a. £63·50; *b.* £43·05; *c.* £11·90.

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of his Department's total budget has been spent on advertising in each of the past five years.

Mr. Fowler: The table shows expenditure on advertising on health and social security in each of the last five years and this cost expressed as a percentage of total administration expenditure.

Year	*Expenditure on advertising (£000's)*	*Percentage of total administration expenditure*
1979-80	1,433	0·22
1980-81	1,109	0·13
1981-82	1,773	0·18
1982-83	2,351	0·22
1983-84	2,228	0·18

Child Tax Allowances

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a table showing the combined value of child tax allowances after clawback and family allowances or child benefit for each year since 1946 expressed at November 1984 prices, assuming inflation of about 5 per cent. in November 1984.

Mr. Whitney: The table illustrates the value of child support provided over the years in question, to a manual worker on average earnings, with one, two or three children under 11, on the assumption of an increase in the retail price index of 5 per cent. in the 12 months to November 1984.

Child support to persons on average earnings expressed at November 1984† values*

Date‡	*Children aged 11 or under*		
	One child family	*Two child family*	*Three child family*
August 1946	3·20	7·62	10·69
April 1947	3·47	7·32	10·67
April 1948	3·45	7·36	10·35
April 1949	3·77	8·11	10·97
April 1950	3·16	7·30	10·24
April 1951	3·79	8·51	11·27
April 1952	3·02	6·60	8·89
April 1953	2·99	8·01	11·62
April 1954	3·59	8·49	12·60
April 1955	3·89	9·39	12·94
April 1956	3·86	9·69	13·55
April 1957	3·95	9·91	14·71
April 1958	4·06	9·89	15·13
April 1959	4·06	9·53	14·85
April 1960	4·40	10·05	15·99
April 1961	4·28	10·14	16·07
April 1962	4·19	10·00	15·61
April 1963	4·50	10·92	16·62
April 1964	5·06	11·36	17·65
April 1965	5·59	11·68	18·14
April 1966	5·40	11·99	18·16
April 1967	5·24	11·81	17·86
April 1968	5·02	11·53	18·43
April 1969	4·76	10·98	17·57
April 1970	4·50	10·40	16·63
April 1971	5·25	11·90	18·87
April 1972	4·94	11·19	17·75
April 1973	4·48	10·09	15·98
April 1974	5·14	11·23	17·53
April 1975	4·50	10·73	16·94
April 1976	4·72	10·92	17·10
April 1977	4·54	9·74	14·93
April 1978	5·41	10·83	16·23
April 1979	6·70	13·41	20·11
November 1980	6·22	12·44	18·66
November 1981	6·14	12·28	18·42
November 1982	6·44	12·88	19·32
November 1983	6·83	13·65	20·48
November 1984	6·85	13·70	20·55

* The combined value of child tax allowance after clawback and family allowance/child benefit.

† Based on the movement in the General Index of Retail Prices assuming a 5 per cent. increase in the index between November 1983 and November 1984.

‡ Child tax allowance ceased after the 1978-79 tax year and uprating dates are shown from 1979 onwards.

Retirement Pension

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the value of the retirement pension in each year from November 1978 to November 1984 if it had been fully uprated in line with prices or earnings whichever was the higher; and what would be the extra net cost to public expenditure of raising the retirement pension to this level.

Mr. Whitney: Taking the retail prices index and the new series index of average earnings for the whole economy (seasonally adjusted), and increasing the standard rate of retirement pension for a single person by the higher of the increases in these two indices each November the cumulative results would be as follows:

November	*£*
1978	19·50
1979	23·20
1980	27·35

November	£
1981	30·65
1982	33·20
1983	35·60

Figures for 1984 are not yet available.

These figures are hypothetical. It is not possible to make an accurate estimate of the level at which the retirement pension would have stood in November 1983 if uprating in line with the better of the increases in prices or earnings had been maintained. The need to make assumptions about forecasts, the treatment of forecasting errors and public expenditure constraints would render such an estimate meaningless.

The estimated cost of increasing the November 1983 pension rate from £34·05 to £35·60 would be £670 million in a full year. This cost includes pro-rata increases in the married couple pension rate but excludes any savings on supplementary pension and housing benefit. The cumulative cost of increasing the pension in the way described since 1978 would, of course, be much greater.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he plans to issue any guidance to parents in relation to the occurence of cot deaths *(a)* generally and *(b)* in relation to the possible part played by overheating of babies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Department is arranging a meeting of experts on the subject of cot deaths, to be held in the New Year. One of a number of ideas that may be discussed could be the need for guidance to parents.

Dental Treatment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he has not agreed to bring topical fluoride applications within the scope of the general dental service for children with special medical needs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have not been able to agree with the British Dental Association on arrangements for including this item in the general dental service scale of fees.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he will be making available for the purpose of promoting further studies into capitation for dental services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are making up to £120,000 available for a one year pilot study of capitation which began on 1 October. In the light of the results of the pilot study, we shall decide whether a longer and larger study should be commissioned but no costings for this are yet available.

Dental Health

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he will be taking to co-ordinate the efforts of health education bodies to encourage further reductions in the level of sugar consumption in order to improve dental health.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Health Education Council is currently supporting a number of initiatives nationally that are designed to improve dental health, including a reduction in the level of sugar consumption, and we support these intitiatives.

Dentists

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many complaints have been made in 1984 by individual dentists and members of the public to the General Dental Council about alleged unprofessional conduct.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This information is not held by our department but may be sought from the Registrar of the General Dental Council. Ministers are not responsible for the handling of disciplinary cases by the council.

Family Planning Clinics

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will list the number of family planning clinics throughout the following regions; the north-east, the north-west, the midlands, the south-west and the south-east.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not hold centrally information in the form requested. At the end of 1983, the numbers of premises used regularly for family planning sessions in the regional health authorities covering the areas referred to by the hon. Member were as follows:

Regional Health Authority

	Number
Northern	132
Yorkshire	152
Mersey	105
North Western	162
Trent	138
West Midlands	174
South Western	114
North-West Thames	168
North-East Thames	153
South-East Thames	138
South-West Thames	120

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many family planning clinics have been closed throughout the United Kingdom within the last two years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally. The numbers of premises used regularly for family planning sessions in the United Kingdom at the end of 1982 and 1983 were 2,150 and 2,183 respectively.

Child Benefit

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what increase in percentage and cash terms in child benefit could be provided for the expenditure of an additional £300 million.

Mr. Whitney: Additional expenditure of £300 million would enable child benefit to be increased by about 60 pence a week or 8·75 per cent.

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (Trafford)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to answer the letter from the

hon. Member for Stretford, written on 20 September, concerning the operation of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act by the borough of Trafford.

Mr. Newton: I replied to the hon. Member on 7 December.

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people received single payments towards funeral expenses during 1983, as described by paragraphs 9.9 and 9.10 of the "Supplementary Benefits Handbook"; at what average level; and what overall cost.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not yet available for 1983. According to the annual statistical inquiry conducted in December 1982, about 12,500 single payments of supplementary benefit were made for funeral expenses in 1982. The average payment was about £210 and the overall cost was about £2·6 million. Because these figures relate to single payments made during the 12 months preceding the date of the inquiry to people still in receipt of supplementary benefit at the time of the inquiry, they are an under-estimate of the total number of overall cost of such payments made during the year.

Hearing Damage

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence his Department has of hearing damage caused by portable, cordless telephones; what research has been done; and if there is any action he will be taking.

Mr. Newton: We are not aware of any damage to hearing caused in this way nor of the need for any such research.

Induction Loops

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assistance and advice his Department is giving to increase the provision in public buildings of induction loops for the hearing impaired; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Disabled Persons Act 1981 requires local planning authorities, when granting planning permission, to draw the attention of developers of public buildings to the British Standards Institution Code of Practice for Access for the Disabled to Buildings (BS 5810: 1979). This recommends the installation of an induction loop in various such buildings. In April 1982 the Department, on behalf of those Departments with the relevant responsibilities, issued guidance on the implementation of the Act. This stressed the importance of reference to the code of practice when considering provision of facilities for disabled people.

Day Care Arrangements

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what study his Department has made of innovative day care arrangements for mentally handicapped people in rural areas, such as a mobile adult training centre; of how many such arrangements he is aware; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has funded the evaluation of a mobile adult training centre (a converted bus) serving two villages in north Yorkshire. The cost of the service was met by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust. The evaluation has been published* and North Yorkshire social services department has decided to continue the service, for a further three years in the first instance. In addition, the Department is aware of a number of innovative agricultural or horticultural projects for mentally handicapped people and has grant-aided voluntary organisations providing relevant guidance.

* The Rural ATC £3·50 (post free) from the Joint Unit for Social Services Research, The University, Sheffield S10 2TN.

Domiciliary Care Staff

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if his Department has given any consideration to revising its guidelines on the ratio of domiciliary care staff, such as home helps in rural areas; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what account his guidelines on domiciliary care staff take of the distances they have to travel in rural areas;

(3) how many home helps per thousand of the population he would recommend local authorities to employ in rural and urban areas, respectively.

Mr. John Patten: Our Department made it clear in response to a recommendation in the 1981-82 report of the Select Committee on Social Services that

"we do not consider that indicative national target levels of provision would be meaningful in local terms and regard it as the business of local authorities to set local targets in terms of local need and provision and to monitor their progress in achieving them."

In setting local targets, local authorities will be best placed to have regard to any special features of rural areas.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received about the adequacy of domiciliary care staff in rural areas.

Mr. John Patten: We have received no representations on this subject.

Home Helps

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's current policy on charging for home helps in cases where the person being helped is in receipt of supplementary benefit; and what recent action he has taken to publicise the policy.

Mr. John Patten: Local authorities have discretion to make reasonable charges for their home help services. We would prefer local authorities not to charge those at supplementary benefit levels of income or below for these services and we have made this clear on many occasions.

Pregnant Women (Diet Costs)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what his Department estimates as the average cost of a diet for a pregnant woman.

Mr. John Patten: The advice given to healthy pregnant women is to eat a normal balanced diet. No estimates of the cost of such a diet are made by the Department because that cost must depend upon a personal choice of items.

ICC Hospital Services

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will conduct an investigation into the recent dispute involving cleaners employed by ICC Hospital Services at the Sheffield headquarters of the Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. This would be for the regional health authority if any investigation were to become necessary.

Racism (Nursery Schools)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take on the report by his Department on racism in nursery schools and playgrounds.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

NHS Employees (Fringe Benefits)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many employees of the National Health Service have been affected by the decision of private contractors to annul certain fringe benefits since the abolition of the fair wages resolution; and if he proposes to take action to rectify this.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Employees of the National Health Service are subject to Whitley terms and conditions of service which have not been affected by the recession of the fair wages resolution. The conditions of service which private contractors provide for their employees are entirely their concern and not the responsibility of Ministers or health authorities.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to appoint a general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority, following the refusal of the Minister for Health to confirm the appointment of Mr. K. Bales by the members of the regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This matter has not yet been decided and I am discussing the appointment with the Chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to which section of his Department representations about the limited list of drugs should be made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Written comments should be addressed to: Branch FPS1A, Department of Health and Social Security, Room 619, Eileen House, 80-94 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6EF.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* those pharmaceutical products which he is currently considering placing on the limited list of medications which may be prescribed by doctors for patients under the National Health Service;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of those medications for minor ailments which are currently available for prescription on the National Health Service but which he is considering not including on the recently-announced limited product prescription list;

(3) how many prescriptions were issued in the last year for which figures are available of each of those medicines for minor ailments which he is considering not including on the recently-announced limited product prescription list;

(4) how many of those preparations currently listed in the British National Formulary will not be available for prescription under the National Health Service under the proposals for a limited list which he is currently considering; and what this figure is as a percentage:

(5) how many generic preparations currently prescribed under the National Health Service in *(a)* the tranquilliser, sedative and hypnotic classifications and *(b)* for the treatment of mild to moderate pain will not be available for prescription under the proposals which he is currently considering for the drawing up of a limited list of drugs acceptable for National Health Service prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will not finally decide which drugs will no longer be prescribable at public expense through the National Health Service until after our consultation with the medical and pharmaceutical professions, and the drugs industry, is complete. We have published, as a basis for that consultation, a provisional list of medicines that will remain available in the categories of drugs affected by our proposals. It is as follows:

Provisional List of Medicines remaining available for prescription on the National Health Service

Antacids
- Aluminium Hydroxide Mixture BP
- Aluminium Hydroxide Tablets BP
- Compound Magnesium Trisilicate Oral Powder BP
- Compound Sodium Bicarbonate Tablets (Soda Mint Tablets) BP
- Magnesium Trisilicate Mixture BP

Laxatives
- Glycerol Suppositories BP
- Methylcellulose Granules BP

Inhalations
- Menthol & Benzoin Inhalation BP

Antitussives
- Codeine Linctus BP
- Diamorphine Linctus BPC 1973
- Methadone Linctus BP
- Pholcodeine Linctus BP
- Paediatric Simple Linctus BPC 1973
- Simple Linctus BP

Analgesics for Mild to Moderate Pain
- Aspirin Tablets BP
- Dispersible Aspirin Tablets BP
- Paediatric Dispersible Aspirin Tablets BP
- Paracetamol Tablets BP
- Paediatric Paracetamol Elixir BP

Vitamins
- Ascorbic Acid Tablets BP
- Calciferol Solution BP
- Thiamine Hydrochloride Tablets BP
- Nicotinic Acid Tablets BP
- High Strength Calciferol Tablets BP
- Pyridoxine Hydrochloride Tablets BP
- Vitamins A-D Capsules BPC 1973
- Vitamin Capsules (Vita minorum Capsules) BPC 1973

Tonics and Bitters
- Alkaline Gentian Mixture BP

Benzodiazepine Sedatives and Tranquillisers
Diazepam
Nitrazepam
Temazepam

Other Therapeutic Groups
All Drugs.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a comparison of the prices of those products which he is currently considering placing on the limited list of medications which may be prescribed by doctors for patients under the National Health Service with the cost of their most widely-prescribed brand-name equivalents.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received recently from the Dispensing Doctors Association concerning his proposals to limit prescriptions under the National Health Service to those preparations on a more limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received one letter from the Dispensing Doctors Association.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, following the implementation of his proposals for limited list prescribing under the National Health Service, a revised edition of the British National Formulary will be issued omitting those preparations which are not included on the limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The British National Formulary is a joint publication of the British Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. Questions about the content of future editions of this publication should be addressed to those bodies.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration has been given to the particular needs of those living in rural areas who make use of dispensing doctors to obtain brand-name products or medications for minor ailments which will not be included on the limited list which he is now considering.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: These matters will be fully considered during our consultation with the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry. It will not be clinically necessary to prescribe a drug in the relevant therapeutic category that is not on the limited list if we achieve, after consultation, our aim of ensuring that the list contains an adequate range.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that after the introduction of limited list prescribing, patients suffering from pernicious anaemia will continue to have access to vitamin B-12 under the National Health Scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The prescribing of vitamin B-12 on the National Health Service will not be affected by our limited list proposals.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will establish within his Department a round-the-clock information service to assist doctors in reaching a decision as to whether to prescribe a generic or a proprietary drug.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I forsee absolutely no need to establish such a service. Information on any aspect of drug therapy is already available to all doctors in the National Health Service, free of charge, from regional and district drug information services. Decisions of the kind described in the question should be within the competence of any qualified doctor.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to consult representatives of the pharmaceutical industry regarding the consequences of the Government's decision to introduce a limited list of generic drugs for the treatment of certain therapeutic conditions under the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I wrote to the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry on 8 November. I am meeting representatives of the association this week.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations he held with the British Medical Association before the recent announcement on the introduction of limited list prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We did not consult with the British Medical Association before reaching a decision based on our detailed investigations of the experience of other countries, on the principle of the limited list. However, we have invited the BMA to consult with us on the contents of the proposed list.

H2 Receptor Blocking Drugs

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates would be the additional cost to the National Health Service if in all cases H2 receptor blocking drugs were prescribed instead of antacids.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Doctors would not be so irresponsible as to prescribe these expensive ulcer healing drugs in cases where they were not necessary.

Smoking (Health)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost to the National Health Service of smoking-induced diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 6 December 1984, c. *270*]: I regret that because of a typing error the current estimated cost to the National Health Service in England and Wales of diseases attributable to smoking appeared as "about £120 million a year" instead of "about £170 million a year".

Social Provision (Unemployed)

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which of the current review teams are looking at the question of social provision for unemployed people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The reviews of supplementary benefit, housing benefit, and benefits for children and young people are all concerned with aspects of provision for unemployed people. The review teams are due to finish their work by the end of the year and the Government's conclusions and proposals for change will be published in the early part of next year.

Oglesby Report

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he has taken on the Oglesby report's proposals concerning limitations on the accumulation by individual National Health Service hospitals in-patients of mobility allowance.

Mr. Newton: None. We are still considering this recommendation.

Drug Misusers

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list projects allocated funds in 1984-85 to date as part of the central initiative to improve services for drug misusers, in addition to those listed to the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) on 9 February, *Official Report*, columns 756-760, and to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East on 30 April, *Official Report*, columns 59-64.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) on 10 July, [*Official Report*, Vol. 63, c. *464-465*]. In addition to the projects listed there, three further projects have been allocated funds in 1984-85 as part of the central initiative to improve services for drug misusers. The details are as follows:

Health Authority	*Description of project*	*£*
East Anglian Region		
Peterborough HA	Drug Screening Equipment	3,450
North East Thames Region		
Bloomsbury HA	Day Treatment Centre	344,300
Voluntary Organisations		
Phoenix House	Residential Rehabilitation House—South Tyneside	273,419

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, what was the total of local authority *(a)* current and *(b)* capital expenditure expressed in cost terms in each year since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: Total current and capital expenditure (on a public expenditure survey basis) by English local authorities expressed in cost terms as an index (1978-79 = 100) is as follows:

	Current	*Capital*
	100	100
1978-79	(£11,826m)	(£2,881m)
1979-80	102	108
1980-81	104	88
1981-82	106	58
1982-83	110	57
1983-84 (prov)	119	68

For 1978-79 to 1982-83 the index is calculated from the figures published in Table 2.18 of Cmnd. 9143-II (revalued using the GDP deflator) while for 1983-84 provisional estimates from local authority returns are used. The capital figures are net of sales of fixed assets (mainly council house sales).

About half the increase in current expenditure over the period 1978-79 to 1983-84 is due to the increase in expenditure on housing benefit (arising out of the increased responsibilities of local authorities for this service). Current expenditure on RSG basis increased by 9 per cent. between 1978-79 and 1983-84 in cost terms.

Sports Council

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the Sports Council, stating in each case the sporting or recreational qualifications or experience which caused him to appoint them to the council.

Mr. Macfarlane: The present Sports Council members, with relative experience, are:

Chairman Mr. R. E. G. (Dick) Jeeps, C.B.E.

Appointed June 1978 for a period of five years and re-appointed for a further five years in June 1983. Member of th English Tourist Board. Gained 24 rugby caps as a scrum half for England during the period 1956-62 and was captain of one of the most successful English teams which won the Championship in 1961. Took part in three tours by the British Lions. When he became President of the Rugby Football Union in 1977 he was one of the youngest men to achieve that position. He is a former RFU representative on the International Rugby Football Board. He served as a county councillor for 11 years and as a JP for four years. He was the Vice-Chairman of the Eastern Regional Sports Council when it was inaugurated and served on the Council for three years.

Vice Chairman Mr. Ian S. McCallum

Appointed to the Sports Council in February 1976 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1983. Formerly Chairman of the Association of District Councils. Formerly Mayor of Woking borough council. Unit trust executive. Surrey county swimmer as a youth.

MEMBERS

Mr. Robin A. Aisher

Appointed to the Sports Council in September 1982. Chairman of the Southern Council for Sport and Recreation. Represented Great Britain in International and World Championship Yachting continually since 1956 and in the 1960, 1964 and 1968 Olympic Games winning a Bronze Medal in 1968. He was a member and Captain of the Great Britain Admiral's Cup Team in 1973 and 1975 and a member of the victorious team in 1977. He captained the team which won again in 1981 and was Yachtsman of the Year in 1975. He is currently Chairman of the Yacht Racing Divisional Committee of the Royal Yachting Association and a memberof the Royal Yachting Association Council. He is a member of the Permanent Committee of the International Yacht Racing Union since 1971 and chairman of two of its committees. He was Vice-Commodore of the Royal Thames Yacht Club and he is now the Vice-Commodore of the Royal Ocean Racing Club. He is the main board director of Marley PLC and chairman and director of Marley Floors limited and chairman of Marine Development.

Miss Eileen Alexander, O.B.E.

Appointed to the Sports Council in February 1977 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1982. One of the representatives of the Central Council of Physical Recreation on the Sports Council. Formerly Chairman of the CCPR Movement and Dance Division and Member of the CCPR Executive Committee. Member, Lilleshall Committee.

Mr. James R. Cochrane, J.P.

Appointed to the Sports Council in September 1984. President of the Lawn Tennis Association. Joined the Council of the Lawn Tennis Association, representing Lancashire, in 1972 and was vice-chairman in 1980 and chairman in 1981. Formerly a schoolmaster and now a company director.

Mr. Sebastian Coe, M.B.E.

Appointed to the Sports Council in November 1983. Research student at Loughborough university working on the social history of sport. He has been champion at 800m at all levels from schools' to the World Cup, Europa Cup and European Championships. He is the double Olympic Champion at 1500m and has a total of 13 world records. Member of the IOC Athletes Commission.

Mr. Steve Coppell

Appointed to the Sports Council in November 1983. Made over 400 appearances for Manchester United Football Club and scored over 70 goals in his career with them until his retirement through injury in 1983. He gained a winner's medal in the 1977 F.A. Cup Final and runners up medals in the 1976 and 1979 F.A. Cups and the 1983 Milk Cup. He made his first appearance for England in 1978 and played 42 times for his country. Chairman of the Professional Footballers Association in 1983 and now manager of Crystal Palace Football Club.

Mr. George A. Cubitt, M.B.E.

Appointed to the Sports Council in October 1979 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1982. One of the representatives of the Central Council of Physical Recreation on the Sports Council. Joined the Camping Club of Great Britain in 1958 and appointed Secretary General in 1963. Deputy Chairman of the CCPR and a member of the CCPR Executive Committee and Chairman of the Outdoor Pursuits Division. Member, British Association of National Sports Administrators. Member, British Tourist Authority's Camping and Caravanning Committee and a member of Council for National Parks.

Sir Arthur Gold, CBE

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1980 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1983. President, European Athletic Association. Honorary Secretary, British Amateur Athletic Board 1965-77 and Life Vice President 1977. Chairman, Commonwealth Games Council for England. Vice-Chairman, British Olympic Association. Member of Executive Committee of the CCPR. Former British international high jumper. Involved in athletics coaching for more than four decades and currently Chairman of the United Kingdom Coaching Committee.

Mr. James Harvie-Watt, FCA

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1980 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1983. Company Director. Formerly Managing Director of Wembley Stadium Ltd.

Mr. Peter Heatly, CBE, DL, BSc

Chairman, Scottish Sports Council. Previously Chairman of the former Scottish Council of Physical Recreation. Appointed to the Sports Council in December 1971. Appointed to the advisory Sports Council in June 1969. Civil Engineer and Company Director. Chairman, Commonwealth Games Federation. Sports administrator and former international diver. Represented Great Britain in 1948 Olympic Games and won a Gold Medal at the 1950, 1954 and 1958 Commonwealth Games. Chairman of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland when the Games were held in Edinburgh in 1970; Great Britain Diving Committee and Secretary of the International Diving Committee.

Mr. A. E. (Dick) Hodges

Appointed to the Sports Council in March 1984. One of the representatives of the Central Council of Physical Recreation on the Sports Council. Chairman, CCPR Water Recreation Division and a member of the CCPR Executive Committee.

Air Vice-Marshall G. C. (Larry) Lamb, CB, CBE, AFC, FBIM, RAF (retd.)

Appointed to the Sports Council in February 1983. During his career in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1978, Air Vice-Marshall Lamb commanded several squadrons and served in Egypt, West Germany and Borneo as well as appointments in the United Kingdom. He began refereeing Rugby Union games in 1962 and controlled 14 International matches, 5 Barbarians games and the University match, some 30 County Championship games and many other games in the first class rugby calendar. Has refereed and lectured on the game in many overseas countries. Appointed Chief Executive of the Badminton Association of England in 1978. Member of the CCPR's Games and Sports Division.

Mrs. Judith MacKay

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1982. Worked professionally in the film industry, television and the theatre. Chairman, Birmingham Sports Council. Chairman of the West Midlands Council for Sport and Recreation. Member of the Board of Directors Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

The Hon. Colin B. Moynihan, MP

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1982. Member of Parliament for East Lewisham. Representative of the British Boxing Board of Control on the World Boxing Association. Steward of the BBBC. Member of the CCPR Major Spectator Sports Division. Member of the Howell Enquiry into Sponsorship of Sport. Governor of the Sports Aid Foundation (London and South East). Member of British Public School Golf Team and toured USA in 1972. Won World Lightweight Rowing Championships in 1978. Silver Medallist Rowing VIIIs in the 1980 Olympic Games and the 1981 World Championships. Participated in the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. President of the Oxford Union Society 1976.

Mr. Kenneth Roberts, BA

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1983. Chairman, Water Sports Division of the British Sports Association for the Disabled. Royal Yachting Association Coach. Mr. Roberts is an administrator at the University of Loughborough. Member, Holme Pierrepont National Water Sports Centre.

Mr. R. G. (Dick) Robinson

Appointed to the Sports Council in October 1979 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1982. One of the representatives of the Central Council of Physical Recreation on the Sports Council. Chairman, CCPR Major Spectator Sports Division. Member, CCPR Executive Committee. Retired insurance official. Vice-President and an ex-Chairman of the Lawn Tennis Association. Member of the Committee of Management of the Wimbledon Championships. Member of Committee of the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum. Vice-President and an ex-Secretary for 26 years of the Kent County LTA. Chairman, Tunbridge Wells Lawn Tennis Tournament.

Mr. Norman W. Sarsfield OBE MC

Appointed to the Sports Council in February 1983. Chairman, East Midland Council for Sport and Recreation. Trained as a physical education teacher and was swimming teacher to the Gateshead Education Authority from 1947 to 1970. Appointed Secretary of the Amateur Swimming Association in 1970 until retirement in 1981. He has held many posts in swimming including Chairman, World Technical Swimming Committee 1968-72 and Honorary Secretary of the European Swimming Federation 1974 onwards. Councillor, Durham city council 1955-70 and Mayor of Durham 1964-65. Councillor and Chairman, Estates and Recreation Committee of Charnwood borough council Chairman, Charnwood Sports Council. Deputy Chairman, Central

Council of Physical Recreation 1975-81 and Honorary Treasurer, Commonwealth Games Council for England from 1978 onwards.

Air Commodore Peter H. L. Scott AFC RAF (Retd.)

Appointed to the Sports Council in October 1982 as the Armed Forces representative on the Sports Council. Director of Sport for the Royal Air Force since 1977 and Inspector of Recreation Grounds for the Royal Air Force. He joined the RAF in 1943 and has held a variety of posts until his retirement from active service in 1977.

Mr. Keith K. Mitchell OBE

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1974. One of the representatives of the Central Council of Physical Recreation on the Sports Council. Appointed Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CCPR in May 1981. Formerly General Secretary, English Basketball Association and Vice-President of the Technical Committee of the International Basketball Federation. Lecturer in physical education at the University of Leeds.

Mr. Charles S. Palmer OBE

Appointed to the Sports Council in November 1983. Chairman, British Olympic Association. Secretary General of the General Association of International Sports Federations. Chairman of the CCPR's Games and Sports Division and a Member of the CCPR Executive Committee. Chairman of the British Judo Association and a Governer of the Sports Aid Foundation. Mr. Palmer has been one of Britain's top judo experts and achieved 8th Dan as recently as 1980. He studied Judo in Japan 1951-55; was a member of Britain's Gold Medal Team in the European Championships in 1957-59, and captained the team in 1958-59.

Professor J. Allan Patmore B.Litt MA

Appointed to the Sports Council in June 1978 and re-appointed for a futher term in July 1983. Appointed Member, North York Moors National Park Committee. Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Geography University of Hull.

Mr. John H. Powell MC

Chairman, Sports Council for Wales. Appointed to the Sports Council in April 1980 and re-appointed for a further term in April 1984. Formely Director, British Steel Company of Wales. President of Ebbw Vale Rugby Club and Town Cricket Club for the past 20 years.

Mr. John W. Smith CBE JP

Appointed to the Sports Council in June 1980 and re-appointed for a further term in July 1983. Chairman of the Minister's Inquiry into Lawn Tennis. Chairman, Liverpool Football Club. Member, Football League Management Committee. Member of the Football Grounds Improvement Trust and the Football Trust.

Mr. Peter Thomas

Appointed to the Sports Council in July 1982. Chairman, Community Sports Leadership Training Advisory Panel. One of the representatives of the Central Council of Physical Recreation on the Sports Council. Vice-Chairman of the CCPR Interested Organisations Division and its Sport and Youth Sub-Committee. Member of the CCPR Executive Committee. Director of Staff Development and Training (youth and community service) Buckinghamshire county council. Spokesman for the National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers on sport and recreation. Member of the Association of Recreation Managers.

Mr. Ossie Wheatley MA

Appointed Vice-Chairman of the Sports Council for Wales in April 1984. Appointed to the Sports Council in April 1984. Cambridge Cricket Blue; hold the record of the number of wickets taken in a season by any bowler from Oxford or Cambridge Universities. Played cricket for Warwickshire and Glamorgan and was Captain of Glamorgan from 1961 to 1966. Former Chairman of Glamorgan County Cricket Club. Former Test Selector and a member of the MCC.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost of preparing a full list, to be placed in the Library, of all organisations responding to Cmnd. 9063 and associated consultation documents, and a separate analysis of their responses.

Sir George Young: The cost of producing a full list of all organisations who have responded, and a separate analysis of their responses, would be disproportionate to the value of the information. We have already placed in the Library a comprehensive analysis of the responses to the White Paper, which includes a list of local authorities and major national organisations who have responded.

"London Housing Aid Centre"

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has considered the findings of a recent report by Shelter Housing Aid Centre, the "London Housing Aid Centre", a copy of which has been sent to him, regarding ways to end the housing shortage and poor housing conditions in London; whether he proposes to take any measures in response to this; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The report contributes some useful information to the assessment of housing need upon which capital allocations are based.

Barnstaple and South Molton (EC Grant)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what sums of EEC grant have been allocated for works in the Barnstaple and South Molton travel-to-work assisted area during the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Gow: European Regional Development Fund grant aid approved by the European Commission towards public sector infrastructure works in the former Barnstaple travel-to-work area during the last five years is as follows:

	£
1980	13,500
1981	Nil
1982	100,200
1983	1,435,500
1984	426,600

Public Inquiries

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the efficiency of the public inquiry system in planning.

Mr. Macfarlane: In general, yes. Some 3,000 planning inquiries are held each year, and, while the detailed working of the inquiry system needs to be kept under reivew, I am satisfied that it operates both efficiently and fairly in the vast majority of cases. I am concerned about the cost and length of a few major inquiries, and about the disruptive behaviour which occasionally occurs at inquiries, and I am considering with colleagues how best to tackle these problems.

Playing Fields

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy not to allow planning permission for school playing fields to be developed, except for recreational use.

Mr. Macfarlane: Proposals for the development of school playing fields should be considered on their individual merits. Local planing authorities will no doubt have regard to the case for retaining such land for recreational use in deciding whether to grant planning permission.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the housing investment programme allocations for 1985-86.

Mr. Gow: An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Pesticides

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those sites of special scientific interest which have been damaged or destroyed by pesticides in the years 1981 to 1984, together with such information as he has about the names of the pesticides concerned.

Mr. Waldegrave: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. Conclusive proof of both pesticide and herbicide damage is difficult to obtain. The Nature Conservancy Council estimates that about 10 per cent. of the 156 sites included in Appendix *5(b)* of the Nature Conservancy Council's 10th report (Damage to SSSIs and proposed SSSIs: April 1983 to March 1984) have suffered (mainly minor and short-term damage) from the excessive application of herbicides and from spray drift.

Planning (London)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has initiated to establish how the planning commission for London will fill the strategic planning role now performed by the Greater London council; and when these studies will be completed.

Mr. Macfarlane: Planning powers will be devolved to the London boroughs, and it is not intended that the London Planning Commission will assume responsibility for functions at present carried out by the GLC. The role of the Commission will be to advise my right hon. Friend on the guidance he will issue to the boroughs for the preparation of their unitary development plans and on other matters relating to the planning and development of greater London.

European Charter of Local Self-Government

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why Her Majesty's Government, in a recent meeting of Council of Europe Ministers responsible for local government, held in Rome from 6 to 8 November, voted to give the European charter of local self-government merely the status of a recommendation and not that of a convention;

(2) if he will make a statement on the implications for local government in the United Kingdom if the European charter of local self-government is given the status of a convention by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The biennial Conference of European Ministers responsible for local government held under the auspices of the Council of Europe is not a deliberative body. Individual Ministers make their views known, but there is no voting procedure. This was the case last month at the Rome Conference which discussed, as one of the items on its agenda, the draft European Charter of Local Self-Government. I am writing to the hon. Member about the draft charter so as to explain the United Kingdom Government's agreement to its content and our preference for it to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe as a Recommendation rather than a Convention.

Environment Council

Mr. John Browne asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement about the outcome of the Council of Environment Ministers' meeting on 6 December.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made earlier today.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Jack Thompson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will seek the views of the local authority associations about the likely effect of the miners' dispute upon future rate support grant settlements, in view of the formula established under the National Coal Board Rateable Valuation Order 1977;

(2) if he will estimate the likely effect of the loss of rate income to local authorities from the National Coal Board under the arrangements established in the National Coal Board Rateable Valuation Order (S.I. 1977, No. 2083); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration is being given to assisting those local authorities in coal mining areas with the financial consequences of the loss of rates from the National Coal Board due to lack of output from the collieries within their rating area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Rate support grant in 1985-86 will be paid on the basis of rateable values at 1 April 1984.

Under the provisions of the 1977 order, the rateable value of National Coal Board property at 1 April 1984 is derived from production in 1982-83. Local authorities have recently been notified of the rateable values at 1 April 1985 of the NCB properties in their areas. They will therefore be able to take this into account in setting their rates for 1985-86. Changes in rateable value from year to year are reflected a year in arrears in the distribution of block grant, on which I consult the local authority associations.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration is being given to assisting financially those local authorities in coal mining areas who are granting financial assistance, under the Child Care Act, to those adjudged to be in need; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: This is a matter principally for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, but local authorities are paid block grant in aid of their revenue expenditure generally.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider exempting from financial penalties increased expenditure incurred by local authorities in mining areas arising under the Child Care Act because of the continuation of the mining dispute.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend will consider any representation to this effect which he receives.

River Mersey

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what approaches have been made to his Department or to the European Economic Community for financial assistance to clean up the River Mersey as part of an environmental improvement; at what total cost; and what has been the response.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: A number of local authorities in the Mersey basin, as well as the water authority itself, have suggested to the Government that the North-West Water Authority should receive special financial assistance from the Government to clean up the River Mersey. The authority estimates it could cost more than £2,000 million for the whole Mersey system over a period of 25 years. As I announced in the north-west on 16 March, we will continue to give the authority a high priority when allocating external finance. While in general, those who benefit from water quality improvements should bear the costs, it is the Government's intention to ease these costs by securing maximum grant aid from the European Community's Regional Development Fund, which is already contributing to Mersey improvement projects. With support from the water authority and local authorities, we will be sending the first phase of a combined programme of water quality and landward improvement projects to the Community early in the New Year.

Civic Trusts (Grants)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the criteria by which, in his special grants programme, he decided the appropriate level of grant for each civic trust applying in 1984-85.

Mr. Waldegrave: The grants awarded under the special grants programme are intended to assist national and regional voluntary organisations carrying out activities which further the Department's policy objectives. Priority is given to organisations encouraging practical voluntary action. Applications from the civic trust bodies are considered against the same general criteria as other applications and levels of grant reflect the merits of individual applications.

Water Authorities

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the regional water authorities in England achieved their 1983-84 performance aims.

Mr. Gow: Water authorities agreed performance aims with Ministers in the form of limits to their real operating costs in 1983-84. The performance of the English water authorities against their 1983-84 aims was as follows:

£ million 1979-80 prices
(Operating costs of water supply, sewerage sewage treatment and disposal)

Authority	*Performance Aim*	*Outturn*	*per cent. deviation*
North West	104·7	102·2	−2·4
Northumbrian	27·1	26·1	−3·7
Severn Trent	114·4	115·7	+1·1
Yorkshire	68·5	68·7	+0·3
Anglian	69·6	66·2	−4·9
Thames	162·0	159·1	−1·8
Southern	43·0	41·4	−3·7
Wessex	26·5	26·5	0·0
South West	21·7	22·0	+1·4
England	637·5	627·9	−1·5

I am satisfied that there has been a significant improvement in the efficiency of water authorities in 1983-84, demonstrated by the fact that they improved on their collective aims by nearly £10 million (1·5 per cent.). However, I am disappointed at the failure of the Severn Trent, South-West and Yorkshire water authorities to meet their aims and will be studying their performance particularly closely in future.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EC Funds (Ilfracombe)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sums of EEC grant have been allocated for works in the Ilfracombe travel-to-work development area during the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Gow: I have been asked to reply. European Regional Development Fund grant aid approved by the European Commission towards public sector infrastructure works in the former Ilfracombe travel-to-work area during the last five years is as follows:

	£
1980	Nil
1981	Nil
1982	Nil
1983	1,435,500
1984	142,500

DEFENCE

REME Static Workshops

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement about his Department's proposals for a reorganisation of the REME static workshops.

Mr. Lee: Extensive consultation has taken place since the consultative memorandum on the REME static workshops was issued on 28 June. Trade union representatives have received a full presentation on the background to the review's conclusions, while my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces has discussed the issues with representatives of the communities affected and of the two workshops recommended for closure. Detailed representations have been received from many interested parties, including hon. Members, and these have of course been given most careful consideration. However, no significant new points have emerged from this process, and we have therefore decided to implement the proposals in full.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 December 1984

WALES

River Conwy (Tunnel)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what recent changes have been made to the plans for the tunnel under the river Conwy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Foundation and ground water problems in the Conwy estuary have necessitated, respectively, a 60 m extension of the tunnel on the east side and the adoption of a different form of construction on the western approach to the tunnel.

Welsh Water Authority

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the financial target for the Welsh water authority for 1985-86.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The financial target for the Welsh water authority for 1985-86 has yet to be finally agreed. Our officials are considering with the authority the proposals set out in its October submission and we expect to be able to announce the target shortly.

SCOTLAND

Teachers (Salaries)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the request by Scottish teachers for an independent review of their salaries.

Mr. Younger: I have today written to the secretary of the teachers' side of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education in the following terms:

Robert Beattie Esq
Joint Secretary
Teachers' Side
Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee
for Teaching Staff in School Education
46 Moray Place
EDINBURGH
EH3 6BH

11 December 1984

Dear Mr Beattie

TEACHERS' SALARIES

You wrote to me on 14 August on behalf of the Teachers' Panel of the Scottish Joint Negotiating Committee for Teaching Staff in School Education (SJNC(SE)) to request that I establish an independent body to review the salaries of Scottish school teacher. Your letters referred only briefly to increased workload arising from recent educational developments and to annual erosion of the relative salary position of Scottish teachers; but at my invitation representatives of the Teachers' Side of the SJNC(SE) met me on 23 October to amplify their case, and I have seen also various documents published by individual teachers' associations. I have had the opportunity too of discussion with representatives of the Management Side of the SJNC(SE), and I have very recently seen an advance copy of a report prepared by a working party of the SJNC(SE) on the matter of teachers' workload. I have received also a number of representations in the matter from other organisations and individuals.

I have taken careful note of all the points made. It appears to me that the case being advanced by the Teachers' Side depends essentially upon the claims (i) that the salaries of teachers have been eroded in recent years and (ii) that teachers have over the same period experienced considerable increases in workload. On pay, it is of course no part of the Government's policy that salary increases should be indexed either to the rate of inflation or to some measurement of pay increases in the economy generally. Such an approach would be inconsistent both with the determination of the Government to defeat inflation and with our general policy of seeking to limit local authority expenditure. However, pay awards to teachers over the last 10 years or so have in fact been very closely comparable with those made to other groups of local authority employees in Scotland.

It has been put to me that teachers nevertheless constitute a special case, in that they have experienced substantial additions to their workload in recent years. It must, however, be borne in mind that teachers are by no means alone in having had to come to terms with new technologies and new methods of working. I recognise that new curricular developments have involved individual teachers in increased work; but I do not regard this as a permanent phenomenom and it certainly does not affect all teachers at one time. It should be remembered also that I have already made provision in rate support grant settlements for the employment of additional teachers in secondary schools and that I have agreed to a shortening of the school year in order to facilitate additional days of in-service training for teachers.

In the circumstances, therefore, I am not persuaded that I should be justified in establishing an independent review of the sort requested. There is, however, another possible way to handle this. Under statute it is of course the responsibility of SJNC(SE) to determine the salaries and conditions of service of school teachers in Scotland. I should be prepared to consider on their merits and in the framework of the Government's existing public expenditure plans for Scotland as a whole any proposals relating to pay and conditions of service together which might result from detailed examination undertaken by the SJNC(SE). I should make it plain however that, to be convincing, a review of conditions of service would have to deal specifically with areas where existing arrangements appear not to be in keeping with present-day requirements — including the definition and prescription of teachers' responsibilities in the planning of personal teaching methods and programmes, together with the teaching, discipline and assessment of pupils and participation in schemes of personal professional development; participation in pastoral, tutorial and guidance arrangements; lunchtime and playground supervision of pupils and consultations with parents, including attendance at parents' meetings; and control by employers of time within conditioned hours when teachers are not in class contact.

I fully appreciate the strong feelings of many teachers at the present time and I want to find a constructive way of responding to them. I hope that my reply will now enable us to move ahead with the exciting and progressive new developments in teaching on which we and the profession have embarked.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Management Side Joint Secretary of the SJNC(SE). I am also making its terms public by means of a Parliamentary statement and a press announcement.

Yours sincerely
George Younger

Homeless Young People

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what services for homeless young people are currently being funded by his Department under *(a)* section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act, *(b)* section 13 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act and *(c)* the urban aid programme.

Mr. Ancram: The information for 1984-85 is as follows:

	£
(a) Grants are provided jointly under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and section 13 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 towards the administrative costs of the following organisations:	
Scottish Council for Single Homeless	31,750
Scottish Women's Aid	27,280
(b) Grant is provided under section 13 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 towards the following project:	
Shelter (Scotland) Young People's Housing Project	12,925

	Approved capital £	*Approved current* £
(c) Urban programme funding is supporting the following projects for young homeless people:		
Funding of Director for Edinburgh Council for Single Homeless Project	—	23,420
Independent Community Homes for Young People (Glasgow)	31,400	64,673
Short Stay Refuge for Adolescents (Monklands)	11,243	87,211
Adolescent Hostel (Inverclyde)	—	27,097
Elpis Centre (for girls) (Glasgow)	—	29,200

In addition, the following urban programme projects provide for both young and adult homeless:

	Approved capital £	*Approved current* £
Reception/Short Stay unit for single homeless (Aberdeen)	—	37,317
Upgrading of Peoples Palace (Edinburgh)	—	35,430
Women's Aid—second tier (Glasgow)	4,444	3,745
Redidential/Day care project for long term homeless women	975	85,788
Rehousing hostel/lodging house (Glasgow)	—	47,149
Lodging/alcoholic counselling houses (Glasgow)	—	15,311
Steps to Independence (Paisley)—Single homeless and alcoholic unit (Glasgow)	40,900	44,806

Notes:

(1) The Scottish Council for Single Homeless and Scottish Women's Aid provide services for both homeless young people and adults. It is not possible to identify what proportion of the grant to those organisations is specifically for services to young people.

(2) Urban Programme projects sometimes incorporate specific services for other groups such as alcoholics.

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the rank order of Scottish travel-to-work areas by unemployment rate at the latest date; and what were the corresponding figures for May 1979.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is available in the House of Commons Library. However, the figures are not directly comparable due to the introduction of the claimant based count in October 1982 and the redefinition of the travel-to-work areas in September 1984.

Housing Support Grant (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the value of housing support grant made available to Dundee district council in each year since 1980-81; and what are these figures expressed at constant prices.

Mr. Ancram: The information is given in the following table:

	£	*At 1983-84 average prices** £
1980-81	8,598,809	10,531,303
1981-82	5,285,879	5,886,280
1982-83	1,820,168	1,900,562
1983-84	—	—
1984-85	—	—

* Using GDP deflators.

Local Authority Services (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure on services in Dundee district in each year since 1980-81 at constant prices; and what are these figures expressed per head of population.

Mr. Ancram: Figures for total expenditure and expenditure per head of population by Dundee district council, excluding loan charges, on services relevant for rate support grant since 1980-81 are as follows. Figures have been expressed at November 1983 prices.

	Total Expenditure (£ million)	*Expenditure per head (£)*
1980-81	12,860	68·14
1981-82	12,547	67·60
1982-83	11,627	63·42
1983-84	11,552	63·91
1984-85	*12,598	69·70

* Budget Estimate.

Homes Insulation

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* figures showing the percentage of homes in Scotland that have a loft or have access to a loft, but which have no loft insulation, or which have loft insulation less than the 100 mm minimum included in all new properties; and if he will break the figures down into owner-occupied, local authority and other tenures.

Mr. Ancram: Estimates are available of loft insulation in dwellings in Scotland with access to the loft and are given in the following table:

	All Homes per cent.	*Council Homes per cent.*
Proportion of households with access to loft:—		
a. Without loft insulation or not known	25	25
b. With loft insulation less than 100 mm thick	58	62
c. With loft insulation 100 mm or thicker	17	13

Source: Survey conducted by Audits of Great Britain.

School Meals

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total figure of free school meal receipts for Scotland, and for Lothian as a region.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The number of pupils receiving free school meals on the day of the 1984 school meals census, held in January, is as follows:

	Number
Scotland	129,335
Lothian	12,413

PRIME MINISTER

HMS Conqueror (Log Book)

Q11. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if the board of inquiry into the circumstances of the disappearance of the log book from HMS Conqueror has yet reported; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement on this matter on 30 November.

Regional Aid

Q30. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Prime Minister whether she is satisfied with the co-ordination of the Scottish Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the review of regional aid.

The Prime Minister: Yes. Full account has been taken of all European Community considerations.

Studet Grants

Q53. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about student grants and the representations she has received on student grants.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement on the 1985-86 grant proposals made on 5 December 1984 at column 360-61 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. I have received about 30,000 representations on the proposals.

Rail Travel (Official Business)

Q73. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister if she will give the last three occasions for the period ended 26 November when she travelled on official business by British Rail.

The Prime Minister: There have been no such occasions.

Israel

Q95. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister whether, following the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affair's visit to Israel, invitations have now been formally extended to Mr. Shimon Peres and Mr. Yitzhak Shamir to make official visits to the United Kingdom in 1985; and whether any dates have yet been fixed.

The Prime Minister: During the visit to Israel of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Mr. Shamir and Mr. Peres accepted invitations to make official visits to Britain. No dates have yet been arranged.

Common Agricultural Policy

Q103. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Prime Minister what specific changes in the common agricultural policy Her Majesty's Government intend to propose during the next three years.

The Prime Minister: We shall continue to press the need for sustained price restraint as the best means of containing CAP costs and bringing about a better balance between supply and demand. We shall press for the effective application of the financial guideline for agriculture. At the same time we are determined to ensure that the measures taken should not discriminate against United Kingdom interests.

Pwllheli

Q108. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Pwllheli.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Job Creation

Q112. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Prime Minister what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the relative effects of marginal changes in *(a)* income tax thresholds and *(b)* the employers' national insurance contribution upon job creation.

The Prime Minister: Any quantitative assessment would depend upon assumptions about other developments in the economy. But to the extent that income tax thresholds could be raised or employers' national insurance contributions reduced within the context of the medium term financial strategy, both could be expected to have a beneficial effect on job creation.

Engagements

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 11 December.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Ethiopia

Mr. Skinner asked the Prime Minister if she will make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government to increase the funds they provide for famine relief in Ethiopia by a sum equivalent to the estimated value added tax revenue received from sales of the record recently released by Band Aid in support of the famine victims; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I welcome the initiative shown by those involved in the production of this record. I believe, however, that the Government have already responded quickly and effectively to the famine in Ethiopia.

In addition to the £15 million of aid given to Ethiopia over the past two years, £11·4 million is being given for famine relief. Moreover, the Overseas Development Administration has made it clear that it will continue to respond sympathetically to appeals for the drought-stricken countries, including Ethiopia.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police (Dogs)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why the use of dogs by the Metropolitan Police on the streets of central London is increasing.

Mr. Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that police dogs and their handlers have been added to street patrols to provide increased public protection over the Christmas period.

Lion Intoximeter 3000

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the planned use of the Lion Intoximeter 3000 breathalyser machine during the Christmas holiday period.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Lion Intoximeter and the Camic breath analyser testing machines will be in use in police stations during the Christmas holiday period on the same basis as at other times of year. The non-statutory blood/urine option introduced on 16 April will continue to be available over the period.

Citizenship

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for citizenship were under consideration at the end of November; and how this compares with figures in each of the past five years.

Mr. Waddington: The number of applications for citizenship under consideration at the end of November 1984 and in the five preceding years was:—

	Number
1979	45,651
1980	53,579
1981	66,208
1982	65,541
1983	77,844
1984	36,707

Members' Communications (Interception)

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there has been any change in the Government's policy towards the interception of the communications of Members of Parliament.

Mr. Brittan: No. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reaffirmed in a written answer on 6 February 1980 at column *244* the policy remains as stated in 1966 by the then Prime Minister, the Lord Wilson of Rievaulx at column 634-41, and as applied by successive Governments since then. In answers to Questions on 17 November 1966, Lord Wilson said that he had given instructions that there was to be no tapping of the telephones of Members of Parliament; that remained the policy of the Government, and that, if there was a development which required a change in the general policy, he would, at such moment as seemed compatible with the security of the country, on his own initiative make a statement in the House about it. The Government regard this undertaking as applying to both postal and telephone interception.

TRANSPORT

Transport Supplementary Grant Settlement

Mr. Tracey asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has made the 1985-86 transport supplementary grant settlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The 1985-86 transport supplementary grant settlement is set out in the "Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1985/86" which is made to the House today.

This transport supplementary grant settlement is the first to be made under the new arrangements which I announced on 16 October in circular 3/84. These were approved by Parliament on 27 November. Only capital expenditure on highways and the regulations of traffic is now eligible for TSG.

I have decided to accept the TSG a total of £320 million. The total amount of grant will be £160 million, to be paid at a rate of 50 per cent. on all accepted expenditure.

In considering the highways capital programmes of the GLC and the county councils in the transport policies and programmes which they submitted to the Department in the summer I have taken into account the extent to which their estimated expenditure on major road schemes related to roads of more than local importance. In particular I considered the extent to which the expenditure would improve the primary route network of important through routes, would improve major urban roads which carry heavy long-distance traffic, or would relieve communities of the effects of heavy through traffic. For this settlement, however, I have also continued to accept expenditure on highways schemes which were named as future commitments in previous years and which have already started, as in paragraph 10 of circular 3/84, even where they do not meet these criteria. The amount of estimated expenditure for each council is shown in annex P to the rate support grant report. Councils are being informed individually today of their own figures.

These accepted capital programmes include 289 major road schemes, 214 already in progress or due to start in 1984-85 and a further 75 due to start in 1985-86. Of these schemes 169 are bypasses or relief roads and a further 76 are other improvements to the primary route network.

The amount of expenditure accepted for TSG is not intended to cover the whole of each council's capital highways programme. With the resources available to them, councils should be able to carry out additional works to improve their roads.

We shall pay 50 per cent. specific grants in support of expenditure for investment in public transport facilities on 11 projects which were previously supported through TSG.

Because TSG forms part of aggregate Exchequer grant, the new TSG arrangements mean an increase in block grant. How the extra block grant is allocated between authorities depends on their GREs, targets and the block grant mechanisms. The associations were consulted about the new transport GREs introduced as a consequence of the TSG changes.

Seafarers (Health and Safety)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport what were the numbers of inspections of United Kingdom registered vessels by the Department's inspectorate for each of the years since 1978; what were the numbers of prosecutions for statutory infringements of occupational health and safety regulations that followed; what was the nature of the infringements for which prosecutions were mounted; what penalties were imposed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The numbers of inspections of United Kingdom registered merchant vessels are as follows:

	Number
1978	729
1979	580
1980	993
1981	1,020
1982	744
1983	543
1984*	532

*To 5th December.

Five prosecutions connected directly with occupational health and safety legislation have been brought under the Means of Access Regulations 1981. Two cases are yet to be concluded; in the other three cases fines of £100 and £1,600 were imposed.

In addition, many warnings have been given leading to appropriate improvements short of requiring prosecution. Statistics on these are not available other than at disproportionate costs.

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport which section of his Department is responsible for the occupational health and safety of seafarers; what is the total staff of that section; and what were the comparable figures in each of the financial years since 1978-79.

Mr. David Mitchell: The responsibility for enforcement lies with marine surveyors attached to the eight district marine offices, in each of which a principal marine surveyor is nominated with responsibility for occupational health and safety matters.

Responsibility for the occupational health and safety of seafarers is co-ordinated within my Department by a section which was staffed by three officers between 1978 and 1982; since then their numbers have been increased by one. A number of other sections regularly provide particular expertise and professional advice.

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport what training is given to his Department's inspectors responsible for carrying out the Departmental duties in respect of occupational health and safety matters of seafarers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department's marine surveyors are responsible for dealing with the safety of seafarers and ships in general, and matters connected with the occupational health and safety of seafarers are an important aspect of their responsibilities. Most of them have served at sea and have first-hand knowledge of these matters. They join the Marine Survey Service highly qualified and the training they receive is therefore broadly based, but it does cover their duties in respect of occupational health and safety matters of seafarers.

Driving Test Centre, Basildon

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to institute a driving test centre in Basildon.

Mrs. Chalker: None at present, but I shall be writing to my hon. Friend in answer to his recent letter on this matter.

Trucks (Wheel Nuts)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the incidence of accidents caused by wheel nut loosening on trucks.

Mrs. Chalker: The number of reports of wheel detachment that we have received over the last few years is as follows:

	Number
1980	6
1981	11
1982	21
1983	10

The 10 detachment incidents reported in 1983 caused four accidents and one injury.

Brazil (Landing Facilities)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Brazilian Government for the provision of landing facilities for civil aircraft servicing the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Michael Spicer: None.

Shipping Movements

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of movements per annum at United Kingdom ports by merchant trading vessels over 500 gross registered tonnes in the following categories; and whether these are United Kingdom or non-United Kingdom flag: *(a)* ferries, *(b)* coastal shipping, *(c)* one-port traffic, namely, offshore supplies and *(d)* international, non-ferry.

Mr. David Mitchell: Information on ship movements in the detail requested is not collected centrally. In 1983, arrivals in the United Kingdom of all shipping, excluding yachts, from foreign ports (outside the Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man) numbered 41,000 for United Kingdom registered ships and 54,000 for non-United Kingdom registered ships.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were successfully prosecuted in respect of accidents classified as hit and run in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I have been asked to reply.

The readily available information relates to the number of findings of guilt at magistrates' courts for the offences of failing to stop after an accident and of failing to report an accident within 24 hours and is published annually in "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (table 5 of the issue for 1983). A copy of this publication is in the Library of the House.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation (Pollution)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much of the 5 per cent. increase in electricity bills referred to on page 24 of the Government's reply to the fourth report from the Environment Committee (Cmnd. 9397) he expects to be incurred in the first year and each of the subsequent years by consumers, as a percentage of their electricity bill, if the Government were to meet the European Economic Community draft directive on sulphur dioxide pollution which proposes a 60 per cent. reduction by 1995.

Mr. Peter Walker: The detailed figures are a matter for the Central Electricty Generating Board and I am asking the chairman to write to the right hon. Member.

DEFENCE

Statements of Service

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will in future when supplying statements of service to former Army personnel refrain from entering service in Northern Ireland under service in foreign countries.

Mr. Lee: No such change of practice is needed, since service in Northern Ireland should not appear in the statements of Army service provided by my Department under the heading of service in foreign countries. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces is writing to the right hon. Member.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost to his Department of assistance given to the police in connection with the miners' strike.

Mr. Stanley: We continue to anticipate no cost to the Department.

62. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will advise service men not to become involved in the miners' dispute while off duty.

Mr. Stanley: I do not believe that there is any necessity for general advice to be issued at the present time.

There has, to our knowledge, been only one case of a service man becoming involved in this dispute whilst off duty, which was the one referred to in the answer that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office gave to my hon. Friend on 16 November.

Missiles and Aircraft (Dual Capability)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration is being given by Her Majesty's Government to battle plans involving dual-capable missiles and aircraft.

Mr. Stanley: Dual capable weapons systems have been an integral part of both NATO and Warsaw pact forces for many years.

Royal Ordnance Factories

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet trade union representatives to discuss redundancies at royal ordnance factories.

Mr. Butler: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I met representatives of the industrial and non-industrial trades unions on 1 November, and we have subsequently corresponded with them on the question of the reductions in the royal ordnance factories. If the trades unions have further points to raise, I have no doubt that a further meeting could be arranged.

27. **Mr. Carter-Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with trade union representatives of the royal ordnance factories concerning redundancies.

Mr. Butler: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I met representatives of the industrial and non-industrial trades unions on 1 November.

34. **Mr. Straw** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning ammunition manufacture at royal ordnance factories.

Mr. Butler: The ammunition division of the royal ordnance factories comprises the factories at Birtley, Blackburn, Chorley, Glascoed and Patricroft together with the agency factory at Featherstone; in addition small arms ammunition is manufactured at Radway Green in the small arms division. These factories produce a range of high quality munitions and the Government wish to see them successful in their new commercial environment. However, the current order position has necessitated the declaration of redundancies at certain of these factories although the extent of these has been reduced by the recent placing of further orders by the Ministry of Defence.

NATO Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the communiqué issued after each North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial meeting refers only to agenda items which do not carry security classifications.

Mr. Stanley: No, but it is the usual practice in NATO to provide communiqués in an unclassified form about discussions which are classified themselves.

26. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will, in future, make a statement to the House prior to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial meetings.

61. **Mr. Michie** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will in future make a statement to the House prior to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial meetings.

65. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will, in future make a statement to the House prior to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ministerial meetings.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

33. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he attended the December meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation defence ministers; and if he will make a statement outlining the main decisions reached.

Mr. Heseltine: I met other NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels between 3 and 5 December. We had valuable discussions on a wide range of subjects. Details are set out in the communiqués of the Eurogroup and of the defence planning committee. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Army Detention Centres

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the detention centres used by the British Army; and what is the present number of service men being held at such centres.

Mr. Lee: Sentences of military detention are served either at the military corrective training centre, Colchester or in Army unit guardrooms, depending on the length of the sentence. The position on 30 November was that 109 Army personnel were in detention in the military corrective training centre and 131 in unit guardrooms.

Tidworth Army Depot (Custody Statistics)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of service men at present being held in custody at Tidworth Army depot, and the period of time men have been held there without being charged with an offence.

Mr. Lee: The position on 30 November 1984 was that two soldiers were being held at Tidworth garrison, both of whom were charged within 48 hours of being placed in arrest.

Service Personnel (Custody)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of *(a)* service men and *(b)* service women at present being held in custody by the British Army in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: The position on 30 November 1984 was that 46 service men and no service women were being held in custody (as distinct from detention) in Army unit guardrooms in the United Kingdom while under investigation or awaiting trial or confirmation of sentence.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the period of time a member of the British Army can be held in custody by the Army before being charged with an offence.

Mr. Lee: Army personnel would normally be informed by their commanding officer of the charge on which they are being held by no later than 48 hours from the time of being taken into custody. If in exceptional circumstances they cannot be informed within 48 hours, a report has to be submitted to the superior military authority explaining the delay.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the rights of service men to consult solicitors if they are being held in detention by the British Army.

Mr. Lee: A service man being held in custody by the Army has the following rights of consultation with a solicitor.

(a) he may name a solicitor as the person he wishes to be informed by the Army of his arrest and the place where he is being held.

(b) provided that the investigation or prevention of crime, the apprehension of offenders or military operations, safety and security would not be unreasonably hindered, he may telephone a solicitor at his own expense or receive telephone calls from him at reasonable times.

(c) with the commanding officer's permission he may be visited by a solicitor.

Information Services

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a breakdown of the cost to his Department in the last financial year of the provision of presentations comprising information films, lectures and exhibitions to selected groups and to the public in general.

Mr. Butler: Ministers, service officers and officials regularly give public presentations and lectures on a wide range of defence issues. It is not possible to assess the cost of such presentations without disproportionate effort. In 1983-84 the cost of service recruiting and public relations films and exhibitions amounted to about £2·5 million. The cost of the RN and RAF presentation teams amounted to about £0.5 million, including manpower costs.

64. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of his Department's information service.

Mr. Lee: The cost of defence public relations worldwide amounted to some £6·2 million in 1983-84. This figure includes expenditure on public relations activities together with staff and related costs.

Ulster Defence Regiment

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the military equipment of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, listing separately firearms and the type of firearms, motor vehicles, armoured vehicles and type and number of radio, radar and electronics surveillance equipment with which the regiment is equipped today and in each year since its inception.

Mr. Lee: The information is not maintained in the form requested. However, the current establishment of weapons and vehicles for the Ulster Defence Regiment is as follows:

	Number
·22 Rifles	222
9mm Pistol	642
9mm SMG	110
7·62mm SLR	8,409

	Number
GPMG/LMG	184
Landrovers	249
Recruiting Trailer	1
Trailers	61
4 Ton Trucks	10
Other vehicles	228

Other equipment can be issued when commitments or circumstances dictate. The radio allocation varies from week to week, dependent upon the tasks and commitments of each battalion.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the percentages of Catholics and Protestants who have served in the Ulster Defence Regiment for each year since the regiment's inception.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his question of 13 March this year, at column 129. The position has not changed since then. Information for earlier years is not available.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many regular officers are currently attached to the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Mr. Lee: The figure is 34.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many regular soldiers are currently attached to the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Mr. Lee: The figure is 67.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the current morale of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Mr. Lee: The morale of the Ulster Defence Regiment is high.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to change the role of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Mr. Lee: No. The Ulster Defence Regiment will continue to play a full part in the Army's overall effort in support of the RUC in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Ulster Defence Regiment have been killed or maimed this year whilst carrying out their duties; how many were off duty; and how many were full-time and part-time, respectively.

Mr. Lee: Up to 30 November, 10 soldiers have been killed, of whom two were on duty and eight were off duty, and one was full-time and nine part-time. Nine soldiers have been injured, of whom four were on duty and five were off duty, and three were full-time and six were part-time.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, since its inception have been found to be members of illegal paramilitary organisations or, separately, legal paramilitary organisations such as the Ulster Defence Association or the Third Force.

Mr. Lee: The information is not maintained in the form requested, but during the last five years — the only period for which information is available—there are no records of serving members of the UDR being convicted of membership of any organisation proscribed under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current policy concerning the possession of firearms at their domiciles by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and its Reserve.

Mr. Lee: UDR personnel who are under threat can be issued with a personal protection weapon on the authority of the commander UDR. All applications for PPWs are subject to rigorous scrutiny. If the UDR member issued with a PPW leaves Northern Ireland or is absent from home for over 24 hours the weapon has to be returned. In addition, UDR personnel may apply to the RUC for a private firearms certificate in the same way as any other resident of Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the costs of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, divided between wages and salaries, other personnel costs, costs of construction and buildings, investment in military equipment and other costs for each year since the regiment's inception.

Mr. Lee: The information is as follows:

Financial year	Wages/ salaries £ million	Construction/ buildings £ million	Equipment £ million	Support costs £ million	Total £ million
1971-72	0·9	—	—	0·1	1·0
1972-73	2·3	2·5	—	0·3	5·1
1973-74	6·0	1·4	0·2	0·4	8·0
1974-75	6·4	1·4	0·6	0·3	8·7
1975-76	6·88	—	0·43	0·42	7·73
1976-77	10·63	0·21	0·31	0·58	11·73
1977-78	13·01	0·42	0·92	0·78	15·13
1978-79	15·07	0·31	0·88	0·85	17·11
1979-80	20·04	0·05	1·03	1·12	22·24
1980-81	24·77	—	1·10	1·26	27·13
1981-82	33·2	—	0·9	1·2	35·3
1982-83	33·1	—	1·10	1·7	35·9
1983-84	36·1	—	1·2	1·8	39·1

The above figures are those which appeared in the Estimates for each financial year. Figures for 1984-85 are not yet available, and those prior to 1971-72 were not separately identified.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning current policy and practice of deployment of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, with particular reference to the areas and circumstances in which it is, and is not, deployed.

Mr. Lee: The UDR, both permanent cadre and part time, are deployed in support of the RUC across almost all areas of Northern Ireland, although they are not used on crowd control or riot duties in cities.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many persons have been killed by the Ulster Defence Regiment operatives on duty in Northern Ireland to date; how many of those fatalities were of civilians unconnected with terrorist organisations; and how many victims there were for whom no mandate of arrest existed.

Mr. Lee: Since the formation of the regiment, six civilians have died as a result of action by members of the UDR in the course of their duty. It is not possible to say for certain how many of these were or were not connected with terrorist organisations.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the manpower strength of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, as between full-time and part-time, male and female operatives for each year since its inception.

Mr. Lee: These details are given in the following table:

(figures as at 31 March).

	Part time		*Full time*		
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1970	2,243	—	49	—	2,292
1971	3,880	—	234	—	4,114
1972	8,117	—	645	—	8,762
1973	7,444	—	833	—	8,277
1974	6,484	450	851	8	7,793
1975	5,635	592	1,414	13	7,654
1976	5,618	596	1,505	19	7,738
1977	5,332	619	1,662	31	7,644
1978	5,039	631	2,113	79	7,862
1979	4,556	598	2,346	123	7,623
1980	4,627	552	2,416	138	7,373
1981	4,159	582	2,580	158	7,479
1982	3,893	498	2,561	178	7,130
1983	3,798	544	2,601	192	7,135
1984	3,563	531	2,483	200	6,777

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the strength of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, by rank of serving operative for each year since the regiment's inception.

Mr. Lee: These details are given in the following table:

(Figures as at 31 December)

	1974	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Lieutenant Colonel	3	2	1	1	3	3	4	3	2	4
Major	78	82	83	83	85	89	87	88	86	77
Captain	123	144	148	153	142	130	126	125	112	114
Lieutenant	72	101	107	89	89	97	123	113	100	96
2nd Lieutenant	124	70	59	64	86	74	44	43	32	37
Warrant Officer 1	1	2	2	1	1	2	—	—	—	—
Warrant Officer 2	113	112	114	114	132	133	134	138	139	138
Staff Sergeant	155	178	185	193	187	168	182	172	162	170
Sergeant	251	273	251	260	321	349	358	345	336	336
Corporal	753	761	733	698	787	766	744	707	692	655
Lance Corporal	867	879	870	887	924	939	916	868	829	795
Private	4,652	4,586	4,441	4,585	4,274	3,980	4,001	4,072	3,851	3,795
Female other ranks	204	603	622	684	730	695	712	676	685	712
Total	7,396	7,793	7,616	7,812	7,761	7,425	7,431	7,350	7,026	6,929

The figures for other ranks do not include females, which are shown separately.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, were former members of the B Specials at the time of the regiment's inception; and what is the number today.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available in the form requested, though on grounds of age alone some two thirds of those now serving in the regiment would have been too young to serve in the B Specials.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number of operatives by rank, separately, of those who have joined the Ulster Defence Regiment and its Reserve, and of those who have resigned from the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, in each year since its inception.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available in the form requested. However, figures for those who have joined the UDR and who have left the UDR, for reasons other than medical or disciplinary or on death, are as follows:

	Intake		*Outflow*	
	Officers	*Other ranks*	*Officers*	*Other ranks*
1975-76	59	1,634	38	1,214
1976-77	37	1,691	36	1,191
1977-78	55	1,931	54	1,301
1978-79	64	1,731	43	1,515
1979-80	34	1,331	40	1,236
1980-81	39	1,509	38	1,105
1981-82	26	1,211	51	1,207
1982-83	26	1,488	47	1,114
1983-84	36	966	30	1,076

Figures prior to 1975 are not available.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the average time served

in the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, by current operatives for each year since the regiment's inception for each group of *(a)* non-commissioned officers, *(b)* commissioned officers and *(c)* other ranks.

Mr. Lee: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the procedure for vetting existing and new applicants for membership of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, to ensure that the membership of the regiment is consistent with standards of maximising its acceptability to both communities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Lee: It is not our practice to disclose details of our procedures for vetting applicants to join the armed forces; however, I am satisfied that they provide thorough safeguards.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number of persons who have been asked to resign from the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, in each year since its inception, indicating those who have been charged with crimes, giving separately details of persons who resigned as a result of being charged with scheduled offences.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is not available.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that the number of seconded regular officers and men in the Ulster Defence Regiment is sufficient to prevent sectarian activity by members of that regiment; and if he will indicate how he measures the efficacy of such steps.

Mr. Lee: I am satisfied that the current balance between personnel from the regular Army and locally recruited personnel is the best one to ensure the effective operation of the regiment. There are no plans to change that balance, which has worked very well.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the Ulster Defence Regiment within Her Majesty's Government's overall policy of promoting a peaceful settlement to the troubles in Ulster.

Mr. Lee: The UDR makes an important contribution to the overall security forces effort. In many cases it has helped the RUC to bring terrorist criminals to justice, and this in turn has contributed to the Government's overall aim of promoting peace and political stability in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the steps he is taking to ensure that the Ulster Defence Regiment enjoys the support of the majority of each sector of political opinion in Northern Ireland; and if he will indicate how he measures the efficacy of such steps in each sector.

Mr. Lee: The Government are always sensitive to the need to ensure that all elements of the security forces enjoy the support of all sections of the community. In training soldiers for the UDR the Army makes every effort to instil the highest possible standards of impartiality and politeness of their dealings with members of the public, irrespective of political or religious affiliation.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its reserve, for each year since the regiment's inception, who have been charged with offences in criminal courts and who have been convicted of offences, giving details of custodial sentences imposed, and separately for charges and convictions concerning murder, attempted murder, membership of illegal organisations, conspiracy to cause explosions, withholding information concerning terrorist activity, possession of explosives, possession of explosives with intent to cause bodily harm, possession of firearms, possession of firearms with intent to cause bodily harm and other offences classified as schedule offences; and if he will specify whether those convicted have served their sentence either in any of the six counties of Northern Ireland or on mainland Britain.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available in the form requested. However, since the formation of the UDR the following numbers of serving soldiers have been convicted of offences:

— eight with murder.
— six with manslaughter.
— eighty with assault.

The great majority of these offences were of a domestic nature. In addition, it is known that the following numbers of soldiers have been charged with serious offences since May 1983:

— three with possession of firearms.
— two with bomb hoaxes.
— one with making petrol bombs.
— one with arson.
— one with drunk in charge of firearms.

JP 233 Airfield Attack Weapon System

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the RAF to start taking delivery of the JP 233 airfield attack weapon system; what is the total value of the contract; and when it is expected to be completed.

Mr. Butler: Deliveries of JP 233 to the RAF are planned to begin early next year and be complete by the end of 1988. The contract value cannot be stated for reasons of commercial confidentiality: contractual negotiations for fixed prices are still in progress.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to encourage the United States Government to purchase the JP 233 airfield attack weapon system or to arrange for its production under licence in the United States of America.

Mr. Butler: Since the United States withdrew from a joint United Kingdom-United States development programme for JP 233 in 1981, Hunting Engineering Ltd. the prime contractor, has been fully supported by the Ministry of Defence in the marketing of the JP 233 weapon system in America.

It remains uncertain whether the United States air force will procure the complete JP 233 system. However, there is serious interest at the sub-system level.

The MOD will continue to assist Hunting Engineering and the other United Kingdom contractors involved in the programme in the promotion of the JP 233.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to exploit the export potential of the JP 233 airfield attack weapon system.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I have given to his earlier question as regards exploitation of the weapon in the United States. My Ministry has also given the manufacturer approval and encouragement to promote sales to a number of other countries.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs in the United Kingdom are estimated to be involved in the production of the JP 233 airfield attack weapon system.

Mr. Butler: At peak production levels the project is expected to provide direct employment for about 4,000 people in the United Kingdom.

Northern Europe Tracking Station

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned location and function of the Northern Europe tracking station which the United States air force plans to establish in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lee: The proposed Northern Europe tracking station would be part of a modernisation of the United States worldwide satellite tracking network. As the House was informed on 28 June, we have already approved one joint Anglo-American project to establish a communications antenna at RAE Oakhangar, to enhance the existing co-operation between ourselves and the United States in the field of satellite communications, in particular in support of the Skynet 4 satellite project and the space shuttle. The possibility of a second Anglo-American project to establish a further tracking dish at Oakhangar is still under consideration.

Military Helicopters (Nap-of-the-Earth Flying Areas)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those areas in the United Kingdom which are designated specially for nap-of-the-earth flying by Army or Marines' helicopters; and whether any consultations took place with local authorities over the designation of these areas.

Mr. Lee: I assume that by "nap-of-the-earth" flying the right hon. Member is referring to low flying. All of the United Kingdom may be used by Army and Royal Marines helicopters for low flying subject to the usual restrictions. Consultations with local authorities are, therefore, not appropriate.

Submarine Exercises

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the coastguard is informed of the timing and location of British and American submarine exercises in British coastal waters.

Mr. Stanley: No. For reasons of operational security, it has long been Ministry of Defence policy not to disclose Royal Navy submarine movements nor to comment on foreign submarine activity. However, areas around the United Kingdom where submarines of the Royal Navy or of NATO nations exercise regularly are marked on Admiralty charts.

Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre (Contracts)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those companies which have been awarded contracts by his Department for work related to the British underwater test and evaluation centre.

Mr. Butler: The following companies are currently providing services for the operation and maintenance of the BUTEC facility at Kyle of Lochalsh:

RCA Limited, Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex,
Thorn EMI Electronics Limited, Woking, Surrey,
Bond Helos, Aberdeen.

In addition, the following companies have current contracts for support, repair and design-development services and the supply of equipment to be used at the facility:

RCA Limited, Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex,
Thorn EMI Electronics Limited, Woking, Surrey,
Easams Limited, Frimley, Surrey,
CAP Scientific Limited, Holborn, London,
dB Instrumentation Limited, Aldershot, Hants,
Waverley Electronics Limited, Weymouth, Dorset,
Offshore Environmental Systems Limited, Farnham, Surrey,
Slingsby Engineering Limited, Kirkbymoorside, Yorks,
STC Limited, Greenwich, London,
Alluvial Mine and Shaft Sinking Company, Basildon, Essex,
Techmation, Edgware, London,
Price and Edward Limited, West Drayton, Middlesex.

Approximately 250 local purchase orders have also been placed during the same period by the responsible technical branch at Portland.

Military Aircraft (Minimum Operating Height)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the minimum operating height for military aircraft in the Highlands restricted area was lowered from 360 ft to 200 ft; and what consultations took place with local authorities when this occurred.

Mr. Lee: The Highlands restricted area was established in October 1981 to allow practice in the use of terrain-following radar. All the local authorities concerned were informed. To date, flying in the HRA has generally been above the 250 ft minimum that normally applies to military low flying in the United Kingdom.

Gruinard Island

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with tests on Gruinard Island to investigate the feasibility of decontaminating the island.

Mr. Lee: Possible methods of decontaminating affected areas of Gruinard Island, including the question of potential effectiveness and cost, remain under careful review. A further visit was made to the island in July 1984 and initial analysis of the date obtained supports previous encouraging results. However, further work is required before a decision on decontamination can be considered and it is not yet possible to say when that will be.

Jet Provost (Replacement)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that his choice of the replacement for the Jet Provost is the one which in the opinion of the Royal Air Force is the best choice on technical and operational merit.

Mr. Butler: In reaching a decision on a new trainer aircraft, major considerations will be value for money as well as the ability of the aircraft to meet the technical and operational requirements of the Royal Air Force. Other issues which will be taken into account will include job opportunities in the United Kingdom, overseas sales prospects and international relations.

37. **Mr. Randall** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about the choice of a replacement basic trainer aircraft for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Butler: In October and November my right hon. Friend and I received 24 letters from hon. Members, many of which forwarded correspondence from constituents and interested parties, and six letters from industrialists and trades unionists. In that period, hon. Members also asked seven questions on this subject, and two questions have been answered in another place.

Tornado Project

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what sum of money he envisages Her Majesty's Government will have to pay to the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany in compensation for the imbalance which has occurred in the work-sharing on the Tornado project; if this sum will be paid in cash or in some other form; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: The most recently published estimate of United Kingdom under-payments against her cost liability is approximately £250 million. If this imbalance continues to the end of the programme, it may be necessary for a cash payment to be made. However, means of reducing the imbalance such as the possibility of work transfers to the United Kingdom are kept under regular review and will be implemented wherever practicable.

41. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning export prospects for the Tornado aeroplane.

Mr. Butler: British Aerospace is currently pursuing several export prospects for the Tornado, with strong Government support, which we hope will prove successful.

Marconi Radar

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the problems encountered with the Marconi radar intended for the Nimrod mk. III aircraft; and when he expects them to be overcome.

Mr. Butler: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 29 October, at column 854.

Air Defence Network

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current effectiveness of the United Kingdom air defence network.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 409-412 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984".

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said on 29 October, at column 854, it is taking longer than originally anticipated to commission the Nimrod airborne early-warning aircraft.

Trident Missile

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the offset agreements with the United States of America on the Trident programme.

Mr. Butler: There is no offset agreement. Given the strategic nature of the project, there was no question of guaranteeing United Kingdom industry a specific proportion of the work. The industrial participation arrangements negotiated when the UK decided to purchase the Trident II missile do, however, permit United Kingdom industry to compete for Trident II subcontracts, in support of both United States and United Kingdom requirements, on equal terms with their United States counterparts.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many British firms have made bids for component work on the Trident programme.

Mr. Butler: Up to the end of June 1984, the last period for which we have data, 107 United Kingdom firms had been invited to bid for contracts on the United States Trident II programme. Of these, only 37 made bids.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts have been won by United Kingdom companies and which contracts for component work on the Trident programme; and what is the estimated value of these contracts collectively and individually.

Mr. Butler: Twenty six contracts on the United States Trident II programme have been placed with 21 United Kingdom firms for a wide variety of products ranging from those requiring basic engineering skills to those incorporating high technology. The estimated total value of these contracts is just over $14 million. Many of the contracts are for initial quantities with potential follow-on orders. It is not the practice to give details of individual contracts.

Mr. Douglas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number and value of orders secured by United Kingdom contractors for the Trident II missile system and the percentage of total orders coming to the United Kingdom to date.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Member for Kingston Upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). Information on the percentage of total orders coming to the United Kingdom is not available.

50. **Mr. Bermingham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated annual running costs, as opposed to the procurement costs, of the Trident system.

30. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated annual running costs, as opposed to the procurement costs, of the Trident system.

Mr. Heseltine: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) on 24 July at column *807*.

31. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the latest estimate of the cost of the Trident missile system.

43. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is yet able to announce a revised cost for the Trident programme.

46. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of the Trident programme; and what estimate he now makes of the amount of equipment included in the programme which will be purchased in the United Kingdom.

59. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest available estimated cost of the Trident programme.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

53. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the recent public expenditure review has affected his calculations on the ability to finance the Trident II missile system.

Mr. Heseltine: The Trident programme, in line with all Defence programmes, is under review as part of the annual recosting exercise.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts were made by his Department to procure contracts for United Kingdom firms on the Trident II programme.

Mr. Butler: The agreement enabling United Kingdom firms to compete for sub-contract work formed part of the arrangements for the purchase of the United States Trident II (D5) weapon system programme signed in March 1982.

My Department subsequently established an office in London in order to advise British industry how best to approach the programme. Working closely with the major United Kingdom trade associations, an inaugural briefing was staged in London in May 1982 with United States participation and under the chairmanship of my predecessor. Further industry briefing sessions were made throughout 1982 including at the SBAC Farnborough 1982 Air Show and at local offices of the Department of Industry.

In June 1982, at the Ministry of Defence's request, a "Guide for Potential Sub-contractors" was published by the United States project office advising firms how to seek sub-contracts on the Trident programme, and listing the specific points of contact in the United States. It is estimated that 1,500 United Kingdom firms have been made aware of the programme, the majority by direct briefing.

Negotiations between my Department and the United States Government have successfully removed many of the barriers which frequently deter United Kingdom defence manufacturers from marketing in the United States. Most notable was the United States agreement, exceptionally, to waive the International Traffic in Arms Regulations.

As the participation programme has developed the MOD has maintained a close contact on opportunities open to United Kingdom firms with the United States prime contractors, and has arranged for them to send representatives to the United Kingdom in order to assess United Kingdom firms' capabilities.

The programme entered the full scale engineering development phase in October 1983 and the selection of sub-contractors is expected to be largely complete by the end of 1985. The office set up in London continues to offer advice and assistance to United Kingdom industry and will be closely monitoring the progress of our firms.

NATO (Conventional Weapons)

Mr. Douglas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department proposes to meet a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation commitment to increase expenditure on conventional weapons.

Mr. Stanley: By the next financial year the Government will have raised defence expenditure to a level about one fifth higher in real terms that it was in 1978-79. This increase in expenditure has gone overwhelmingly to our conventional forces. We will continue to look for ways of releasing additional resources through greater efficiency, economy and competition.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a copy of his letter of 29 November to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes.

"Dear George,

You wrote to me on 14th November about HMS CONQUEROR'S control room log.

In my answer of 13th November to your written Question, I explained very fully the circumstances in which my Department and I became aware that HMS CONQUEROR'S control room log for this period of the Falklands Campaign was missing. I totally reject your suggestions that indications of the log's disappearance were available earlier or that there was any sinister motive behind an official asking to see the log.

On your second point, although I cannot confirm precisely the information contained in the control room log, since it is not available, I would expect it to contain details of HMS CONQUEROR's movements on 3rd May 1982. Indeed, as both Lord Trefgarne and I explained on 7th November, the log would contain routine readings of latitude and longitude, distance run, course, speed and depth, information which Lord Trefgarne was quite right to maintain would be of no value in the discussions that have been proceeding since the sinking of the Belgrano. As he and I also said, the submarine's operational activities were fully recorded in the Captain's narrative account. I also reject the suggestion that the Government has refused to detail the movements of HMS CONQUEROR on 3rd May: this was covered in the Annex to the Prime Minister's letter to you of 19th September.

On the question of why the control room log was not submitted to Flag Officer Submarines with the Captain's account, I hoped that I had made it clear that, at the conclusion of a patrol, a submarine commander forwards to the appropriate authorities such detailed records as are needed for analysis. These do not normally include the control room log, which is retained on board the submarine until sent to my Department's records office. As Flag Officer Submarines had a detailed daily account of HMS CONQUEROR's operations during the Falklands Campaign, there was no reason for him to ask to see the control room log.

You also asked if I was content with the response of my officials in October to the apparent disappearance of the control room log. I can confirm I am entirely happy that they, and the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, took such action as was necessary to deal with the matter.

Finally, I have nothing to add for the moment to my undertaking to consider making a statement once the report of the

Board of Inquiry was available and had been considered by Commander-in-Chief Fleet and the Ministry of Defence. I can assure you that the matter is being dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

Michael Heseltine"

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what documents were submitted to the Flag Officer Submarines by the commander of HMS Conqueror on his return to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: I understand that the documents submitted to Flag Officer Submarines by the commanding officer of HMS Conqueror were his report of proceedings including, inter alia, his narrative account.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the collection of documents and information from members of the crew of HMS Conqueror during the two weeks spent in Faslane after its return from the Falklands campaign; and if the procedures used on that occasion represent the normal practice in respect of fleet submarines returning from patrol.

Mr. Stanley: I understand that on her return to Faslane HMS Conqueror landed technical information and data for analysis in the usual way. It is standard practice to ensure that maximum value is derived from each submarine patrol for future operations. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 20 November, at column 84.

16. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence why he has now referred the diary written by a member of the crew of HMS Conqueror during the Falklands war to the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: As I told the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 30 November, a copy of a diary which apparently was kept by a member of the crew of HMS Conqueror is in the possession of my Department. The diary contains classified information and it appears that its contents have been communicated to persons not authorised to receive such information. This constitutes a prima facie breach of the Official Secrets Acts. In the circumstances of this case my Department considered that it was a matter for reference to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

20. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the crew of HMS Conqueror on 1 July 1982 have now left the Royal Navy.

Mr. Heseltine: Two officers and six ratings.

Airborne Early Warning

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the remaining Shackleton airborne early warning squadrons; and which system he expects to provide radar defence against low level attack in 12 months, 24 months and 36 months from now.

Mr. Stanley: [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *296*]: The Shackleton continues to provide a useful AEW capability, but it is an elderly aircraft which is increasingly difficult to maintain. The timing of the disbandment of the Shackleton AEW force in relation to the coming into service of the Nimrod AEW has yet to be decided.

Martin Kettrick

14. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has given any further consideration to the case of Martin Kettrick, the disabled ex-Marine.

Mr. Lee: The case of ex-corporal Kettrick, Royal Marines, is still under consideration. In view of the complexities of the issues involved I cannot yet say when a decision will be made.

Flexible Response and Forward Defence

15. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a definition of flexible response and forward defence.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the essay entitled "NATO Strategy" in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983".

Multi-launch Rocket System

17. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the multi-launch rocket system for the Army.

Mr. Butler: We hope shortly to place a firm production order for MLRS phase I launchers and rockets with a European consortium consisting of United Kingdom, French, German and Italian firms. A contract for the development of MLRS phase III was awarded on 29 November by the United States Government on behalf of itself, the United Kingdom, France and Germany to an international consortium consisting of firms from each of those countries.

Hong Kong

18. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of British military personnel based in Hong Kong at the latest available date.

Mr. Stanley: At the end of September there were a little over 9,000 British military personnel in Hong Kong.

Military Training (Reorganisation)

19. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the proposed reorganisation of military training.

Mr. Stanley: I am not aware of any on the reorganisation as a whole, but a number of letters have been received on specific local effects of the reorganisation.

Space-based Anti-ballistic Missile Technology

21. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will support the deployment of space-based anti-ballistic missile technology should it prove technically feasible.

35. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will support the deployment of a space-based anti-ballistic missile technology should it prove technically feasible.

Mr. Stanley: The United Kingdom is consulting closely with the United States and other allies on the

current research programmes by the United States of America and the Soviet Union into ballistic missile defence systems. Decisions on deployment are some years away.

Type 22 Frigates

22. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is yet in a position to announce the yards that will build the new type 22 frigates.

Mr. Lee: Not yet.

Cruise Missiles

23. **Mr. Jack Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to change the security precautions for exercises involving cruise convoys.

57. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is proposing any changes in the security precautions relating to exercises of cruise convoys.

Mr. Stanley Security precautions always remain under review.

Shoeburyness (Departmental Services)

24. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress there has been in the putting out to tender of the services at his Department's establishment in Shoeburyness.

Mr. Lee: I cannot usefully add to the answer I gave on 15 November at column *344*, in which I indicated that tenders would be invited early in the new year.

RAF Molesworth and Alconbury

25. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the development of RAF Molesworth and RAF Alconbury.

Mr. Stanley: ON RAF Molesworth I cannot at present add to my answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 29 October at column *854*.

RAF Alconbury is scheduled to be developed in support of the deployment of TRI tactical reconnaissance aircraft with construction planned to begin next year.

Allied Command Europe

28. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Her Majesty's Government will consider with other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries the establishment of a separate Allied Command Europe mobile force to defend the European southern flank.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. NATO plans for the defence of the area involve the deployment of dedicated reinforcements, largely American. The existing Allied Command Europe mobile force also has deployment options on the southern flank.

Trainer Aircraft and Support Helicopters

29. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much weight he intends to attach to *(a)* the opinions expressed by hon. Members as to the merits of light trainer aircraft and light support helicopters prior to his placing orders on behalf of the Royal Air Force and *(b)* the opinions expressed by professional aeronautical engineers.

Mr. Butler: Full consideration is always given to the views of hon. Members on such matters and to those of professional aeronautical engineers, including those who work in the Ministry of Defence. Before orders are placed, all relevant factors including performance, price, industrial and sales implications will be analysed fully.

Naval Construction Work

32. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his ordering plans for naval construction work.

Mr. Lee: In the next year it is planned to order the following ships: two type 22 frigates (22-13 and 14), the first of the Trident class SSBNs, a nuclear-powered fleet submarine SSN19, two mine counter-measure vessels (MCMV 12 and 13), the first of class of the single-role minehunter and the second Upholder class conventional submarine. For the years beyond 1985 there are firm plans to order three more Trident submarines, six of the new one-stop replenishment ship the AOR, and Upholder class submarines at the rate of about one per annum. Further type 23 frigates will be ordered once the build of class, HMS Norfolk, is sufficiently advanced, with the order for 02 expected in about 18 months' time.

Exercise Brave Defender 1985

36. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether county military headquarters will be deployed to their wartime locations with local authorities during Exercise Brave Defender 1985.

Mr. Stanley: No.

RAF (Central Region)

38. **Mr. Soley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the air defence needs of the Royal Air force in the central region for 1990 and beyond.

Mr. Butler: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 27 November at column *411*.

Northern Ireland (Irish Regiments)

39. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the stationing of Irish regiments in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Lee: Irish regiments have not generally been deployed in Northern Ireland for a variety of reasons, not least the additional strain this would place on soldiers and their families. It is not our policy to comment on future deployments.

COCOM

40. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards COCOM and defence sales to China.

Mr. Butler: The Government take a positive attitude towards defence sales to China, wherever this is compatible with our wider political, strategic and security considerations and our COCOM obligations.

ALARM Missile System

42. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the development of export sales potential for the planned ALARM missile system.

Mr. Butler: The Defence Sales Organisation has examined the export sales potential of ALARM and concluded that there should be a significant market for it. We are assisting British Aerospace in its promotion overseas.

European Fighter Aircraft

44. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning progress on the European fighter aircraft.

56. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a decision on the proposed European fighter aircraft.

63. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the future of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Butler: The technical and industrial feasibility study of the European fighter aircraft is well under way. The industries of the participating countries which are carrying out the studies are required to complete their work in time for officials to submit a report to the five Defence Ministers for their consideration at a meeting next March. It is hoped that the studies will provide an acceptable basis from which to proceed with a collaborative procurement programme.

Defence Sales (Brazil)

45. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing defence sales to Brazil.

Mr. Butler: The Brazilian authorities and defence industries are currently interested in a number of United Kingdom defence equipments. If many of these are eventually purchased, we should see an increase in United Kingdom defence exports against levels for recent years.

Nuclear Weapons (Ministerial Control)

47. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he has made in the arrangements for ministerial control of nuclear weapons as a result of experience gained during the Falklands conflict and its aftermath.

Mr. Heseltine: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to discuss the details of arrangements for ministerial control of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear Missiles

48. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear missiles he estimates to be targeted in the direction of the United Kingdom by the Soviet Union and its allies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman).

Naval Dockyards

49. **Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish his consultative document on the future of the naval dockyards.

Mr. Lee: It is likely that we will produce a consultative document when we have completed our present deliberations, assuming they result in radical proposals for change.

Flexible Response and Forward Defence

51. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a definition of flexible response and forward defence.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

FH70 Propellant

52. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will explain why the FH70 propellant order has been given to firms in Germany.

Mr. Butler: The agreement between the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Italy sets out each partner's entitlement to production work within the FH70 programme. The United Kingdom has benefited from an excess of work over its entitlement under that agreement while Germany is in deficit. We are obliged, therefore, to place any new orders in such a way as to aim to restore each partner's work share to the agreed entitlements.

Exercise Lionheart

54. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many foreign flag vessels were chartered for Exercise Lionheart.

Mr. Stanley: Ten foreign flag vessels were chartered for Exercise Lionheart.

Defence Budget

55. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are his proposals for controlling the cost of the defence budget.

Mr. Heseltine: The range of measures in hand to control defence budget costs and to promote the efficient use of defence resources was described in chapter 2 of the "Statement on Defence Estimates 1984" (Cmnd. 9227).

Expenditure

58. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of conventional defence spending.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) earlier today.

Falkland Islands (Free Airmail Letters)

60. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the privilege of free airmail letters to servicemen in the Falklands is to be continued.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot on 5 December 1984 at c. *181*.

NATO (Weapons Systems)

66. **Mr. Malone** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's attempts to harmonise its weapons systems.

Mr. Butler: There is general recognition within NATO of the need to make faster progress in harmonising weapons systems. In support of this overall NATO effort, European Defence Ministers have recently endorsed initiatives aimed at establishing a more systematic approach to harmonisation. These initiatives include a study of future equipment needs in order to identify areas where common requirements might be drawn up and which might form a basis for collaborative procurement.

Defence Review

67. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will consider undertaking a defence review in the near future.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

NATO Training (Weapons)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to whether, despite the fact that no North Atlanic Treaty Organisation field training exercise this autumn contained a nuclear phase, any weapons capable of being used in a nuclear rôle were moved in connection with, or as a consequence of, any of these exercises.

Mr. Stanley: In the course of NATO exercises, a range of weapons systems may be moved for training purposes, and some of these may be nuclear-capable. Security considerations however preclude my detailing the involvement of particular systems in particular exercises.

South Atlantic

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the Royal Navy current operations budget is now tied to the south Atlantic.

Mr. Stanley: The breakdown of the running costs of the Falklands garrison into its individual components is classified. However, the total running costs of the garrison in 1984-85, excluding capital works and equipment but including the running costs of naval support and of the airbridge, is estimated at some £185 million or just over 1 per cent. of the defence budget.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men are currently based on the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 12 July 1983 at c. *303*.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Brazilian Government for the provision of landing facilities for the Royal Air Force aircraft servicing the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Stanley: Brazil accepts aircraft diverted there in an emergency, as we would expect any other country to do.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is a condition precedent to consideration by Her Majesty's Government of awarding the basic jet trainer contract to Shorts that the Brazilian Government grants landing facilities for Royal Air Force aircraft servicing the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Butler: No.

Mr. McNamra asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is a condition precedent to consideration by Her Majesty's Government of awarding the basic trainer contract to Shorts that the Brazilian Government grants landing facilities for civil aircraft servicing the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Butler: No.

Lemnos (Militarisation)

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement upon the effect which the militarisation of Lemnos by Greece has had upon the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation alliance and Britain's defence relations with Greece and Turkey.

Mr. Stanley: The military status of Lemnos is a matter of dispute between Greece and Turkey. Both NATO and the United Kingdom have taken an even-handed approach and have urged the two countries to resolve their differences bilaterally. But their disagreements have, nevertheless, affected NATO's ability to conduct exercises in the Aegean. Our defence relations with Greece and Turkey remain unaffected.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information on the course and position of the General Belgrano was available to Ministers in his Department between 30 April 1982 and 3 May 1982; and from the information now available to him, if the information available to Northwood on 30 April to 3 May differed from that available to him.

Mr. Stanley: HMS Conqueror reported the course and position of General Belgrano to the Flag Officer Submarines at Northwood on a number of occasions between first sighting General Belgrano on 1 May 1982 and attacking her on 2 May. There is no evidence that these reports, which were not relevant to the threat represented by General Belgrano, were made known to

Ministers at the time. On the general question of information in relation to the Belgrano I refer the hon. Members to paragraph 6 of the letter that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to the hon. Member on 19 September.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence at what time Admiral Woodward learned of the visual contact which HMS Conqueror had established with the General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Capital Grants

Mr. Bellingham asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now give details of the changes in farm capital grants promised in his statement of 12 November, *Official Report*, column 138.

Mr. Jopling: We have today laid statutory instruments before Parliament modifying the agriculture and horticulture grants scheme, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Scheme (AHDS) and the farm and horticulture development scheme. These will produce the savings of £40 million in 1985-86 announced on 12 November. The changes will come into effect immediately in respect of expenditure under the AHGS incurred after 11 December, and new applications or variations under the AHDS, and variations under the FHDS, received after that date.

The changes, which are detailed in the following schedule, relate almost wholly to the AHGS. In the lowlands, the standard AHGS rate of grant will now be 15 per cent. We shall, however, maintain the enhanced rates for the replacement and improvement of heated glasshouses (37½ per cent.) and for apple and pear orchard replanting (22½ per cent.). For the planting of hedges and the construction of walls using traditional materials we are increasing grant rates to 30 per cent.

In the less-favoured areas, the standard rate of AHGS grant will be 30 per cent. For buildings, electricity or gas supplies and waste disposal systems we are retaining the present rate of 20 per cent. We are reducing grant rates for roads from 40 to 20 per cent. in severely disadvantaged areas and from 20 to 15 per cent. in the marginal areas. The enhanced rates of 60 per cent. introduced last year for hedges, traditional walls and shelter belts in the LFAs are unchanged. We have, however, decided that, in the interests of achieving a better balance between agriculture and conservation, grant should not be available for land clearance. Moreover, land reclamation will now be assisted in Northern Ireland only where it is essential to maintaining farm incomes. Operations such as the removal of tree stumps and other obstacles to cultivation, land levelling or grading and deep ploughing are no longer eligible for grant in Great Britain. These changes apply also for new applications and variations to approved development plans under the FHDS and AHDS. Grant will, however, continue to be available in the less-favoured areas for other land improvement operations such as reseeding and regeneration, the laying down of permanent pasture, bracken control and the regeneration of heather.

For the AHGS alone, the ceiling on the amount of investment which may be grant-aided will be halved, except for the special aid for heated glasshouses and orchard replanting where it remains unchanged. The limit per labour unit will be £25,000 and the overall business limit over six years £50,000. These reductions will apply to expenditure incurred after 11 December 1984.

The only changes under the development schemes (FHDS and AHDS) will be the exclusion of the same land reclamation items now excluded under the AHGS and reductions in the rate of grant for field drainage from 70 to 50 per cent. in the less-favoured areas and from 50 to 32½ per cent. in the lowlands.

In making these changes we are reflecting the Government's declared aim of achieving a closer integration of conservation and agricultural policies through high rates of grant for certain agricultural works of particular benefit to the environment and the exclusion of land clearance and, except in Northern Ireland, reclamation works. We are, however, maintaining the policy of paying enhanced rates of grant in the less-favoured areas in recognition of the natural hardships which they suffer.

When the new capital grants schemes are introduced in 1985 to implement the new EC farm structures policy currently being negotiated in Brussels, we are determined to maintain a level of capital investment support which will enable the industry to preserve its competitive strength. This will take particular account of the needs of the livestock sector, especially in the hills. It is also our intention to introduce further measures to help conservation and to encourage farmers to diversify into non-farming enterprises.

Schedule of changes to the Capital Grant Schemes

	Standard rate		*Less favoured areas rate*		*Horticultural business rate*	
	Percentage		*Percentage*		*Percentage*	
A. EEC Scheme (AHDS)						
Field drainage	32·5	(50)	50	(70)	32·5	(50)
B. National Scheme (AHGS)						
Provision of:						
agricultural buildings	15	(20)	20	(20)	15	(20)
buildings for drying and storage of grain for consumption solely by livestock kept on land	15	(20)	20	(20)	NIL	(NIL)
The replacement of or other improvement to existing horticultural production buildings (including thermal insulation)	NIL	(NIL)	NIL	(NIL)	15	(20)
Waste disposal systems	15	(20)	20	(20)	15	(20)
Electricity or gas supply	15	(20)	20	(20)	15	(20)

	Standard rate		Less favoured areas rate		Horticultural business rate	
	Percentage		Percentage		Percentage	
Water supply and storage	15	(20)	30	(50)	15	(20)
Field drainage	15	(30)	30	(60)	15	(30)
Flood protection works	15	(20)	30	(50)	15	(20)
(In Scotland only—arterial only)	40	(50)	50	(60)	NIL	(NIL)
Land works:						
roads, paths etc.	15	(20)	20	(40)	15	(20)
pens, dips, stells etc.	15	(20)	30	(50)	NIL	(NIL)
hedges; walls and dykes built of traditional, local material; and associated gates	30	(20)	60	(60)	30	(20)
permanent fences; walls and dykes not built of traditional, local materials; and associated gates	15	(20)	30	(50)	15	(20)
shelter belts	NIL	(NIL)	60	(60)	15	(20)
grassland and heather regeneration	NIL	(NIL)	30	(50)	NIL	(NIL)
in Northern Ireland only—land reclamation	NIL	(NIL)	30	(50)	NIL	(NIL)
orchard grubbing	15	(20)	15	(20)	15	(20)
stakes and wirework for hop gardens	15	(20)	15	(20)	NIL	(NIL)
watercress beds	NIL	(NIL)	NIL	(NIL)	15	(20)

Notes:

(a) Land clearance and reclamation works are no longer eligible for grant in Great Britain under the AHDS and AHGS. In Northern Ireland the reclamation only, including the removal of obstructions to cultivation, is eligible in the less-favoured areas.

(b) The cumulative investment limit for eligible agricultural businesses under the AHGS has been halved from about £100,000 to about £50,000. For eligible horticultural businesses the rates of grant and the investment limits remain at £100,000 where the additional expenditure is on orchard replanting and £130,000 where the extra expenditure is for glasshouse energy conservation.

Milk

Mr. Spence asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many milk producers have so far decided to join the outgoers' scheme; and whether any more will now be invited to join.

Mr. MacGregor: To date, 1,060 producers have committed themselves to joining the scheme. The quota which they will surrender amounts to 109·5 million litres on a full year basis. This week we are sending out invitations to a further 261 producers who each have between 275,000 and 325,000 litres of quota, amounting to 78·1 million litres in total. As before, a small number have been excluded because milk production is a relatively small part of their overall farming enterprise.

Progress will be reviewed early in January and from then onwards further groups of producers will be invited to join the scheme each week in so far as this is necessary to offset the number not taking up earlier invitations. This process will continue until our target of 289 million litres is reached.

Mr. Latham asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current position regarding quotas over off-farm sales of retail milk or other dairy products such as butter, cheese or yoghurt by farmers; whether the quotas are to be made interchangeable with general quotas of milk sold to the Milk Marketing Board; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Producers who make direct sales of whole, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, butter, cream or cheese had to apply for direct sales quota by 28 August 1984. Yogurt is not covered by the milk quota arrangements.

Estimates of primary direct sales quota have now been issued to over 90 per cent. of the 3,454 applicants. It is hoped that the remainder will receive their notifications shortly.

Under the terms of the Community regulations quota arrangements for direct sales are dealt with quite separately from those for wholesale deliveries to a purchaser. I consider that the regulations are rather too rigid in this respect and we are continuing to press in Brussels for greater flexibility. In the meantime, we intend to make use of the existing provisions which provide some limited measure of flexibility between the two types of quota. If a producer has more wholesale quota than he needs but not enough direct sales quota (or vice versa) he will be able to apply to the MMB to exchange some of his quota with a producer in the opposite position. The quota exchange system will be operated on the Ministry's behalf by the MMB.

The detailed arrangements are being finalised in discussions with the interests concerned and I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Beef and Lamb

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what change has taken place in consumer demand for beef and lamb, respectively, since 1979;

(2) what has been the percentage change in the retail price of beef and lamb, respectively, since 1979.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cereals

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the total imports of cereals to *(a)* the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and *(b)* China from (i) the EEC, (ii) the USA, (iii) Canada, (iv) Argentina and (v) Australia, for each of the years 1960, 1970, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Channon: Details of imports by the USSR and China by trading partner are not available. The available partner country export data are in the table.

	European Community†		USA		Canada		Argentina		Australia	
	US$M	'000's tonnes	US$M	'000's tonnes	US$M	'000's tonnes	US$M	'000's tonnes	US$M	'000's tonnes
Exports of Cereals to the USSR*										
1960	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‖	‖	‖	‖
1970	1	8	‡	‡	85	1,376	1	24	5	‖
1980	279	1,192	938	5,697	1,101	6,011	1,056	6,779	770	4,308
1981	494	2,262	1,554	9,004	1,443	7,976	‖	‖	342	1,886
1982	361	2,157	1,621	10,700	1,543	9,239	‖	‖	363	2,198
1983	579	4,218	1,191	7,382	1,318	7,461	‖	‖	‖	‖
Exports of Cereals to China*										
1960	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‖	‖	‖	‖
1970	17	447	‡	‡	119	2,008	3	55	123	‖
1980	23	138	1,264	7,384	451	2,668	119	666	326	2,018
1981	108	633	1,331	7,516	586	3,182	‖	‖	245	1,267
1982	104	706	1,236	7,997	597	3,459	‖	‖	345	2,217
1983	102	840	336	3,624	761	4,788	‖	‖	‖	‖

* Standard International Trade Classification groups 041-046.
† Present membership throughout.
‡ Indicates nil or less than half the final digit shown.
‖ Not readily available.
Source: OECD.
United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what were the total proceeds to the EEC of the 2,156,658 tonnes of cereal exports to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1982 and the average price per tonne of cereals sold to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1982 and 1983;

(2) what were the total proceeds to the EEC of the 706,415 tonnes of cereal exports to China in 1982 and the average price per tonne of cereals sold to China in 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Channon: In 1982 European Community exports of cereals to the USSR and China were valued at $360·8 million and $104·2 million respectively. Price details are in the table.

Cereals—Average price per tonne

	US million dollars European Community exports to	
	USSR	China
1982	167	147
1983	137	121

Source: OECD Trade Series 'C'.

Textiles

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the latest position regarding funds available from the European regional development fund non-quota textile measures allocations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) on 27 November 1984, at columns 434-36.

British Telecom

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grants have been received by British Telecom from the European regional development fund in each parliamentary constituency in the Lancashire, East Euro constituency since 1979.

Mr. Butcher: ERDF grants have been approved in respect of the following British Telecom projects in the Lancashire, East Euro constituency since 1979:

1. £98,100 in respect of a Rossendale region modernisation project in 1983.
2. £18,000 in respect of a Rossendale industrial development area project in 1984.

Both projects were located in the Rossendale and Darwen constituency.

Companies (Public Funds)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies which have been in receipt of public funds over the past 10 years have eventually gone into liquidation.

Mr. Fletcher: I regret that this information is not available.

Regional Aid (North-West)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effects he expects Her Majesty's Government's new policy on regional aid to have on unemployment in the north-west.

Mr. Trippier: The new policy is aimed at reducing regional imbalances in employment opportunities. The scale of the effect depends on industry's response to the incentives. It is not possible to forecast the impact on unemployment in particular areas.

French Cosmetic Product

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the French cosmetic product, the name of which has been supplied to him, has been licensed for sale in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fletcher: Cosmetics do not have to be licensed for sale in the United Kingdom, but they have to comply with the Cosmetic Products Regulations 1984. I have no knowledge of the product in question, but if the hon. Member would supply me with a sample, together with the reason why he is concerned about it, I will have it analysed.

Cargo Centre Development, Manchester

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration he gave to the implications for the viability of the cargo centre development at Manchester international airport in allowing new freight agencies to qualify for grant-aid within areas of Manchester but specifically excluding the airport.

Mr. Trippier: Agents facilitating freight transport will qualify under the new RDG scheme, which applies only to development areas. Decisions on qualifying activities were taken according to the likely effect on employment opportunities in the development areas as a whole; decisions on map coverage were based on areas' relative needs for employment opportunities. The Manchester TTWA is part non-assisted and part intermediate area, with the latter abutting other TTWAs which are also assisted. We included as much of the Manchester TTWA as was possible within a total map coverage of 35 per cent. of GB working population without excluding areas with a greater need.

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has seen copies of the telex exchanges between the Caribbean countries involved and the European Commissioner regarding the purchase of Super 748 aircraft for Leeward Islands Air Transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions the Minister for Trade had with Commonwealth Caribbean leaders when he attended the Caribbean Basin meeting in Miami, on the purchase of new turboprop aircraft for Leeward Islands Air Transport and the possibility of United Kingdom funding, in view of the European Community aid offer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *345*]: The matter was not raised with me by any of the Governments concerned. It is my understanding that Leeward Islands Air Transport and the Caribbean Development Bank are still in contact with the European Commission, but I am keeping the matter under close review.

West Midlands

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* which areas of the west midlands have been *(a)* downgraded and *(b)* upgraded as a result of his recent changes in regional aid.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

(a) No areas in the west midlands were downgraded.

(b) The following travel-to-work areas in the west midlands were designated intermediate areas: Birmingham, Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye (partly in South-West region), Coventry and Hinckley (partly East Midlands region), Dudley and Sandwell, Kidderminster, Telford and Bridgnorth, Walsall, Wolverhampton.

ENVIRONMENT

Falkland Islands (Vic Hallam Company)

69. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is satisfied with the work done by the Vic Hallam Company on building houses for his Department in the Falkland Islands.

Sir George Young: The Vic Hallam Company is currently providing prefabricated living accommodation for the new RAF camp at Mount Pleasant. The company is sub-contractor to the main contractor, the Laing-Mowlem-Amey Roadstone Construction joint venture. Responsibility for the satisfactory completion of this accommodation rests with the main contractor and I am satisfied that it can meet the specifications laid down in its contract.

Common Land

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the protection of common land in England.

Mr. Waldegrave: I recognise that there is some concern about the effects of deregistration of common land.

This and other matters relating to commons are currently being considered by the Common Land Forum, which was set up last January under the aegis of the Countryside Commission. We shall give careful consideration to any proposals, resulting from the forum's deliberations, concerning future protection of common land.

Town Planners (Manchester)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many qualified town planners were employed in the Manchester regional office of his Department on 31 July; how many were employed there on 1 November; and how many he estimates will be employed there by 1 April.

Mr. Macfarlane: Eight plus one part-time on each of the first two dates. One of this number will have retired by 1 April 1985. Arrangements are in hand to appoint a suitable replacement.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to take any action to enable London boroughs to reduce the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation; and whether he intends to propose legislation which will ensure that conditions in these hotels are satisfactory and safe.

Sir George Young: It is for individual authorities to decide on their own housing priorities within the resources available to them. The Government will continue to encourage them to concentrate resources on capital provision for those in greatest housing need, including the homeless, and to minimise the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We have encouraged also the use of empty property and I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 22 November, at column 284.

Authorities have ample powers to ensure satisfactory conditions amenities and safety in houses in multiple occupation. The need for further measures will be considered in the light of the outcome of the Department's current research into the use and condition of such accommodation.

Trafford Park Enterprise Zone

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total number of private sector jobs created as a result of the Trafford park enterprise zone since its creation; and if he will give the average cost of each new job created.

Sir George Young: From 12 August 1981 (the date of designation of the zone) to 31 May 1983, the consultants who surveyed the zones on behalf of the Department found that 54 firms and 730 jobs had been established in the Trafford park enterprise zone. By 31 December 1983 the consultants estimated that a further 152 jobs had been added. No distinction was made between jobs in the private sector and other sectors. As to the cost per job, I refer to my answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on 6 December, at column 238.

Water Authorities

Mr. Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the financial targets for 1985-86 of each water authority in England.

Mr. Macfarlane: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction is still discussing with the water authorities the individual financial targets to be set for 1985-86 within the announced policy of achieving an average rate of return of 1·4 per cent.

Hulme (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the recent visit by the Minister for Housing and Construction to the Hulme area of Manchester; and what action he now proposes to take following this visit.

Mr. Gow: The future of the Hulme estate is initially a matter for Manchester city council. The city council has made proposals for the estate in its housing investment programme submission for 1985-86, and these will be considered carefully before the housing capital allocation is decided.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the section 137 entitlement and expenditure for 1982-83 for each local authority in England.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today placed copies of the information requested in the Libraries.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of jobs filled in each enterprise zone; and whether any further enterprise zones are being planned.

Sir George Young: The consultant who monitored progress in the first 11 zones reported the following, on the basis of surveys carried out between the date of designation of the zones and 31 May 1983 (the figures in brackets show their estimate of the number of jobs added in the period 31 May—31 December 1983):

Enterprise Zone	*Net increase in jobs up to 31 May 1983*	
Belfast	332	(169)
Clydebank	1,637	(544)
Corby	1,591	(494)
Dudley	523	(118)
Hartlepool	476	(137)
Isle of Dogs	353	(451)
Salford/Trafford	1,052	(462)
Speke	453	(134)
Swansea	1,046	(172)
Tyneside	446	(187)
Wakefield	156	(17)
Totals	8,065	(2,885)

We are currently collecting data about progress in these 11 zones since 31 May 1983 and on the 14 zones designated after that date.

We have no plans at present to create further enterprise zones.

Humberside County Council

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much is in the balances, capital receipts fund, repairs and renewals fund and any other similar fund of Humberside county council; from whence those resources come; and how much has come from underspends on budgets in previous years, giving each years figures since 1981.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following is the information supplied by Humberside county council on annual outturn returns:

	Balances at end of year: £ million			
	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Rate fund revenue accounts	18·1	10·5	..	2·4
Capital accounts	0·7	—	0·1	−1·1
Special and Capital Funds	1·0	3·7	21·2	17·9

A full explanation of the source of these balances can be obtained only from the authority concerned.

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what the total budget of Humberside county council was for 1983-84 and 1984-85, respectively; by how much the county council has underspent in each year; if he will give the figures for underspend in each underspending department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following is the readily available information for Humberside county council, based on "total" expenditure for block grant purposes (expenditure to be raised from block grant, rates and rate fund balances).

	Budget £ Million	*Outturn £ million*
1983-84	317·7	316·6
1984-85	318·7	not available

Lordlords (Compensation)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why he has decided to increase with effect from 25 December the compensation payable to landlords whose property is the subject of a control order by their local council.

Sir George Young: Section 78 of the Housing Act 1964, as amended, imposes a duty on local authorities to pay compensation, fixed by reference to rateable values, to landlords who are dispossessed by a control order. The last rating revaluation took place in 1973. The level of compensation was adjusted in 1981 by Statutory Instrument 1981/781. S.I. 1984/1629 takes account of the change in values since then.

Multiple Occupation Houses (Safety Precautions)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on means of escape from fire in houses of multiple occupation.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce legislation to strengthen fire and other safety provisions for houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Gow: The Government have considered carefully the representations for, and the implications of, an extension to the scope of the Housing (Means of Escape from Fire in Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order (SI 1981/1576). The Government have decided that it would not be appropriate to increase the statutory duties of local authorities at the present time. Local authorities already have powers to require adequate means of escape from fire in houses in multiple occupation and my right hon. Friend looks to them to exercise that power in the light of their knowledge of their area and the resources available to them.

Homeless People

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what allowance he intends to make in allocating capital for housing in 1985-86 for the number of homeless people in Greater London;

(2) what assistance he has offered to councils in Greater London to reduce the number of homeless persons;

(3) what assistance he has offered to councils in Greater London to help reduce their dependence on bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people.

Sir George Young: My Department makes substantial capital allocations to London and other authorities. In making the allocations, regard is paid to the homelessness indicator in the generalised needs index and to information about homelessness provided by authorities. Allocations may be used at authorities' discretion for new building, bringing empty property into use and certain other measures which would reduce dependence on bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

London (Housing)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of housing starts by the Greater London council and each London borough in 1978-79 and each subsequent year; and what is the estimate for the current year.

Sir George Young: Figures of dwellings started for these housing authorities in each calendar year, appear in "Local Housing Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library. The relevant issues are listed below:

	Number
1978	49
1979	59
1980	57, 59-62
1981	65
1982	66
1983	70
1984*	71

* First half of 1984.

The Department has made no estimates of house building starts for the year 1984.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he has made to inform the London boroughs and metropolitan district councils about the proposed financial arrangements to follow the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department has recently written to the chief executives of all London boroughs and metropolitan district councils about the proposals. Copies of these letters have been placed in the Library.

Acid Rain

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds his Department is spending on research into acid deposition in the current financial year; how much is expected to be spent next year; if he will list the projects involved, where known; and how much of this represents moneys allocated to basic research and applied research, respectively.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend expects to spend approximately £1·5 million on acid deposition research and monitoring in the current financial year; the projects involved are listed below.

An increase of about £1 million in this total is being planned for 1985-86 to be spent largely on additional monitoring and on research into the effects of acid deposition.

Most of the Department's research is aimed at solving pollution problems and should therefore be classified as applied, although some basic supporting research is also necessary.

Project and Contractor

Warren Spring Laboratory

1. Monitoring, atmospheric measurement and modelling of acid components and precursors.

AERE, Harwell

2. Atmospheric chemistry, modelling of photo-oxidants and acid components.

NERC, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Edinburgh

3. Effects of acid deposition on plants and soils.

Macaulay Institute for Soil Research

4. Effects of acid deposition on upland soils and streams.

DAFS, Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory

5. Effects of acidification on the fauna of lakes and streams in Scotland.

University of Loughborough

6. Chemical inputs from precipitation and their effects on the chemistry of a catchment area.

Imperial College

7. Combined impact of acid deposition and ozone.

Welsh Water Authority/NERC

8. Effect of different land management regimes on water acidity, fish stocks and freshwater biota in 5 catchment areas in Wales.

AERE, Harwell

9. Modelling of acid deposition and photo-oxidants.

Imperial College

10. Effects of acid deposition and ozone on trees.

North West Water Authority/NERC

11. Effects of acidification on freshwater biota in the Rivers Esk and Duddon, Cumbria.

NERC/AERE

12. Effects of acid mists and fogs at altitude, Great Dun Fell, Cumbria.

National Physical Laboratory/BRE

13. Controlled exposure studies of economic materials.

Freshwater Bodies (Acidification)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the freshwater bodies in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales which have become acidified (i) to the point where fish populations have been killed off and (ii) to the point where fish populations and other aquatic life are in serious danger.

Mr. Waldegrave: Precise information is not available to enable the details requested by the right hon. Gentleman to be provided. My Department has therefore recently established a group of experts to review the availability and quality of information on (i) the extent and degree of acidity in surface waters in the United Kingdom and (ii) the status of freshwater fisheries; to review the geological and hydrological factors in a catchment area; to advise on the need for additional data; and to assess the implications of the foregoing for freshwater fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. The group is expected to report in the next 18 months to two years.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has to show that emissions of sulphur dioxide or nitrous oxides from fossil fuel-fired power stations are affecting the acidity of freshwater bodies in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that acidification of freshwater bodies in some areas is, in part, associated with emissions either now or in the past of sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen from combustion processes including power stations. It is not possible to relate specific damage to specific emission sources in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

The extent of acidification of freshwaters in Scotland, England and Wales and the causes of acidification are being assessed by an expert group set up by my Department.

Vegetation (Ozone Damage)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is aware of any damage to vegetation in the United Kingdom by ozone in recent years; and what research is in progress on this topic.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. Research over the last 10 years has shown that summer time ambient ozone levels in rural southern England can cause visible foliar injury and reductions in growth of some crop species. My Department is currently funding research on the effects of ozone on trees and crops through Imperial College (who also receive funds from the Natural Environment Research Council and the Commission of the European Communities for this purpose). I understand that the CEGB also funds work in this area.

Air Pollution (Crops and Trees)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum his Department is planning to spend in the next financial year on air pollution damage to crops and trees in the United Kingdom; and how the sum compares with the amount spent in the current financial year.

Mr. Waldegrave: Expenditure by the Department on research into the effects of air pollution on crops and trees in the United Kingdom is expected to exceed £300,000 in 1985-86. About £250,000 will be spent in the current financial year.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the fall in total sulphur dioxide emissions from United Kingdom sources *(a)* between 1970 and 1980 and *(b)* from 1980 to date, has been because of reductions in emissions from Central Electricity Board power stations.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will answer this question shortly.

Acid Deposition (Power Stations)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the contribution from emissions from fossil fuel-fired power stations in the United Kingdom to the total acid deposition in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will answer this question shortly.

EMPLOYMENT

Community Programme

68. **Ms. Richardson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what effect the new eligibility criteria for entrants to community programme schemes which have been introduced are expected to have on the level of participation by married women in the scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The number who will be affected by the decision to give priority to those people who meet the programme's criteria for long-term unemployment and are also benefit recipients will vary according to changing personal and family circumstances. Married women may claim benefit in their own right and we have provided that

where benefit is claimed by a head of household and includes an element of payment for an unemployed spouse, that spouse will also be regarded as a benefit recipient.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Paddy Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Employment how the Manpower Services Commission defines special training needs in the context of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Youngsters with special training needs are not separately categorised. An offer of a suitable place on the youth training scheme is guaranteed to all eligible minimum age school leavers regardless of their individual ability. Where necessary, special provision is made for disabled youngsters, many of whom will have special training needs.

Unemployment

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement of the likely future trends on long-term unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department does not make forecasts of trends in unemployment. However changes in long-term unemployment tend to lag behind changes in total unemployment and it is therefore likely that long-term unemployment may continue to increase for some time after total unemployment stabilises.

Engineering Apprenticeships

Mr. Cunliffe asked the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he had made of assistance given to the engineering industry training board by the Greater Manchester council of additional funding to provide engineering apprenticeships during the last two years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I understand that the engineering industry training board's involvement is limited to the provision of information about trainees to Greater Manchester council, and that the board receives no direct assistance. My Department has made no assessment of this co-operation, which is a matter between the council and the board.

Adult Training

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many adult training places are available for each 100,000 of the work force, by region, in 1984-85; and how many he expects to be available in 1985-86.

Mr. Peter Morrison: For each 100,000 of the work force I estimate that the following numbers of people will benefit from our locally run adult training programmes:

	1984-85	*1985-86 Provisional*
Scotland	402	763
Northern	564	848
North West	420	755
Yorkshire and Humberside	326	652
Midlands	269	702
Wales	393	628
South West	294	677
South East	241	522
London	347	501

Skillcentres

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the expansion of the mobile instructor service announced as part of the proposals for the future of the skillcentre training agency.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The proposed expansion of the skillcentre training agency's mobile instructor force to around 300 staff would enable the agency to deliver training wherever and whenever employers needed it. The mobile force would concentrate on new technology skills which are vital to the country's future economic well-being. To keep the force up-to-date it is proposed that 100 of the staff should be recruited on short-term contracts.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give an assurance that, whenever possible, the instructional staff who will be affected by the proposed skillcentre closures will be retained so that their skills can be retained by the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison: If its proposals are agreed, the skillcentre training agency intends that 200 of the 300 instructors required for the greatly expanded mobile instructor force would come from among its existing instructors. The agency also intends that whenever possible it will retain instructors through retraining and re-deployment.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the effect of proposals for the future of the skillcentre training agency on its new technology training.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In 1985-86 the skillcentre training agency proposes to deliver 12 per cent. more new technology training in specialist classes—including that carried out in its new technology access centres—than this year. It would expect this upward trend to continue in 1986-87, both in skillcentres and through the expanded mobile instructor force, and is also increasingly incorporating new technology elements in other courses.

National Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his current policy in respect of the national dock labour scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the statements made in July that the Government have no plans to change or abolish the national dock labour scheme.

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he next proposes to meet representatives of the Transport and General Workers Union to discuss the implications for the national dock labour scheme of the proposed Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to discuss with the Transport and General Workers Union any views it may have on this matter, and no invitation to do so has been received from it.

Theatre Technicians

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about unemployment levels amongst theatre technicians.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available.

Noise Protection

Mr. Litherland asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the current protection of workers from noise; and if he will make a statement on the EEC directive on the wearing of hearing protection.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am satisfied that the Health and Safety Executive is taking effective action to secure the protection of workers from noise as described in the reply given by my predecessor to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 24 January 1984 at column 488.

The proposed EC directive, on the protection of workers from noise, is not concerned only with hearing protection, but the provision and wearing of hearing protection in work places where it is not reasonably practicable to limit exposure to an acceptable level by other means is an essential feature of it, as it would be of any domestic legislation on this subject. Negotiations on the proposed directive have been making progress, and are to be reviewed by the Social Affairs Council at its meeting on 13 December.

Construction Workers

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will indicate the number of unemployed construction workers in Great Britain.

Mr. Alan Clark: The 1983 labour force survey indicates that in the second quarter of 1983 some 250,000 persons whose previous job had been in the construction industry were without a paid job and seeking work.

Unemployment (London)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the present level and percentage rate of unemployment in London; and what are the comparable figures for blacks.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *360*]: The latest available information comes from the 1983 labour force survey which provides the following provisional estimates for the Greater London area, for the second quarter of 1983.

	Out of employment (Thousand)	*Out of employment as a proportion of economically active (per cent.)*
All ethnic origins	300	9
Non-white ethnic origin	75	15

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outstanding problems of verification with regard to recent resolutions at the United Nations calling for a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Luce: We believe that for a test ban to command general acceptance it must contain adequate safeguards against the danger of non-compliance by any of its signatory parties. This position was reflected in our voting on recent resolutions at the United Nations. As a first step towards ensuring that compliance with a comprehensive test ban is adequately verifiable, current techniques of seismic verification, on which monitoring of such a treaty would depend, require significant improvement. We have played an active part, including the tabling in 1983 of an important working paper, in discussions of verification aspects of the CTB at the Geneva conference on disarmament. We shall continue to do so.

Lemnos (Militarisation)

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement upon the militarisation of the island of Lemnos by Greece, and the effect that that will have upon Anglo-Greek and Anglo-Turkish relations.

Mr. Renton: The question of the militarisation of the island of Lemnos has been a matter of long-standing dispute between Greece and Turkey. Britain is an ally of both countries. We hope that they will soon be able to resolve this and other disputes relating to the Aegean.

Treaty of Lausanne

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the excercise by the United Kingdom of its obligations under the treaty of Lausanne as it affects the Aegean.

Mr. Renton: The treaty of peace with Turkey signed at Lausanne in 1923 is wide-ranging and covers many issues of relevance to the Aegean. We have no reason to believe that we are not adequately discharging any obligation which the treaty may still impose upon us.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Students (Statistics)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female undergraduate students following degree courses in England and Wales, the number who receive a mandatory grant award and the number who receive dependants' additions to their basic grant award; and, of these numbers, how many students' dependants' awards are made in relation to dependent children.

Mr. Brooke: In 1982-83 there were 192,000 male and 150,000 female full-time and sandwich home students following first degree courses in England and Wales. In the same year 370,500 students received a full value mandatory award from English and Welsh local education

authorities. Information on mandatory awards by sex of student is not available. There is no direct link between award holders and numbers studying in England and Wales. This is because award holders from English and Welsh authorities could choose to study anywhere in the United Kingdom and vice versa.

In 1982-83, 9,600 students received an additional dependants' allowance. Numbers of students' dependants' awards made in relation to dependent children are not available.

Blind and Deaf Children (Teaching)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to have completed his analysis of responses to the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers report on the training of teachers and of hearing-impaired children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales are considering the responses to the ACSET report and will announce their decisions in due course.

Thompson Report

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to issue his circular to local authorities on the implementation of the Thompson report.

Mr. Brooke: Early in the new year.

Special Education Needs

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children under the age of five years have been the subject of a statement of special education needs under section 4 of the Education Act 1981 in each local authority.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

AIDS (Research)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has concerning expenditure upon and allocation of personnel to research into acquired immune deficiency syndrome in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 26 November, at column 389, to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). The Medical Research Council's research referred to in that reply is being carried out at three centres in London and one in Manchester. I understand that a total of eight scientists are receiving grant support, which also provides the salaries for eight support staff as well as laboratory expenses and equipment.

It is possible that research work relevant to AIDS is also being conducted in universities and medical schools, financed from the block grant to universities allocated for teaching and research on advice from the University Grants Committee.

Teachers (Pay)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the current average levels of pay of secondary school headmasters, deputy headmasters and teaching staff; and how they compare with those of 1979 and with those of each year since 1979.

Mr. Dunn: Information by the grades requested is not readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member about this as soon as possible. The average salaries of all full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England and Wales were as follows:

31 March	£
1979	5,181
1980	6,217
1981	7,783
1982	8,454
*1983	9,048

* Provisional.

Since 31 March 1983, the latest date for which complete figures are available, salary rates have been increased by 4·98 per cent. (from 1 April 1983) and 5·1 per cent. (from 1 April 1984) and the application of those increases to the 1983 provisional figure above produces a current estimated average salary for full-time secondary school teachers of £9,983.

Students (Tuition Fees)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what increases have taken place in the level of costs incurred for tuition fees for British students at universities and polytechnics; and to what extent such fees have risen annually since 1979.

Mr. Brooke: The recommended fee levels for advanced courses for students charged the home rate of fee since 1979-80 have been as follows:

	Under-graduate £	*Post-graduate* £
1979-80	595	890
1980-81	740	1,105
1981-82	900	1,320
1982-83	480	1,413
1983-84	480	1,494
1984-85	500	1,569
1985-86	520	1,632

British students may be charged higher fees if they do not have the relevant connection with the United Kingdom specified in the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations 1983 and are not excepted students under the provisions of these regulations.

Overseas Students

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the amount which students from overseas have had to pay towards university tuition fees for the current academic year; and how this amount compares with those paid in the academic year 1978-79 and with those paid in every academic year since 1978-79.

Mr. Brooke: The Government's policy is that overseas students who began their courses after 1 September 1980 should pay fees that cover the cost of their education in the United Kingdom. The level of fee is now for universities to decide in accordance with that policy and in the light of their own circumstances. Universities have in general charged the minimum fee that

has been proposed by the Government or, since 1983, recommended by the University Grants Committee. The minima that have applied from time to time are as follows.

	Undergraduate £	*Postgraduate* £
1978-79	705	925
1979-80	770	1,010

	Arts Courses	*Science Courses*	*Clinical Years of Medicine, Dentistry and Venterinary Science* £
1980-81	2,000	3,000	5,000
1981-82	2,500	3,600	6,000
1982-83	2,700	3,600	6,600
1983-84	2,900	3,800	7,000
1984-85	3,150	4,150	7,650

World Scientific Research (Report)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he intends to take on the report from the science policy research unit at Sussex university, a copy of which has been sent to him, on the decline of the United Kingdom's share of world scientific research.

Mr. Brooke: The Advisory Board for the Research Councils advises my right hon. Friend on his responsibilities for civil science. It is thus for the ABRC in the first instance to assess the significance of this particular report and to advise accordingly. The recent announcement of extra money for the science budget confirms that the Government attach the greatest importance to maintaining the health and vigour of British science.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia (Famine Relief)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Ethiopian Government concerning the distribution of Her Majesty's Government's famine relief to the Eritrean population.

Mr. Raison: When I saw the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner in London on 7 November, and during my visit to Ethiopia between 25 and 27 November, I urged the Ethiopian Government to co-operate fully in ensuring that relief gets through to those in need in all drought-affected areas irrespective of their background or political affiliations.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the British contribution to famine relief in Ethiopia, in the light of the details sent to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside.

Mr. Raison: The Government share the concern of others that relief supplies should reach those in need in all drought-affected areas. For this reason, we continue to channel the bulk of our assistance through British and international organisations already working in those areas.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Economic Growth

Mr. Dubs asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of economic growth he expects for 1985.

Mr. Peter Rees: Gross domestic product is expected to grow by 3·5 per cent. in 1985.

Scotland (Incomes)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average real income of *(a)* the top 10 per cent., *(b)* the top 20 per cent. and *(c)* the botton 20 per cent. of taxpayers in Scotland in 1979-80 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Moore: Estimates of average income for different percentiles of taxpayers resident in Scotland are readily available only from 1980-81. For average total income before tax in 1980-81 and 1981-82 (the latest available), they are as follows:

Average total income before tax (£)

*Percentage of taxpayers**	£ *1980-81*	£ *1981-82*	*Percentage increase†*
Top 10 per cent.	15,200	17,100	12·0
Top 20 per cent.	12,400	13,900	11·8
Bottom 20 per cent.	2,550	2,790	9·4

* Married couples paying tax are counted as one unit
† Calculated from unrounded figures
[*Source:* Annual Survey of Personal Incomes]

The percentage increase in the general index of retail prices between 1980-81 and 1981-82 was 11·5 per cent.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage share of total income after tax of *(a)* the top 10 per cent. and *(b)* the top 20 per cent. of taxpayers in Scotland in 1979-80; and what where the corresponding figures for the latest available date.

Mr. Moore: Estimates for taxpayers resident in Scotland are readily available only from 1980-81. Estimates for 1980-81 and for 1981-82 (the latest available) are as follows:

Percentage share of Total Income after tax

*Percentage of taxpayers**	*1980-81*	*1981-82*
Top 10 per cent.	22·1	22·4
Top 20 per cent.	36·9	37·5

* Married couples paying tax are counted as one unit
[*Source:* Annual Survey of Personal Incomes]

North Sea Oil

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been received through taxation from North sea oil between *(a)* 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* 1979 and 1984.

Mr. Moore: Total tax take from the North Sea—that is royalties, petroleum revenue tax (including advance payments), supplementary petroleum duty and ring fence corporation tax (before ACT set-off)—was £930 million in the period between January 1974 and April 1979. From May 1979 to October 1984, the total tax take was £35·1 billion.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Heddle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government's position on the question of the imposition of value added tax on non-domestic construction work remains unaltered since 29 February.

Mr. Hayhoe: Yes. The EC Commission has now issued a reasoned opinion under article 169 of the Treaty of Rome alleging that certain aspects of the VAT zero rates in force in the United Kingdom including those applicable to non-domestic construction are contrary to the provisions of the sixth VAT directive. The United Kingdom Government have made it clear that they do not accept the Commission's views.

Mr. Grylls asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the operation of the Value Added Tax (General) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1984 as it relates to the Post Office's Datapost service and the services operated by international air courier companies.

Mr. Hayhoe: Two trade associations representing international air couriers and freight forwarders have written to or had meetings with Customs and Excise seeking parity of treatment with the Post Office's Datapost service.

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that both plain water, as supplied in hospitals for new-born babies, and dextrose solutions, as supplied for the same purposes, are both zero-rated for value added tax purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: No. Purified bottled water and dextrose solutions are both taxable at the standard rate. Supplies to patients in hospitals are exempt from the tax. With certain limited exceptions, the VAT charged on supplies of goods and services to the Health Service cannot be reclaimed. But the allocation of funds to the Health Service takes the incidence of VAT fully into account.

Foetal Material

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what checks are applied by Customs and Excise officers at British ports on the export of dead foetal material; whether there is a specific customs classification for such material; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: As there is no legislation prohibiting or restricting the exportation of human foetal material Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have no authority to impose controls and do not do so. There is no specific customs classification for such material.

Gay's the Word Bookshop

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the books detained from the Gay's the Word bookshop are listed as obtainable in the United Kingdom in British Books in Print.

Mr. Hayhoe: As it will take a little time to obtain this information I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what compensation Her Majesty's Customs and Excise will make to the Gay's the Word bookshop for the deterioration in condition and consequently in value of the books detained and subsequently returned.

Mr. Hayhoe: Customs and Excise have not received any claim for compensation from Gay's the Word bookshop.

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *177*, if he will list the last six cases under each of the Acts referred to which were included in the instructions given to the 36 officers reading the books taken from the Gay's the Word bookshop.

Mr. Hayhoe: The instructions given to the officers did not refer to specific cases under any of the Acts quoted.

Income Tax

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amounts at 1984-85 prices that could be raised by 1p on the standard rate of income tax in England for the financial years 1978-79, 1979-80, 1980-81, 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 November 1984, c. *295*]: For the United Kingdom, the estimated yields from increases of 1p in the basic rate of tax are as follows:

	*£ million at 1984-85 prices**
1978-79†	705
1979-80†	755
1980-81	1,015
1981-82	1,020
1982-83‡	1,045
1983-84‡	975
1984-85‡	1,025

* using the index of retail prices, and assuming an increase of 4¾ per cent. between 1983-84 and 1984-85.
† assuming that the lower rate of tax remained at 25 per cent.
‡ provisional.

I regret that estimates relating only to England are not available.

Mr. Ewing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the last 10 years the number of people who paid tax at *(a)* the standard rate and *(b)* each of the successive higher rate bands.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, column *378*]: This information is as follows. The figures relate to tax units, that is count married couples as one. Estimates for 1982-83 onwards are provisional. Due to rounding, the individual figures in the table do not in all cases sum to the total.

Taxpayers '000

*Rate per cent	*1975-76*	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
25	—	—	—	3,070	2,660	—	—	—	—	—
30	—	—	—	—	18,260	20,200	19,600	19,800	19,600	19,300
33	—	—	—	17,565	—	—	—	—	—	—
34	—	—	19,500	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
35	19,600	19,800	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
40	325	347	385	235	302	334	445	435	355	350
45	375	455	225	158	168	216	305	245	220	240
50	161	198	113	86	108	129	170	155	130	140
55	98	110	73	84	43	52	75	65	60	60
60	114	105	98	54	53	65	95	80	75	80
65	58	79	53	45	—	—	—	—	—	—
—										
70	47	58	31	32	—	—	—	—	—	—
75	34	42	41	36	—	—	—	—	—	—
83	28	36	41	33	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	20,800	21,200	20,600	21,400	21,600	21,000	20,700	20,800	20,400	20,200

* ignoring any liability to investment income surcharge.

Personal Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the saving if *(a)* all tax reliefs and *(b)* personal tax allowances were set against the standard rate of tax only.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November 1984, c. *579*]: The cost at 1984-85 levels of income of allowing personal tax allowances at rates in excess of the basic rates of income tax is estimated at about £380 million. Information on the similar cost of other income tax reliefs is available only in respect of mortgage interest, retirement annuity premiums and employees' superannuation contributions; in total it is about £400 million. It is not possible to estimate precisely the combined yield from restricting these reliefs and personal allowances to the basic rate, but it is thought to be about £900 million.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why tax rebates for the financial year 1983-84 are being withheld from striking miners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *372*]: If a worker is absent from work because he is participating or directly interested in a trade dispute at his place of employment, his employer is required, by the Income Tax (Employment) Regulations 1973 (as amended), to withhold any PAYE refund due to him until he returns to work.

Commercial Bills

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the Bank of England's stock of commercial bills since the reply of 21 July 1983, *Official Report*, column 178; and whether short-term monetary interest rates are now above or below the level appropriate to the Government's monetary policy.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *372*]: Figures for Issue Department transactions in commercial bills are published in "Financial Statistics", table 11.5. Quarterly changes in Bank of England holdings of bills are published in a table in the article on the operation of monetary policy which appears in each issue of the *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*.

The bank's operations have prevented money market shortages from driving up short-term interest rates to an inappropriate level.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Erne Catchment Area

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the development of the Erne catchment area.

Dr. Boyson: Since the publication of the Erne catchment study report in June 1980 the Government have assisted with the improvement of tourist amenities and accommodation in that part of the area falling within Northern Ireland; further development will continue to take account of the recommendations of the report.

Fair Employment Agency

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland and indicate how long they have each held membership.

Dr. Boyson: Set out below are the names of members of the Fair Employment Agency together with the commencement dates of their membership of the agency.

Name	*Date membership commenced*
Mr. Robert G. Cooper	September 1976
Mr. Howard Burns	May 1981
Mrs. Mary Byrne	July 1982
Mr. Ross Campbell, OBE	October 1983
Mr. Thomas E. Conaty	September 1976
Mr. J. Paul M. Donaghaty	November 1984
Mr. Tom D. Douglas	December 1982
Mr. James J. Eccles	September 1984
Mr. Robert T. Jordan, MBE	October 1982
Dr. Desmond McCourt	November 1984
Mrs. F. Jill McIvor	November 1984
Mr. Kevin Murphy	September 1984

Custodial Remand (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, for each year since 1980, how many prisoners were remanded in custody prior to trial for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

Year	Offence type	
	Scheduled	Non-scheduled
1980	828	854
1981	1,373	1,092
1982	1,199	1,122
1983	1,154	1,009

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, for each year since 1980, what was the average length of time that prisoners spent on custodial remand for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows.

Average waiting time (number of weeks from first remand to termination of trial)

	1980	1981	1982	1983
All persons	36	38	35	37
Persons charged with scheduled offences	43	44	39	46
Persons charged with non-scheduled offences	26	29	22	20

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners in 1982 and 1983 were remanded in custody prior to trial for periods between *(a)* 0 to 3 months, *(b)* 3 to 6 months, *(c)* 6 to 9 months, *(d)* 9 to 12 months, *(e)* 12 to 18 months and *(f)* over 18 months for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available exactly in the form requested but the following information is available:—

Persons tried on indictment 1982-83: Interval between first remand and sentence

Weeks elapsed remand to sentence	No. of persons	
	1982	1983 (to 31 October)
Scheduled offenders		
0—less than 10	29	12
10—less than 20	14	11
20—less than 30	50	46
30—less than 40	74	54
40—less than 50	54	39
50—less than 75	50	32
75—less than 100	19	18
100 weeks and more	2	0
Total	292	212
Non-scheduled offenders		
0—less than 10	28	37
10—less than 20	23	22
20—less than 30	31	17
30—less than 40	10	28
40—less than 50	2	4
50—less than 75	8	3
75—less than 100	1	1
100 weeks and more	0	0
Total	103	112

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, for each year since 1980, what percentage of prisoners on custodial remand for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively were *(a)* given a non-custodial sentence, *(b)* given a custodial sentence and *(c)* found not guilty or not proceeded against.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the exact form requested. However, the following details are available:

Disposal	1980 percentage		1981 percentage		1982 percentage		1983 percentage	
Scheduled offences								
Non-custodial sentence 21	4	44	8	53	9	70	14	
Custodial sentence	327	64	393	67	432	75	367	72
Discharged at Court (including acquittals) or absolute discharge	167	32	145	25	91	16	70	14
Total	515	100	582	100	576	100	507	100
Non-scheduled offences								
Non-custodial sentence	14	2	74	10	68	13	91	16
Custodial sentence	248	41	316	43	341	63	371	67
Discharged at court (including acquittals) or absolute discharge)	348	57	340	47	130	24	93	17
Total	610	100	730	100	539	100	555	100

SOCIAL SERVICES

NHS (Staff)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many combinations of grade and area of work there were in the National Health Service in 1983; and how these combinations were distributed between dental and medical staff, nursing and midwifery staff, professional and technical staff, administrative and clerical staff, ambulance staff, ancillary staff, and any other staff.

Mr. John Patten: The table shows the approximate number of combinations of grade and area of work, for each staff group in the English NHS at 30 September 1983.

The number of different areas of work recorded depends upon the occupation coding structure, which is designed to reflect the information needs of local managers.

Staff group	Number
Medical and Dental	410
Nursing and Midwifery	*1,340
Professional and Technical	530
Administrative and Clerical	1,650
Ambulance Staff (including Officers)	90
Ancillary	510
Others (Works/Maintenance)	380
Total	4,910

* This total takes account of
(a) the full implementation of the 25 new pay scales introduced with the 1982 NHS reorganisation (not all of these scales were operative by 30 September 1982).
(b) About 20 obsolete pay grades used for staff on protected terms and conditions of service following the 1982 reorganisations.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service staff have been prosecuted in the past year for pilfering and fraud, respectively; and what was the lowest sum involved in each category of presentation.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect this information centrally.

Hypothermia

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the numbers of deaths from hypothermia for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and of those annual total deaths, how many occurred to children under one year old, people over 65 years of age and people over 80 years of age, respectively.

Mr. John Patten: The numbers of deaths with mention of hypothermia are shown in the table.

Number of deaths with mention of hypothermia for selected age-groups, 1974 to 1983 England and Wales

Year	Age			
	All ages	Under 1	Over 65 years	Over 80 years
1974	401	23	308	148
1975	511	12	428	232
1976	585	15	482	246
1977	613	18	501	254
1978	708	26	588	301
1979	824	20	676	331
1980	596	13	486	215
1981	685	9	570	297
1982	671	18	533	296
1983	539	9	444	235

Over 65 (or over 80) years of age is interpreted as aged 66 (or 81) and over. The figures for over 80 years are included in those for over 65 years.

Dentists

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a breakdown of the distribution of dentists in the United Kingdom area by area.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of dentists in the general dental service, the Community Dental Service and Hospital Service in the United Kingdom on 30 September 1983 is in the table. For information in respect of general dental practitioners only, subdivided by family practitioner committee area in England, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 28 November 1984 at columns *526-30*.

	Number
ENGLAND	
Regional Health Authorities:—	
Northern	853
Yorkshire	1,123
Trent	1,197
East Anglian	568
North West Thames	1,660
North East Thames	1,361
South East Thames	1,423
South West Thames	1,316
Wessex	969
Oxford	810
South Western	1,270
West Midlands	1,532
Mersey	777
North Western	1,257
WALES	905
SCOTLAND	1,914
Health Boards:—	
Ayrshire and Arran	135
Borders	33
Argyll and Clyde	139
Fife	109
Greater Glasgow	400
Highland	81
Lanarkshire	177
Grampian	142
Orkney	6
Lothian	350
Tayoid	180
Forth Valley	88
Western Isles	14
Dumfries and Galloway	48
Shetland	12
NORTHERN IRELAND	541

Infant Mortality

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the infant mortality rate at the latest available date among families of *(a)* unskilled workers and *(b)* professional workers.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is shown in the table. The figures relate to legitimate births only, as the social class of fathers of all illegitimate babies is not available. In 1983, the infant mortality rate of all illegitimate babies was 13·3 per thousand illegitimate live births. The overall infant mortality rate for 1983 was 10·1 per thousand live births.

Infant mortality rate by social class in 1983, England and Wales legitimate births only*

Social Class*		Rate per 1,000 legitimate live births
All legitimate births		9·4
i.	Professional occupations	6·2
ii.	Intermediate occupations	7·6
iiiN.	Non-manual skilled occupations	8·1
iiiM.	Manual skilled occupations	9·2
iv.	Partly skilled occupations	12·0
v.	Unskilled occupations	12·8

*Social class is derived from the fathers' occupation.

Drugs

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which products of which companies are on the non-reimbursable list for drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are consulting the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry on the content of the limited list. Until this consultation is complete it is not possible to list the medicines which will no longer be available under the National Health Service.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what expert machinery he is developing to assess new drugs currently under research which are to be reimbursable in the future;

(2) whether his Department has considered the prescribing anomalies which could arise as a result of the removal from the National Health Service of each drug which it is proposed will not be available from April 1985;

(3) whether his Department has undertaken individual evaluation of the likely medical and social impacts of the proposed removal in April 1985 of certain drugs currently prescribed under the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: These matters will be fully considered during our consultations with the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the World Health Organisation essential drug list was used by his Department in the selection of those drugs which will continue to be available under the National Health Service after the proposed introduction of a limited list of generic medicines;

(2) why the terms of product licences and data sheets issued and approved by his Department were not used in determining which drugs would continue to be available under the National Health Service after the proposed introduction of a limited list of drugs rather than the British National Formulary.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The list of drugs to remain available on the National Health Service will not be determined until our consultation with the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry is complete. No single source of information was used to prepare the provisional list published on 8 November.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he plans to extend the proposed restrictions to doctors' prescribing of medicines beyond the therapy classes currently proposed; and for which other illnesses he believes it reasonable to limit treatment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. We have announced the full extent of the therapeutic categories covered by our limited list proposals.

Mr. Body asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish any information he has about the price in the United Kingdom of drugs and medicines whose prescription he proposes to restrict, and their price in other countries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The drugs to remain available on the National Health Service in the categories affected by our limited list proposals will not be finalised until full consultation has taken place.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will exclude from the limited list of drugs any product still protected by patent.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our stated intention is to provide an adequate range of cheap and effective generic drugs in the therapeutic categories covered by our limited list proposals. We are now consulting to ensure that no essential drug is omitted from the list.

Mr. Tracey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pre-printed letters in an identical format his Department has received from doctors protesting about restrictions on National Health Service prescribing; what response he is making; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Hon. Members have to date sent us 145 copies of a pre-printed letter circulated by Roche Products Ltd. This letter simply requires the doctor to endorse it with his surgery stamp, sign it and send it to his Member of Parliament. I believe the company supplied a stamped envelope addressed to the doctor's own Member of Parliament for the purpose. The letter contains a number of inaccuracies and misleading statements. We shall be replying to all letters, including this prepared campaigning letter, in due course.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter of 8 November to the British Medical Association about limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. Copies of my letter have now been placed in the Library.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he rejects the introduction of generic prescribing or generic substitution in the family practitioner services of the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not reject generic prescribing. We have always encouraged doctors to prescribe generically whenever possible. A scheme of compulsory generic substitution across all therapeutic groups would be indiscriminate and would have an adverse effect on the research based pharmaceutical industry in this country. In addition the medical profession have raised with us what they see as a serious problem of legal liability if such a scheme were introduced.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) from whom he obtained advice in selecting the drugs to be included in the limited list he announced on 8 November;

(2) if he will give the number of prescriptions dispensed on the National Health Service in 1983 of each of the drugs which will no longer be available for prescription under the National Health Service on the basis used to calculate the estimated savings given in his statement on 8 November;

(3) if he will list the drugs which will no longer be permitted to be prescribed under the National Health Service, giving the cost of the private purchase of each drug by a patient on the basis used to calculate the estimated savings given in his statement on 8 November;

(4) if he will give details of how he arrived at the estimated savings to the National Health Service from the introduction of limited list prescribing mentioned in his statement of 8 November.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our estimate of savings from the introduction of limited list prescribing is based upon the cost to the National Health Service of drugs within the broad therapeutic groups under consideration. We are consulting the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry on the content of the limited list and until this consultation is complete it is not possible to list the medicines which will no longer be available under the National Health Service or their individual costs. No single source of information was used to prepare the provisional list published on 8 November.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why no middle-range pain killers are included in the limited list he announced on 8 November.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Analgesics for the relief of moderate to severe pain are not affected by the limited list proposals.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why his Department's evidence to the Greenfield committee rejected the idea of limited list prescribing in the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The paper prepared by officials of our Department and put to the Greenfield committee in 1981 rejected the idea of a limited list of drugs across all therapeutic groups. It was not concerned with the present proposals, which affect only less essential therapeutic categories.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of items which will be bought across the counter by patients who formerly bought them on prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We cannot estimate this. It will be a matter of personal choice.

NHS (Infertility Treatment)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) which National Health Service hospitals offer infertility treatment;

(2) which National Health Service hospitals offer in vitro fertilisation;

(3) if he will list the establishments where Government funded research into infertility and its causes is carried out.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information routinely about NHS infertility services. There are many infertility treatment techniques available and it is usual for gynaecology departments to offer some of them.

In a new and specialist field of medicine such as in vitro fertilisation a distinction cannot realistically be drawn between research and treatment.

The following hospitals have confirmed that they have in vitro fertilisation programmes:

The Hammersmith hospital, London
Chelsea hospital for women, London
Royal Free hospital, London
St. Bartholomew's hospital, London
King's college hospital, London
St. Mary's central, Manchester
Southmead hospital, Bristol
Bristol royal infirmary
Birmingham maternity hospital
Jessop hospital for women, Sheffield

The main Government funded body supporting research in this field is the Medical Research Council from its grant-in-aid under the science budget of the Department of Education and Science.

I understand from the council that the MRC is supporting major programmes of research at the reproductive biology unit, Edinburgh and at the department of anatomy and obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of Cambridge.

The MRC also supports research relevant to infertility and its causes at the experimental embryology and teratology unit, Carshalton, at the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at Glasgow university and at the institute of obstetrics and gynaecology in London.

In addition the MRC supports research at a number of other centres which could prove relevant to our understanding of this problem.

Action on Smoking and Health

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what public funds from his Department are paid in the current year to Action on Smoking and Health; and how this compares with each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: The information is as follows:

Grant to Action on Smoking and Health

Year	*£*
1984-85	136,000
1983-84	118,000
1982-83	115,000
1981-82	90,000
1980-81	80,000
1979-80	70,000
1978-79	59,500
1977-78	41,500
1976-77	31,000
1975-76	18,500

NHS (Chief Executive)

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce the appointment of a chief executive of the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The chairman of the NHS management board is expected to be announced shortly.

NHS (War Preparations)

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he hopes to issue the revised version of HDC(77)1, "The Preparation and Organisation of the Health Service for War".

Mr. John Patten: Copies of a preliminary draft of revised planning guidelines for the care of the sick and injured in war were sent to the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing at the end of July with an invitation to comment on the draft and the offer of discussions to facilitate consideration. A response from the British Medical Association is awaited.

Because of the importance of the subject, we also propose to provide for full consultation on the draft with the National Health Service and other interests. I cannot say at present when a revised circular will be issued.

Population Statistics

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* all borough or district council areas with populations below 120,000 which have their own fully manned local office of his Department with figures for the respective populations that they aim to serve.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Offices

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the criteria of geography, population, and communication which determine his deployment of local offices of his Department round the country;

(2) what criteria a borough or district council area has to satisfy in order to obtain its own local office of his Department.

Mr. Newton: The main criterion for the deployment of the Department's local offices is to provide the best possible service to the public while at the same time exercising proper economy in administration.

The provision of a local office is not linked to a borough or district council area. However, in determining local office boundaries account is taken of the following criteria; these are not listed in any particular order:

(i) Accessibility of offices to the public.
(ii) Organisation of the work in the most economical way.
(iii) The need for liaison and co-operation with local authorities. As a general rule local office boundaries should not cross those of social service departments and should coincide as far as possible with those of housing departments.
(iv) Liaison and co-operation with unemployment benefit offices.
(v) Ease of identification of the local office covering a given address.

Occupational Asthma Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many posters have been printed about the occupational asthma scheme; and how many of them have been distributed.

Mr. Newton: 23,000 copies of an occupational asthma poster were printed and distributed in July 1984.

Two copies of the poster were sent to welfare/medical officers of relevant industries (10,000 copies), trade union secretaries (5,500 copies), citizens advice bureaux (2,000 copies), DHSS offices (3,000 copies). The remainder is held in stock at our leaflets unit.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims have been made under the occupational asthma scheme (PD 53) since its introduction.

Mr. Newton: 1,343 claims have been made between 29 March 1982, when occupational asthma was prescribed as an industrial disease, and 25 September 1984, the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, in respect of each of the seven listed groups in the occupational asthma scheme (PD53), how many claims were successful and how many claims were unsuccessful.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. However, the following table shows, in respect of each of the seven listed agents, the number of successful claims for occupational asthma and the number of claims where the disease was not diagnosed following examination by a special medical board.

Agents	*Successful claims*	*Disease not diagnosed*
(a) Isocyanates	154	48
(b) Platinum salts	15	—
(c) Fumes/dusts from certain hardening agents	23	33
(d) Soldering flux fumes	67	38
(e) Proteolytic enzymes	7	9
(f) Animals/insects	18	14
(g) Flour/grain dusts	99	91
Totals	383	233

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many males and how many females have been treated under the National Health Service for sexually transmitted diseases in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available in each of the following age groups *(a)* under 17, *(b)* 18 to 24, *(c)* 24 to 39 and *(d)* 40 or more years of age.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information in precisely the form requested. The available figures are in the tables:

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—Patients of all ages.

Year	*Primary and secondary syphilis*		*Post-pubertal gonorrhoea*		*All conditions*	
	male	*female*	*male*	*female*	*male*	*female*
1974	1,395	253	37,337	20,734	216,693	133,889
1975	1,404	202	37,377	21,579	220,061	143,490
1976	1,468	214	37,179	21,497	229,806	150,885
1977	1,513	268	36,898	21,801	240,951	156,762
1978	1,527	218	35,609	21,023	249,159	161,552
1979	1,330	190	34,990	20,035	251,070	166,714
1980	1,340	207	34,070	20,318	271,614	187,365
1981	1,258	193	33,448	18,726	281,189	198,735
1982	1,187	150	33,049	19,083	296,675	220,993
1983 (provisional)	1,039	110	30,455	17,912	309,040	238,397

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—Patients aged under 16

Year	*Primary and secondary syphilis*		*Post-pubertal gonorrhoea*	
	male	*female*	*male*	*female*
1974	3	2	118	460
1975	3	—	107	445
1976	4	5	126	511
1977	9	5	127	430
1978	6	3	101	339
1979	—	2	82	303
1980	—	3	94	305
1981	3	—	96	265
1982	2	4	115	314
1983 (provisional)	—	—	81	199

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—Patients aged 16-19

Year	Primary and secondary syphilis		Post-pubertal gonorrhoea	
	male	female	male	female
1974	89	54	4,654	6,543
1975	92	41	4,745	7,010
1976	99	51	4,600	6,788
1977	104	70	4,807	7,013
1978	75	41	4,357	6,437
1979	74	49	4,329	5,986
1980	63	56	4,288	6,216
1981	69	45	4,351	4,915
1982	49	30	4,469	5,980
1983 (Provisional)	56	22	4,438	5,847

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England-Patients aged 20-24

Year	Primary and secondary syphilis		Post-pubertal gonorrhoea	
	male	female	male	female
1974	305	73	12,367	7,384
1975	290	60	12,160	7,572
1976	333	69	11,987	7,508
1977	317	84	12,028	7,732
1978	304	66	11,209	7,416
1979	240	45	11,123	7,333
1980	258	58	11,314	7,584
1981	268	60	11,000	7,256
1982	245	45	11,382	7,150
1983 (Provisional)	224	37	10,963	7,026

*Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—*Patients aged 25 and over.*

Year	Primary and secondary syphilis		Post-pubertal gonorrhoea	
	male	female	male	female
1974	998	124	20,198	6,347
1975	1,019	101	20,365	6,552
1976	1,032	89	20,466	6,690
1977	1,083	109	19,936	6,626
1978	1,142	108	19,942	6,831
1979	1,016	94	19,456	6,413
1980	1,019	90	18,374	6,213
1981	918	88	18,001	5,290
1982	891	71	17,083	5,639
1983 (Provisional)	759	51	14,973	4,840

* A more detailed breakdown of this age-group is not available for 1974 and 1975.

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—Patients aged 25-34

Year	Primary and secondary syphilis		Post-pubertal gonorrhoea	
	male	female	male	female
1974	not available		not available	
1975	not available		not available	
1976	638	63	14,325	5,224
1977	644	77	13,669	5,222
1978	688	71	13,655	5,441
1979	576	63	13,369	5,079
1980	575	60	12,525	4,815
1981	493	55	11,943	4,111
1982	473	41	11,149	4,385
1983 (provisional)	399	31	10,120	3,837

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—Patients aged 35-44

Year	Primary and secondary syphilis		Post-pubertal gonorrhoea	
	male	female	male	female
1974	not available		not available	
1975	not available		not available	
1976	251	16	4,618	1,190
1977	289	20	4,738	1,111
1978	312	30	4,695	1,111
1979	295	18	4,509	1,028
1980	270	17	4,316	1,116
1981	295	18	4,446	923
1982	270	20	4,386	961
1983 (provisional)	237	13	3,529	773

Number of new cases seen at National Health Service clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in England—Patients aged 45 and over.

Year	Primary and secondary syphilis		Post-pubertal gonorrhoea	
	male	female	male	female
1974	not available		not available	
1975	not available		not available	
1976	143	10	1,523	276
1977	150	12	1,529	293
1978	142	7	1,592	279
1979	145	13	1,578	306
1980	174	13	1,533	282
1981	130	15	1,612	256
1982	148	10	1,548	293
1983 (provisional)	123	7	1,324	230

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning expenditure upon and allocation of National Health Service personnel to the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases in patients aged under 16 years of age in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information.

AIDS

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by region and by date of each reported case of acquired immune deficiency syndrome in the United Kingdom over the last two years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information is as follows:

	1st quarter 1983	2nd quarter 1983	3rd quarter 1983	4th quarter 1983	1st quarter 1984	2nd quarter 1984	3rd quarter 1984	4th quarter (to 14 November) 1984
London	3	4	4	4	11	9	24	6
South coast	—	—	2	1	1	—	2	1
Bristol	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiff	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
North West	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Mersey	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—
Oxford	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
South West	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Northern	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1

Source:
Public Health Laboratory Service: Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the expenditure upon and allocation of personnel to the treatment of acquired immune deficiency syndrome sufferers in the United Kingdom by the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information from health authorities which would enable us to identify the allocation of NHS resources specifically devoted to the treatment of AIDS.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients have been treated for cancer of the cervix in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available in each of the following age groups *(a)* under 17, *(b)* 18 to 24, *(c)* 24 to 39 and *(d)* 40 or more years of age.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information is given in the table:

Estimated numbers of in-patient cases treated in National Health Service hospitals in England and Wales for malignant neoplasm and carcinoma in situ of cervix uteri.

Year	Age group Under 24	25-34	35-44	45 and over	All ages*
1972	290	1,790	2,460	9,080	13,600
1973	310	2,030	2,280	8,500	13,130
1974	350	2,550	2,120	8,650	13,700
1975	400	2,930	2,590	9,760	15,670
1976	340	3,550	2,520	9,220	15,630
1977	330	3,270	2,960	8,840	15,400
1978	600	3,360	3,150	8,360	15,470
1979	340	3,980	3,070	8,770	16,150
1980	370	3,780	3,370	9,100	16,620
1981	380	4,600	3,480	9,420	17,880
1982	420	4,360	4,020	8,920	17,720

* Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Home Helps

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out in the *Official Report* the number of home helps employed per thousand of population, at the latest date for which figures are available to his Department in *(a)* East Sussex, *(b)* West Sussex, *(c)* Devon, *(d)* Newcastle upon Tyne, *(e)* Manchester and *(f)* Sheffield.

Mr. John Patten: The following information as at 30 September 1983 is the latest available:

Number of home helps per thousand population

	Number
(a) East Sussex	0·9
(b) West Sussex	0·7
(c) Devon	0·8
(d) Newcastle Upon Tyne	2·5
(e) Manchester	1·5
(f) Sheffield	1·8

Foetal Material

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Service (1) if he will list those National Health Service hospitals and private nursing homes which supply the foetal tissue bank at the Royal Marsden hospital, London, with dead foetal material; whether the Royal Marsden Hospital pays for this service; and whether it is the sole purchaser of material from these sources;

(2) if officials from his Department carried out an investigation in 1983 into allegations of a trade in dead foetal material between British abortion clinics and French cosmetic companies;

(3) if he will list those establishments approved by his Department or by the Medical Research Council to store dead foetal materia and those establishments licensed to use such material for experimentation; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what safeguards exist to prevent the sale of dead foetal material from abortions to commercial concerns; whether any National Health Service hospital or private nursing home receives income from selling foetal material to commercial concerns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The use and disposal of foetal material in England is very closely controlled in accordance with the code of practice recommended in the Report of the advisory group on the use of foetuses and foetal material for research (the Peel report 1972). Within the National HealthService control is the responsibility of health authorities and details of such arrangements are not held centrally. The supply of material from approved nursing homes is monitored by our Department. We approved the supply of foetal material by nursing homes as follows. No charge is made for the supply.

Blackdown Nursing Home
Birmingham Maternity Hospital and East Birmingham Hospital
Calthorpe Nursing Home
Birmingham Children's Hospital, East Birmingham Hospital

and Birmingham Maternity Hospital
London Private Hospital
Foetal Tissue Bank, Royal Marsden Hospital
Park View Clinic
Foetal Tissue Bank, Royal Marsden Hospital
Raleigh Nursing Home
Foetal Tissue Bank, Royal Marsden Hospital
Robert Nursing Home
Birmingham University Medical School
Wistans Nursing Home
St. Bartholomew's Hospital and East Birmingham Hospital

The Medical Research Council does not control the storage or use of material in this way. However foetal material from the bank is supplied only to research centres in the United Kingdom and not to overseas establishments. All establishments using such material must obtain prior approval from the local ethical committee.

The allegations that foetal material from United Kingdom sources was being supplied to French cosmetic companies were investigated at the time by our Department. No evidence to support the allegations was found.

Outpatient Waiting Lists

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the waiting time for *(a)* outpatient appointments and *(b)* operations in the ear, nose and throat specialties in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) England and (iii) each of the English health authorities.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not collected centrally in precisely the form requested. I shall let the right hon. Member have the available information as soon as possible.

ENT Consultants

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many ear, nose and throat consultant posts there are per million population in each of the English health regions; how many in each region are currently vacant; and what has been the change in the number of *(a)* established and *(b)* filled posts since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table.

Changes in consultant staffing in ear, nose and throat 1979-1983

England:	*1979*		*1983*			*Posts per million population*	*Change 1979-1983*	
	Established posts	*Staff in post*	*Established posts*	*Staff in post*	*Vacant posts†*		*Established posts*	*Staff in post*
Total* All Regions	426	394	422	393	29	9·01	−4	−1
Northern	26	25	26	25	1	8·39	—	—
Yorkshire	25	25	27	25	2	7·50	+2	—
Trent	30	29	32	32	—	6·95	+2	+3
East Anglian	14	13	14	14	—	7·27	—	+1
North West Thames	39	34	31	29	2	8·97	−8	−5
North East Thames	42	33	49	41	8	13·12	n/a‡	n/a‡
South East Thames	38	34	37	34	3	10·32	−1	—
South West Thames	32	29	31	29	2	10·51	−1	—
Wessex	25	24	27	26	1	9·64	+2	+2
Oxford	16	15	18	16	2	7·58	+2	+1
South Western	25	24	24	23	1	7·74	−1	−1
West Midlands	37	33	39	36	3	7·53	+2	+3
Mersey	18	18	17	16	1	6·98	−1	−2
London postgraduate teaching hospitals	24	23	12	10	2	—	n/a‡	n/a‡
North Western	35	35	38	37	1	9·49	+3	+2

* Including London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
† Posts without a permanent holder, which may be partly or wholly occupied by locums.
‡ Direct comparisons cannot be made between 1979 and 1983 for North East Thames and the London postgraduate teaching hospitals since a number of consultant contracts were transferred from the latter to North East Thames in the 1982 NHS reorganisation.
Note:
Numbers of consultants at 30 September, including SHMO with allowance.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes in the number of ear, nose and throat consultant posts have occurred since 1979 in districts which have hospitals associated with medical schools or institutes providing postgraduate training in the ear, nose and throat specialties.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Information in the form requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which health districts have made savings, and of what amount, by reducing the number of ear, nose and throat consultant posts and ear, nose and throat beds; which have closed ear, nose and throat hospitals; and which have plans to do so.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This detailed information is not readily available centrally. On a national basis, however, the number of inpatient and day cases treated in the ear, nose and throat specialty increased from 260,000 in 1978 to 305,000 in 1983 and the number of outpatient attendances rose from 1·9 million to 2·1 million.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will request health authorities to inform him of any proposed hospital closures; and if he will require them to ensure before closure that adequate provision is made with new investment if necessary, for the patients normally treated at the hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Health authorities are required to consult locally on all proposals for permanent hospital closure, and to notify our Department at the same time.

If the community health council does not agree with the proposals, they cannot proceed without reference to Ministers. We consider all such cases very carefully, including details of alternative provision, before making a final decision.

Postgraduate Hospitals

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how the addition of the specialist postgraduate hospitals to the responsibilities of district health authorities affected the application of the formula of the resource allocation working party to the districts concerned; what will be the position when the protected funding of the hospital ends; and if he will ensure that there is continued recognition of the national role of these hospitals;

(2) if he will give figures for the London postgraduate hospitals that had their own board of governors before reorganisation, showing the revenue and capital available to each in the last year before reorganisation, and that available in the current year; what was the percentage charge for each; and which are run by special health authorities and which by district health authorities;

(3) whether any restrictions were placed on the spending of the protected funding of the postgraduate London hospitals now run by district health authorities; whether the protected funding is being fully spent by the hospitals for which it was intended; whether and for which hospitals there has been any borrowing by the district health authority; whether there are plans to maintain the future funding of these specialist hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the right hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

NHS (Charges)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the gross income to the National Health Service from charges made for pathology and radiology work, respectively, carried out for private patients of consultants; what is the net income from each; and what is the current scale of charges;

(2) what are the estimated losses of revenue to the National Health Service in the 10 worst cases of undercharging or failure to charge revealed by his recent survey of health authorities' charging arrangements;

(3) what is the gross income for National Health Service hospitals from charges to road accident victims, private patients and overseas visitors, respectively; and what is the net income in each case;

(4) what is his estimate of the gross income for National Health Service hospitals from charges to road accident victims, private patients and overseas visitors, respectively if all such charges had been fully levied.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Health Authorities (Charges)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service consultants and administrators are to be disciplined or prosecuted as a result of his recent inquiry into the failure of health authorities properly to levy charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Sanctions against employees are a matter for health authorities, which are not required to report this information to us.

Maternity Services Advisory Committee

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to re-appoint the Maternity Services Advisory Committee after its third report is published.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 27 November at column *469-70*.

Perinatal Mortality

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* those district health authorities in the West Midlands with a higher perinatal mortality rate than the present average for the region.

Mr. John Patten: The district health authorities in which the perinatal mortality rates for 1981-83 were higher than the average for the west midlands region over that period are as follows. A group of years has been used to minimise the effect of random fluctuations of rates based on small numbers.

Herefordshire District Health Authority
Shropshire District Health Authority
North Staffordshire District Health Authority
Rugby District Health Authority
Central Birmingham District Health Authority
East Birmingham District Health Authority
West Birmingham District Health Authority
Coventry District Health Authority
Sandwell District Health Authority
Walsall District Health Authority
Wolverhampton District Health Authority

Neonatal Intensive Care Units

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Offical Report* the names and locations of each neonatal intensive care unit in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: Regional health authorities designate certain special care baby units to provide neonatal intensive care, but such care is also provided by some other such units. Because there is at present no firm definition of intensive care, it is not possible, on a routine basis, to identify and collect centrally details of all the units that give such care.

Health Visitors

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to increase the recruitment of health visitors; and how many are at present *(a)* in training and *(b)* employment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is for health authorities to determine the need for any increased provision for health visitors in their districts but we have, over a 3-year period, made extra money available to inner city health authorities for the training of additional health visitors and district nurses. At 30 September 1983 there were, in whole-time equivalent terms, 1,023 student health visitors and 9,708 health visitors, including field work teachers and multiple duty staff, employed in the National Health Service in England.

Community Care

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has to provide additional central funding to health authorities for care in the community.

Mr. John Patten: Central funding for care in the community will be provided in 1985-86 and subsequent years through initiatives already announced. No new proposals are contemplated at present.

Black Foster Parents

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to recruit more black foster parents.

Mr. John Patten: The Government accept that there is a need for fostering agencies to recruit sufficient foster parents from ethnic minority groups to meet the needs of black children in care. The Department is currently preparing a public service advertisement for television to encourage foster parents of all ethnic groups to come forward. The review of the regulations governing fostering which is just beginning will include consideration whether to require authorities to have regard to any wishes of a child or its parent about cultural upbringing.

NHS (Managers)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he has had with representatives of the National and Local Government Officers Association about the appointment of Health Service managers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. I am considering a request for a meeting about the personnel consequences of the appointment of general managers.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 December 1984

HOME DEPARTMENT

Deportation (Commonwealth Citizens)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Commonwealth citizens were *(a)* deported and *(b)* removed from the United Kingdom for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested on deportations and the removal of illegal entrants is published annually in "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom" (tables 19 and 20 of the issue for 1983, Cmnd. 9246).

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of the Metropolitan police on the use of dogs.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that Metropolitan police dogs are used at the discretion of local commanders in a wide variety of circumstances. Dogs are trained to track, to search for persons or property, and to detain escaping suspects. They are always deployed under strict supervision, and under force orders should not be used in any situation which might restrict the animal's freedom of movement or reduce the handler's ability to control it.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the published figures for clear-up rates in the Metropolitan police area for the first six months of 1984 include any changes which result from the experiment referred to in his written answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, c. *493*.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1984, c. *4*]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that offences cleared up as a result of the experimental scheme of interviewing prisoners about otherwise unsolved crimes will be included in the statistics in the usual way. The scheme was introduced in April 1984 after earlier pilot schemes in two divisions, but, as there is inevitably some delay before admitted offences can be verified and recorded, it is unlikely that the statistics for the first six months of 1984 will have been materially affected. The scheme will be fully evaluated after it has been in operation for 12 months.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the crime rates and clear-up rates in the Metropolitan police area in each quarter since March 1979; what is the crime rate and clear-up rate in total and for each standard category of crime in each Metropolitan police district in each quarter in 1983 and to date; and if he will give the establishment and number of police actually on duty in each Metropolitan police district in each quarter in 1983 and to date.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 29 November, 1984, c. *545*]: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the available information is as given in the following four tables and in the set of more detailed tables which I am sending to the hon. Member and placing in the Library of the House, giving the number of offences recorded and the number cleared up in each district for each of the main offence groups in each quarter from the beginning of 1983 to the second quarter of 1984.

Clear-up rates differ markedly according to the type of offence and its circumstances both within offence groups and between offence groups. Variations in clear-up rates between districts reflect variations in the types and circumstances of the offence recorded. The number of offences cleared up and the clear-up rate may also be affected by variations in police recording practices. Offences cleared up in one period may include offences initially recorded in previous periods. Clear-up rates may be particularly misleading if they are based on small numbers of recorded offences.

Information is not available on the numbers of police on duty, which vary according to need and depend upon the operation of the shift system, training commitments, the provision of aid to other forces or to other parts of the MPD, annual leave and sick leave, and so on.

Table 1—Notifiable offences recorded by the Metropolitan Police

Year	*1st quarter*	*2nd quarter*	*3rd quarter*	*4th quarter*	*year*
Number of offences (thousands)					
1979*	129	143	138	147	557
1980	140	149	142	153	584
1981	149	161	156	166	631
1982	164	169	171	185	688
1983	159	167	160	173	659
1984	172	177			
Clear up rate (percentage)					
1979*	20·8	20·1	20·7	19·8	
1980	20·9	20·8	20·7	17·7	
1981	18·0	17·0	16·0	16·4	
1982	15·7	15·8	15·6	16·8	
1983	16·7	17·5	17·1	17·1	
1984	17·8	16·8			

* Figures for 1979 are not entirely comparable with those for subsequent years because of changes in the counting rules made in 1980.

Table 2. Notifiable offences recorded by the Metropolitan Police

Number

District	*1983*				*1984*	
	1st quarter	*2nd quarter*	*3rd quarter*	*4th quarter*	*1st quarter*	*2nd quarter*
A (parts) Westminster	2,012	1,886	2,318	2,495	2,147	2,127
B Kensington and Chelsea	5,396	5,705	6,301	5,649	5,758	5,556

District	1983 1st quarter	1983 2nd quarter	1983 3rd quarter	1983 4th quarter	1984 1st quarter	1984 2nd quarter
C (parts) Westminster	5,342	5,566	5,481	6,037	5,941	5,537
D (parts) Westminster	6,177	6,682	6,856	7,121	6,973	7,832
E Camden	6,887	6,967	7,276	7,663	7,894	7,959
F Hammersmith	3,917	4,044	4,088	4,283	3,909	4,139
G Hackney	5,828	6,724	6,472	6,840	6,507	7,143
H Tower Hamlets	5,046	5,558	4,930	5,587	5,914	5,772
I Heathrow, etc.	2,644	2,604	2,432	2,505	2,505	2,456
J Waltham Forest, Redbridge, etc.	7,299	7,795	6,831	7,954	7,536	9,066
K Havering, Barking and Newham	10,537	10,095	9,648	11,675	11,901	11,503
L Lambeth	8,773	9,083	9,354	9,436	9,072	10,130
M Southwark	7,568	8,064	7,243	8,714	8,590	8,931
N Islington	5,547	5,750	4,989	5,520	5,670	6,617
P Lewisham and Bromley	10,462	11,170	10,715	11,977	11,857	11,773
Q Brent and Harrow	6,418	7,756	6,754	7,169	6,985	7,024
R Greenwich and Bexley	8,456	9,097	8,293	8,755	8,753	8,878
S Barnet and Hertsmere	4,588	5,133	4,768	5,490	5,154	5,362
T Richmond upon Thames and Hounslow	5,268	5,906	5,016	5,514	5,995	5,377
V Kingston upon Thames Merton, etc.	5,694	5,723	5,150	6,233	5,235	5,406
W Wandsworth	6,502	6,672	6,649	6,631	7,045	7,418
X Ealing and Hillingdon	7,811	7,889	7,337	7,983	8,188	7,981
Y Haringey and Enfield	8,478	8,607	8,835	10,114	9,875	11,031
Z Croydon, Sutton, etc.	9,892	9,812	8,994	9,919	10,104	9,592
Others	2,442	2,847	2,954	2,231	2,616	2,381
Total	158,980	167,135	159,683	173,495	172,124	176,991

Table 3. Clear up rate in the Metropolitan Police District by district*

Percentage

District	1983 1st quarter	1983 2nd quarter	1983 3rd quarter	1983 4th quarter	1984 1st quarter	1984 2nd quarter
A (parts) Westminster	22·0	23·4	27·4	22·8	23·4	26·1
B Kensington and Chelsea	20·7	21·5	19·5	18·5	22·3	20·6
C (parts) Westminster	25·8	23·3	21·5	25·3	24·9	24·5
D (parts) Westminster	23·7	27·9	23·1	25·0	27·6	24·9
E Camden	16·4	15·4	13·8	14·2	14·6	14·3
F Hammersmith	19·0	17·8	23·0	19·3	20·2	16·6
G Hackney	16·0	13·4	12·9	12·2	16·4	12·1
H Tower Hamlets	12·8	13·3	14·7	17·3	19·0	16·0
I Heathrow, etc.	31·1	26·2	28·3	25·2	25·4	29·8
J Waltham Forest, Redbridge, etc.	15·9	17·6	16·2	14·5	17·1	16·4
K Havering, Barking and Newham	21·2	20·1	18·8	16·4	18·2	17·6
L Lambeth	14·3	13·0	13·6	11·3	12·2	12·5
M Southwark	14·1	14·7	12·5	14·1	15·7	14·1
N Islington	13·8	22·4	17·5	16·0	14·3	13·4
P Lewisham and Bromley	13·0	13·7	13·9	13·6	13·4	15·5
Q Brent and Harrow	15·7	15·6	14·5	14·5	14·7	14·2
R Greenwich and Bexley	13·4	12·1	13·1	15·5	14·4	14·4
S Barnet and Hertsmere	17·4	19·4	20·9	16·0	19·8	16·5
T Richmond upon Thames and Hounslow	20·1	22·8	22·7	25·0	23·0	19·6
V Kingston upon Thames Merton, etc.	18·1	18·6	17·8	19·2	17·3	18·6
W Wandsworth	13·5	17·1	14·5	14·2	13·7	12·8
X Ealing and Hillingdon	11·7	14·1	15·7	19·5	17·0	14·4
Y Haringey and Enfield	16·0	17·3	18·2	18·8	18·5	16·2
Z Croydon, Sutton, etc.	15·0	14·8	16·3	15·4	17·5	18·0
Others	15·6	30·7	23·5	30·7	34·3	31·4
Total	16·7	17·5	17·1	17·1	17·8	16·8

* Notifiable offences cleared up as a percentage of the total number of notifiable offences recorded by the police.

Table 4

Establishment and strength* of the Metropolitan Police at end of quarter, by district*

Number

District	†Establishment 1983 1st Quarter	†Establishment 1984 3rd Quarter	Strength 1983 1st Quarter	Strength 1983 2nd Quarter	Strength 1983 3rd Quarter	Strength 1983 4th Quarter	Strength 1984 1st Quarter	Strength 1984 2nd Quarter	Strength 1984 3rd Quarter
A	1,057	1,059	827	838	841	835	840	855	849
B	817	816	841	833	848	844	874	897	870
C	969	966	859	848	849	852	843	863	848
D	1,015	1,013	896	891	901	915	919	918	903
E	1,010	1,009	832	834	842	831	841	854	848

District	†Establishment 1983 1st Quarter	†Establishment 1984 3rd Quarter	Strength 1983 1st Quarter	Strength 1983 2nd Quarter	Strength 1983 3rd Quarter	Strength 1983 4th Quarter	Strength 1984 1st Quarter	Strength 1984 2nd Quarter	Strength 1984 3rd Quarter
F	644	643	638	648	662	660	667	679	671
G	684	686	701	695	712	720	732	726	714
H	748	748	715	712	709	715	712	707	704
I	785	784	696	694	698	704	703	702	710
J	1,140	1,138	979	988	991	1,007	1,002	996	996
K	1,321	1,320	1,206	1,206	1,212	1,206	1,214	1,213	1,214
L	887	889	939	959	977	973	977	1,000	983
M	1,057	1,058	914	919	923	922	930	935	929
N	760	764	698	707	714	721	709	718	721
P	1,136	1,136	1,126	1,132	1,151	1,163	1,174	1,165	1,170
Q	945	946	903	898	902	919	912	917	914
R	958	960	817	824	824	835	839	852	866
S	941	943	761	775	796	789	795	793	795
T	943	943	817	824	831	832	833	837	855
V	826	823	693	706	704	709	710	715	726
W	801	804	803	800	788	780	786	812	814
X	989	992	921	920	943	958	954	956	950
Y	1,171	1,173	1,035	1,042	1,056	1,065	1,065	1,067	1,052
Z	1,075	1,076	969	1,004	1,021	1,040	1,050	1,042	1,042
Headquarters	3,936	4,426	5,993	5,959	5,814	5,807	5,699	5,616	5,701
TOTAL	26,615	27,115	26,579	26,656	26,709	26,806	26,780	26,835	26,845

* Regular police, all ranks. Excludes special constables and civilian staff.
† Changes in establishment are less frequent than changes in strength and so figures are given only for the first and last quarters in the period.

Greater Manchester Police Authority

Mr. Cunliffe asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure incurred by the Greater Manchester police authority in each of the last four financial years; and how that expenditure has compared with the targets set by the Government.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is as follows:

	Total expenditure of Greater Manchester police authority (net of police grant) £ million	Target of Greater Manchester County Council £ million
1980-81	48,619	—
1981-82	57,575	221·19
1982-83	64·285	216·913
1983-84	66·97	234·227

There is no separate target for police authority expenditure.

Royal College of Surgeons (Research Establishment)

Mr. Body asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will give the specific dates in the last 10 years when his Department's inspectors visited the research establishment of the Royal College of Surgeons at Downe, Kent; and whether on any of those occasions his Department's inspectors made any recommendations for changes.

Mr. Mellor: Records of inspections at Downe over the last five years show visits by inspectors on the following dates:

9 February 1980
4 June 1980
23 September 1980
25 March 1981
7 April 1981
23 June 1981
26 November 1981
26 April 1982
27 April 1982
13 July 1982
1 September 1982
8 September 1982
18 November 1982
30 December 1982
29 March 1983
11 August 1983
18 October 1983
22 February 1984
16 May 1984

Inspectors' reports are made in confidence to the Secretary of State.

Young Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the certified normal accommodation for each remand centre for young prisoners aged between 17 and 21 years.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Males	
Ashford*	380
Brockhill	177
Cardiff	85
Chelmsford	66
Exeter	48
Glen Parva	120
Latchmere House	128
Low Newton	153
Manchester*	322
Norwich	60
Pucklechurch	103
Risley*	511
Swansea	55
Thorpe Arch	164
Winchester	66
Females	
Low Newton*	35
Pucklechurch*	56
Risley*	84

* These remand centres also hold adult prisoners.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young persons aged 15 to 21 years who were on remand were drafted out of remand prisons for young prisoners to other Prison Department establishments during *(a)* 1983 and *(b)* the first 10 months of 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not available.

Parole

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons sentenced to youth custody had been released on parole licence and have been supervised by local authority social workers in England and Wales since the implementation of part 1, sections 1 to 10, of the Criminal Justice Act 1982;

(2) how many young persons aged 15 to 21 years have been released on parole from youth custody establishments and are in addition subject to a local authority care order.

Mr. Mellor: The number of persons released on parole licence who have been supervised by local authority social workers and/or who are also subject to a local authority care order are not recorded centrally, and the information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. They are, however, a small proportion of the young offenders released on parole licence.

Motorways (Speeding)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the prosecution rate for speeding on Britain's motorways; and whether he is satisfied with it.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The only readily available information on prosecutions for speeding offences on motorways is published annually in "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, Supplementary Tables" (table 5 of the issue for 1983). We are satisfied that the police are taking appropriate action against speeding motorists within the constraints placed on them by their other duties.

Police and Fire Brigade Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* police and *(b)* fire brigade staff have been (i) assaulted and (ii) admitted to inpatient care in hospital, following assaults upon them, in each of the metropolitan counties in each of the last five years;

(2) what terms and conditions apply to *(a)* police and *(b)* fire brigade staff when unable to work, following injuries while at work;

(3) how many assaults there have been on *(a)* police officers and *(b)* fire brigade staff in the Greater London area in each of the last five years;

(4) how many *(a)* police and *(b)* fire brigade staff have been admitted to hospital inpatient care, following assaults on them, in the Greater London area in each of the last five years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Information about assaults on policemen and firemen and subsequent medical treatment is not collected centrally. The conditions of service of police officers are set out in the Police Regulations 1979 (as amended) which provide for a member of a police force to receive full pay while on sick leave and for the reimbursement of medical and dental charges. The scheme of conditions of service of the National Joint Council for Local Authorities Fire Brigades, on which my right hon. and learned Friend is not reresented, provides for a member of a fire brigade whose duties include a liability to engage in fire fighting to receive full pay while on sick leave and, at a fire authority's discretion, for the reimbursement of medical and dental charges.

Steel-toothed Traps

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to ban the use of steel-toothed traps to take fur–bearing animals in the wild.

Mr. Mellor: The use of steel-toothed traps is already an offence under the Pests Act 1954.

Holloway Prison

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much time the prisoners in the CI unit for the severely disturbed at Holloway prison spend in their cell wing and how much time in the skills training unit; and whether this programme was followed during the week ended 8 December.

Mr. Mellor: Women located on C1 unit leave the unit to attend the skills training unit and also for a variety of other purposes, including visits and exercise. The skills training unit generally operates for one and half to two hours in the morning and for one and a half hours in the afternoon. For the week ending 8 December, the skills training unit opened on two mornings and three afternoons; on two mornings and one afternoon classes were conducted on C1 unit by the skills training unit staff.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what workshop facilities are available in Holloway prison; how much time each prisoner allocated to this work spends in the workshop each day; and how much time such prisoners spent in the workshop each day during the week ended 8 December.

Mr. Mellor: There are two workshops at Holloway prison; light textiles and engineering assembly. In the quarter ended 30 June 1984 prisoners in each workshop worked an average of one and a half hours daily. The workshops have been closed since July 1984 due to shortage of staff. It is anticipated that they will open again after Christmas.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the week ended 8 December, what was the number of prisoners in Holloway prison; how many prisoners were allocated work duties outside their cell wing; and for how many hours per day.

Mr. Mellor: The number of prisoners in Holloway prison during the week ending 8 December ranged from 306 on 2 December to 345 on 8 December. The current work force stands at 61. Normal work hours for 37 prisoners are from 9.15 am to 11.30 am and from 2.15 pm to 4.00 pm. Workers in the kitchen, reception and officers' mess are engaged for rather longer hours.

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the full complement of prison officers,

of all grades, at Holloway prison; and what was the actual number of officers on duty each day during the week ended 8 December.

Mr. Mellor: The authorised staffing level of prison officers on discipline duties at Holloway is 335. The staff in post figure is 317, but seven additional staff were posted to Holloway on detached duty throughout the week ending 8 December. The number on duty each day varies according to the shift system and routine in operation at the prison and is also affected by the incidence of annual leave and sick leave and the absence of staff undergoing training. During the week ending 8 December the numbers on duty througout each 24 hour period were:

2 December: 184
3 December: 218
4 December: 201
5 December: 208
6 December: 204
7 December: 118
8 December: 122

Television Licences

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of people without a current television licence.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We estimate that about 1·6 million households with television do not have a licence.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Authority Higher Education

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the expenditure on local authority higher education *(a)* nationally and *(b)* within Stockport metropolitan borough council in the current financial year; and what are the projected figures for 1985-86.

Mr. Brooke: The size of the capped advanced further education pool in England for 1984-85 determined by my right hon. Friend is £580·5 million. The allocation to Stockport MBC is £1·765 million. Outturn expenditure both nationally and in Stockport will not be known until the autumn of next year. My right hon. Friend has determined the size of the capped AFE pool for 1985-86 at £620 million. He expects to announce allocations to authorities later this month after receiving the advice of the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education.

School Meals

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the amount of subsidy paid per annum to provide school meals in England; and what proportion is paid to subsidise the cost of midday meals to boarding pupils.

Mr. Dunn: The net recurrent cost of the school meals service in 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, was £411 million (cash). Information on the subsidy of midday meals to boarding pupils is not available.

Dyslexia

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the British Dyslexia Association about training of teachers of those with special learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: In July the British Dyslexia Association submitted proposals for a modular teaching diploma which would offer an additional qualification for teachers working with children with specific learning difficulties. These were carefully considered both within the Department and by Her Majesty's Inspectorate and a reply was sent to the association in October. It is now for the BDA to consider how it wishes to take forward its plans.

Students (Financial Support)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce the terms of reference, composition and timetable of the body to review student financial support; whether the review will be conducted by an independent body; and whether its findings and recommendations will be published.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on 10 December 1984, at column 333. The announcement will contain all relevant information about the review.

Support Grants

Mr. Jeremy Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the expenditure to be supported through education support grants in 1985-86.

Sir Keith Joseph: On 12 June I announced the Government's intention to support through education support grants in the financial year 1985-86 up to £30 million of expenditure by local education authorities in England. The activities to be supported were selected following detailed consultation with the local authority associations and were set out in the Education Support Grants Regulations 1984. Ninety-five authorities have bid for grant support and for each of the 11 categories of activity for which bids were invited the total of the bids exceeded the expenditure which could be supported.

Education support grants are intended to encourage local education authorities to redeploy a limited amount of expenditure towards activities with national priority in the education service. They should have an important contribution to make in promoting continuing improvements in the education service and in assisting local education authorities to respond to changing demands. Following careful consideration of the bids, local education authorities are being informed of the levels of expenditure for each category of activity which I have approved for the financial year 1985-86 for the purposes of the Education Support Grants Regulations 1984.

Table A sets out for each category of activity the level of expenditure and the number of authorities to be supported through education support grants in the financial year 1985-86. Approval has been given so far in respect of £28·85 million of expenditure.

Within this total, approval has so far been given in respect of expenditure of £1·85 million for pilot projects concerned with records of achievement. A further £0·15 million, to provide for extensions to planned projects, will be allocated after discussion with the authorities

concerned. No decisions have yet been taken about the allocation between authorities of the £1 million to be supported on the management and appraisal of school teachers.

Table B sets out the expenditure which I have approved for the financial year 1985-86 for the purposes of the Education Support Grants Regulations 1984 in respect of each category of activity for each authority. Fuller details about the allocations are set out in a note which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Table A

The level of expenditure for each category of activity to be supported through Education Support Grants in the 1985-86 financial year

Category of Activity	*Expenditure to be supported in the financial year 1985-86 £ million*	*Number of authorities in respect of which expenditure has been approved*
A) The management and appraisal of school teachers	1·00	—
B) The teaching of mathematics in schools	3·26	94
C) The teaching of science as part of primary education in schools	2·02	50
D) The provision of microelectronic equipment designed or adapted for use by children with special educational needs	2·25	89
E) Pilot projects to provide records of achievement for young people in secondary schools and colleges	2·00	14
F) Pilot projects to improve the quality of education provided in primary schools in urban areas	0·54	12
G) Pilot projects to improve the quality or the range of the curriculum provided in primary schools in rural areas	0·45	6
H) Pilot projects to meet the educational needs of those from ethnic minorities, to promote harmony between different racial groups or in other ways to prepare pupils and students for life in a multi-ethnic society	0·98	26
I) The provision of retraining and updating courses directed towards the needs of industry and commerce (PICKUP)	2·00	54
J) The development of the use of information technology at further education establishments, by providing equipment, preparing or providing course material and computer software, or training teachers employed at such establishments	13·00	91
K) The planning, development and coordination of provision to meet the educational needs of those who are unemployed (excluding those currently receiving full-time education)	1·50	45
L) The provision of data processing equipment and accessories and software for use in the management of further education establishments	1·00	85
TOTAL	30	95

Approved expenditure in respect of each category of activity for each authority

£ thousands

Authority	*Teaching of mathematics in schools*	*Science in primary education*	*Micro-electronic equipment for children with special educational needs*	*Pilot Projects concerned with*				*Retraining and updating courses (PICKUP)*	*Information technology in non-advanced further education*	*Educational provision for the unemployed*	*Management systems in further establishments*	*Total*
				Records of achievement	*Urban primary schools*	*Rural primary schools*	*Educational needs in a multi-ethnic society*					
Outer London Boroughs												
Barking	13·4		17·2	—	—	—	—	‡	—	—	8·2	38·8
Barnet	19·9	—	28·7	—	—	—	—	—	92·8	—	13·7	155·1
Bexley	18·7	36·9	—	—	—	—	—	21·8	39·4	15·0	13·6	145·4
Brent	17·9	37·9	20·9	—	—	—	25·0	—	41·2	20·2	6·0	169·1
Bromley	32·0	57·1	—	—	—	—	—	53·4	76·3	—	15·1	233·9
Croydon	32·0	33·9	25·3	—	45·5	—	43·9	52·3	95·9	27·0	7·2	362·2
Ealing	28·7	—	18·0	—	—	—	—	—	175·0	—	10·5	232·2
Enfield	28·1	34·3	15·5	—	—	—	—	—	125·0	—	10·0	212·9
Haringey	26·8	55·0	12·0	—	56·7	—	80·8	‡	72·8	—	9·6	313·7
Harrow	30·0	29·4	27·0	—	—	—	—	—	82·4	—	11·8	180·6
Havering	24·8	23·8	22·0	—	—	—	—	‡	46·9	—	4·4	121·9
Hillingdon	32·0	—	26·2	—	—	—	10·4	22·5	85·4	34·5	7·0	218·0
Hounslow	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston upon Thames	36·1	50·8	21·6	—	—	—	—	—	41·2	—	6·2	155·9
Merton	19·9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	37·0	—	10·5	67·4
Newham	26·1	40·7	24·1	—	—	—	—	‡	61·5	18·4	10·4	181·4
Redbridge	16·9	—	23·0	—	—	—	—	‡	49·6	—	6·4	95·9
Richmond upon Thames	30·9	—	21·8	—	—	—	—	—	41·2	—	7·7	101·6
Sutton	15·7	—	18·8	—	—	—	—	—	34·1	—	—	68·6
Waltham Forest	34·6	31·2	23·9	—	—	—	—	‡143·5	5·0	23·6	9·3	271·1
ILEA	82·1	15·0	60·0	210·9	49·1	—	58·7	182·8	1,218·7	—	18·7	1,896·2

Authority	Pilot Projects concerned with: Teaching of mathematics in schools	Science in primary education	Micro-electronic equipment for children with special educational needs	Records of achievement	Urban primary schools	Rural primary schools	Educational needs in a multi-ethnic society	Retraining and updating courses (PICKUP)	Information technology in non-advanced further education	Educational provision for the unemployed	Management systems in further establishments	Total
Metropolitan Districts												
Birmingham	31·1	—	29·8	—	—	—	60·4	52·3	349·6	58·9	13·9	596·0
Coventry	30·0	—	27·4	*167·2	—	—	11·5	—	76·8	20·2	13·6	346·7
Dudley	32·6	—	15·5	—	—	—	—	29·1	68·1	—	18·2	163·7
Sandwell	33·7	—	27·5	—	—	—	—	—	85·6	37·5	6·9	191·2
Solihull	25·0	—	4·7	—	—	—	—	18·5	41·2	—	6·9	96·3
Walsall	34·5	—	14·2	—	29·4	—	36·8	—	30·4	—	5·0	150·3
Wolverhampton	22·0	—	21·4	—	—	—	—	—	89·3	36·6	9·9	179·2
Knowsley	20·9	29·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	82·4	—	12·6	145·0
Liverpool	50·6	23·8	29·9	—	66·6	—	31·3	—	224·8	41·5	25·4	493·9
St. Helens	19·0	—	20·9	—	—	—	—	49·9	87·4	20·0	11·5	208·7
Sefton	29·3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	29·3
Wirral	30·0	26·4	28·5	—	—	—	—	—	46·2	54·1	16·9	202·1
Bolton	25·0	—	22·3	—	—	—	—	40·9	108·2	26·4	6·1	228·9
Bury	25·0	53·8	21·2	—	—	—	—	—	62·5	—	8·7	171·2
Manchester	30·0	54·2	26·4	—	—	—	41·8	52·3	130·9	50·3	5·0	390·9
Oldham	25·4	—	19·4	—	—	—	41·5	—	41·2	—	9·8	137·3
Rochdale	26·3	—	28·6	—	—	—	—	36·6	72·3	—	8·8	172·6
Salford	25·2	—	28·2	—	—	—	—	31·2	89·9	28·5	11·8	214·8
Stockport	21·9	—	22·8	—	—	—	—	27·0	42·1	26·1	—	140·1
Tameside	27·4	46·2	23·8	—	—	—	24·6	19·9	47·5	15·7	7·1	212·2
Trafford	23·5	—	24·6	—	29·1	—	47·0	—	51·2	—	6·0	181·6
Wigan	30·0	—	23·5	96·7	—	—	—	20·9	59·4	—	—	230·5
Barnsley	35·5	—	32·3	—	—	—	—	—	56·8	27·5	11·4	163·5
Doncaster	35·2	45·5	27·8	—	—	—	—	26·0	74·3	17·0	9·4	235·2
Rotherham	17·4	—	28·2	—	—	—	20·8	31·4	84·7	24·6	11·7	238·8
Sheffield	32·5	39·0	29·8	—	77·9	—	31·3	—	150·7	—	16·1	377·3
Bradford	38·6	28·9	37·6	—	—	—	104·3	32·7	156·5	32·8	12·5	443·9
Calderdale	26·8	—	11·8	—	—	—	—	—	37·5	44·6	6·8	127·5
Kirklees	24·4	—	29·0	—	—	—	48·7	53·2	141·4	48·4	11·5	356·6
Leeds	26·0	—	22·3	—	40·4	—	17·7	52·0	198·4	39·7	9·3	405·8
Wakefield	35·1	35·3	27·8	—	—	—	—	42·3	41·2	—	8·9	190·6
Gateshead	10·2	—	23·6	—	—	—	—	—	41·3	26·9	1·0	103·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	19·8	34·6	25·6	—	—	—	—	36·6	154·4	43·9	15·5	330·4
North Tyneside	23·4	—	28·6	—	—	—	18·1	15·7	24·9	—	5·0	115·7
South Tyneside	23·9	—	18·6	—	—	—	—	32·5	88·0	27·0	12·7	202·7
Sunderland	—	—	25·0	—	43·1	—	—	—	153·1	29·9	—	251·1
Shire Counties												
Avon	59·4	55·8	29·0	—	—	—	—	—	376·5	—	—	520·7
Bedfordshire	53·2	41·6	25·4	—	—	—	—	—	183·6	20·0	15·3	339·1
Berkshire	35·6	—	31·0	—	—	—	62·7	—	118·8	30·9	17·7	296·7
Buckinghamshire	47·1	32·5	29·8	—	—	—	—	31·4	288·2	—	18·1	447·1
Cambridgeshire	48·9	46·9	26·0	—	—	57·5	—	—	185·5	—	12·4	377·2
Cheshire	50·2	—	19·3	—	34·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	103·5
Cleveland	60·6	38·8	29·3	—	32·1	—	—	—	176·2	29·3	8·8	375·1
Cornwall	45·5	36·7	23·7	—	—	—	—	12·5	146·9	23·0	7·9	296·2
Cumbria	52·6	40·3	22·2	—	—	71·9	—	53·8	254·6	—	—	495·4
Derbyshire	59·6	—	27·0	†	—	—	24·3	—	245·7	—	20·4	377·0
Devon	40·1	—	23·7	—	—	—	—	26·1	279·7	75·2	14·5	459·3
Dorset	44·1	51·5	19·2	168·3	—	106·9	—	—	89·6	—	13·4	493·0
Durham	41·3	—	26·6	—	—	—	—	14·0	128·1	—	12·7	222·7
East Sussex	25·3	16·0	22·0	—	—	—	—	—	259·8	—	9·3	332·4
Essex	55·4	—	30·4	276·4	—	—	—	62·7	377·3	21·9	18·8	842·9
Gloucestershire	42·1	41·4	10·9	—	—	—	20·7	41·8	282·0	26·1	12·8	477·8
Hampshire	23·5	56·2	29·0	—	—	—	—	52·3	312·1	—	9·8	482·9
Hereford & Worcester	41·1	—	25·5	—	—	—	—	44·0	201·5	49·1	10·9	372·1
Hertfordshire	61·4	51·7	29·0	—	—	—	—	26·1	278·2	—	16·4	462·8
Humberside	58·2	—	26·0	—	—	—	14·7	34·2	155·2	35·4	16·6	340·3
Isle of Wight	14·4	—	20·9	—	—	—	—	—	41·2	—	2·8	79·3
Kent	44·8	—	27·8	—	—	—	18·8	62·7	164·3	—	19·7	338·1
Lancashire	58·7	38·4	27·6	62·7	—	—	19·1	36·4	249·1	—	11·7	503·7
Leicestershire	55·2	30·8	60·0	*167·2	—	—	65·8	29·4	127·1	53·7	22·9	612·1
Lincolnshire	52·2	—	28·0	†	—	—	—	—	96·0	—	8·0	185·0
Norfolk	45·1	46·8	27·2	—	—	73·4	—	—	119·7	—	15·5	327·7
North Yorkshire	36·1	28·6	24·9	—	—	—	—	52·3	205·5	—	16·6	364·0
Northamptonshire	33·1	51·0	29·8	†274·9	—	—	—	52·3	262·5	53·9	12·6	770·1
Northumberland	25·4	52·0	22·4	—	—	—	—	—	49·5	9·8	10·5	169·6
Nottinghamshire	55·2	—	26·7	†	—	—	—	—	158·7	—	—	240·6
Oxfordshire	45·0	58·6	22·2	*167·2	—	—	—	36·1	206·2	39·6	16·7	591·6
Shropshire	50·0	47·4	24·8	—	—	64·8	—	—	118·7	—	21·6	327·3
Somerset	32·0	41·5	24·0	*167·2	—	—	—	—	243·0	59·7	12·8	580·2
Staffordshire	63·5	89·8	30·9	—	—	—	—	42·0	297·3	—	16·9	540·4
Suffolk	13·4	19·3	60·0	88·6	—	—	—	12·2	—	31·9	13·1	238·5
Surrey	41·1	29·4	—	—	—	—	—	25·6	122·8	23·7	—	242·6
Warwickshire	42·9	42·2	22·7	—	—	—	—	—	166·8	—	16·7	291·3
West Sussex	22·9	43·3	22·0	—	—	—	—	47·0	143·9	—	13·5	292·6
Wiltshire	27·1	28·3	8·3	—	33·9	79·9	—	27·6	176·0	—	10·4	391·5

*† These two groups of four authorities comprise two consortia for pilot projects concerned with records of achievement. The total amount approved for consortium * is £668,000 and for † £274,900. The authorities comprising consortium * each submitted their own application: for consortium † Northamptonshire submitted a single application on behalf of the consortium as a whole.

‡ These two groups of authorities comprise two consortia in respect of which expenditure has been approved concerned with the provision of retraining and updating courses. The total amount approved for consortium ‡ is £143,500 and for ‖ is £53,200. Single applications were submitted by Waltham Forest in respect of ‡ and Kirklees in respect of ‖ on behalf of the consortia.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Cockfield

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from any of the institutions of the European Community regarding the legal problems arising from the appointment of Lord Cockfield as a European Economic Community Commissioner.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what legal advice from outside Government she sought regarding the appointment of a Member of the House of Lords as a European Commissioner.

The Prime Minister: The compatibility of Lord Cockfield's appointment as commissioner with his membership of the House of Lords was initially raised by Members of the European Parliament. It was accordingly considered by the Commission and Council Legal Services. They have concluded that there is no incompatibility in such cases where the Member concerned takes leave of absence from the House of Lords for the duration of his appointment as a commissioner.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will reconsider the appointment of Lord Cockfield as an EEC Commissioner, in view of the legal problem arising from his position as a Member of the House of Lords.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister what remuneration, benefits and payments of any kind are being made or have been made in the current year from public funds to Lord Cockfield.

The Prime Minister: Until 10 September 1984, Lord Cockfield received his ministerial salary and all necessary expenses incurred as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Since then he has been provided with secretarial support, accommodation and transport in connection with his duties as a United Kingdom member of the next European Commission.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister under which head of expenditure the current cost of the office, secretary, ministerial car and driver of Lord Cockfield is met.

The Prime Minister: The necessary expenses of both United Kingdom members of the next European Commission will be met from Subhead A1 of Class XIII, Vote 19 until they take up their appointments on 6 January 1985. These include the provision of secretarial support, accommodation and travel within the United Kingdom.

EC (Aid)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister, of the 1·2 million tonnes of grain for African countries agreed at the European Council on 3 and 4 December, how much will come from *(a)* individual member states, *(b)* stocks under the intervention policies of the common agricultural policy and *(c)* other sources.

The Prime Minister: Detailed arrangements to implement the decision of the European Council to provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain to Africa are still under discussion. However, the understanding reached at Dublin was that member states would provide 450,000 tonnes; and that the Community would provide the remainder with financing being drawn from the budget and from the emergency provisions of the Lomé convention. The Commission will make proposals for the procurement of grain when it proposes allocations to recipient countries.

THE ARTS

British Museum (Redecoration)

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what representations he has received concerning the redecoration of the entrance hall of the British museum, advocating the reinstatement of the 19th century colour scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts has received representations advocating the reinstatement of the original 19th century colour scheme of the entrance hall of the British museum from The Georgian Group.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pensioners (Taxation)

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing tax break-even points, defined as the income levels at which tax paid equals state pension received, for each of a single pensioner and a married pensioner, in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Moore: The information is as follows for taxpayers over 65 receiving the standard rate of national insurance retirement pension. The operation of the investment income surcharge in years before 1984-85 affects the figures for married couples. The table shows minimum and maximum figures.

Levels of total income at which liability to income tax equals receipt of national insurance pension

£ per annum

	Single	*Married*	
		*Minimum**	*Maximum†*
1979-80	5,179	7,418	7,755
1980-81	6,022	8,519	9,000
1981-82	6,369	9,227	9,923
1982-83	7,124	10,259	10,892
1983-84	7,918	11,308	12,028
1984-85	8,342	12,779	12,779

* Assuming that all income other than national insurance retirement pension is investment income.

† Assuming that all income is earned.

Scotland (Wealth Statistics)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of total wealth in Scotland held by the top 1 per cent., top 10 per cent. and top 20 per cent. in 1979-80 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Moore: I regret that estimates of the distribution of wealth in Scotland are not available.

Scotland (Estates)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the number of estates declared at a value of £1 million or over in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Moore: The number of such estates reported to the Capital Taxes Office in Edinburgh were:

	Number
1979-80	4
1980-81	8
1981-82	9
1982-83	10
1983-84	11

Scotland (Taxation)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of the total taxes gathered by the Inland Revenue in Scotland through capital gains, estate duty and capital transfer tax in 1979-80 and at the latest date.

Mr. Moore: Estimates can be given of the yields of each of these taxes in Scotland as a percentage of the total yield of the tax in the United Kingdom, as follows:

	1979-80 percentage	*Receipts in latest year*
Capital gains tax assessed by districts in Scotland	6	To October 1984 5 per cent. (provisional)
Capital transfer tax/estate duty	11	To March 1984 5 per cent.

Because of centralised collection arrangements it would not be meaningful to express the yields as percentages of the total taxes collected by the Inland Revenue in Scotland.

EC (Budget Discipline)

Mr. Caborn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the legal status of the Council of Ministers' document on budget discipline; and whether it rests on any Commission proposal.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Council of Ministers' document on budgetary discipline takes the form of "Conclusions of the Council". By adopting it, the Council has bound itself to observe the rules laid down in it governing both agricultural and non-agricultural expenditure. The legal status of the text could in the last resort be decided only by the European Court.

The document does not itself rest on any proposal from the Commission, but the Commission's undertakings relating to its own role in agricultural price fixing have been annexed to the Council document.

Mr. Caborn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Council of Ministers' document on budget discipline is for internal application to the Council only.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Council of Ministers' document on budget discipline represents the Council's conclusions on the procedures it will observe in its role as part of the budgetary authority. The Commission has also, however, given specific undertakings regarding its role in the agricultural price-fixing and in the management of agricultural spending. These undertakings are an integral part of the system and the text of them is annexed to the Council's conclusions.

Mr. Caborn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Council of Ministers considers its budget discipline proposals affect the rights of the European Parliament as one of the arms of budgetary authority.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December on measures to guarantee the effective application of budgetary discipline bind the Council to observe them in its role as part of the budgetary authority. The text does not affect Parliament's rights under the treaty in relation to non-obligatory expenditure. In addition, the Council has said it wishes to explore with both Commission and Parliament ways of co-operating over budgetary discipline and has specifically sought a meeting with the Parliament before it establishes the reference framework at the beginning of the budgetary procedure.

Mr. Caborn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, taking into account the number of caveats concerning agricultural expenditure, will be the effect of the Council of Ministers' views on budget discipline on non-obligatory expenditure and in particular the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund and Development Co-operation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Under the budgetary discipline rules, agricultural expenditure must grow less than the own resources base. The rules also contain provisions to avoid base drift in the calculation of the agricultural guideline and to enable any excess agricultural expenditure that does have to be conceded to be clawed back over the following two years. As regards non-obligatory expenditure the Council has undertaken to observe the maximum rate laid down in article 203 of the treaty throughout the budgetary procedure. The provision of finance for the European social fund and the European regional development fund will depend upon how the total amount available for non-obligatory expenditure within the maximum rate is distributed. But the Brussels European Council agreed on the need for increasing the provision for both research and development and structural funds.

Mr. Caborn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the Council of Ministers' document on budget discipline concentrates on mechanisms of budget discipline.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The principles of budgetary discipline were drawn up by heads of State and Government at the Brussels European Council in March

and formally endorsed by them at Fontainebleau in June. The remit to Ministers, which has been fulfilled by the text agreed on 4 December, was to reach agreement on the measures necessary to guarantee the effective application of these principles.

Mr. Caborn asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the Council of Minister's document on budget discipline does not define the objectives of such discipline; and if he will take steps to secure the inclusion of specific objectives on budget discipline.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The objectives of budgetary discipline were defined by Heads of State and Government at the Brussels and Fontainebleau European Councils. They were that there should be an overall limit on budgetary expenditure, that the rate of growth of agricultural spending should be less than that of the own resources base and that the maximum rate provisions of the treaty should be strictly observed. All three objectives are clearly covered by the provisions of the Council of Ministers' conclusions.

EC (Aid Provision)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage decrease in *(a)* nominal and *(b)* real terms in the level of aid designated in the draft 1985 European Economic Community budget compared to the 1984 European Economic Community budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Title 9 of the draft Community budget for 1985, which cover co-operation with developing and non-member countries, shows a decrese of 0·8 per cent. in cash terms following the decision made at the Budget Council on 29 November. No estimate is available of the change in real terms. All Community expenditure, including non-agricultural expenditure has been constrained in 1985 by the need to remain within the 1 per cent. VAT limit.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the extra expenditure in the draft 1985 European Economic Community budget necessitated by the provision of 1·2 million tonnes of grain to African countries, as agreed by the European Council; and under what headings the increased expenditure falls.

Mr. Ian Stewart: This commitment will be met from the resources of the Commission and the member states. The Community's contribution will be drawn from the European development fund (which is not part of the Community budget) and from the food aid provisions in the budget.

Financial Management Unit

Mr. Stern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a decision has yet been made on the future of the financial management unit.

Mr. Peter Rees: The financial management unit completes its final term at the end of this year. Its valuable work in helping Departments to imporve financial management will be carried forward by a small group which is being established in the Treasury and Cabinet Office in January. The primary function of this group will be to assist the top management of the two Departments to provide effective leadership in carrying through the programme of management reform in the Civil Service designed to secure better value for money. The setting up of the new group is in line with the recommendations of the report by the Efficiency Unit on consultancy, inspection and review services published on 4 December, and one of its early tasks will be to stimulate and monitor progress in implementing that report.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bankruptcies

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies were declared bankrupt in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Fletcher: Bankruptcies and company liquidations in England and Wales in these years were published in *British Business*, 26 October 1984. Figures for Scotland are as follows:

	*Sequestrations**	*Company liquidations†*
1979	106	238
1980	150	379
1981	181	438
1982	213	503
1983	282	521

* Equivalent to bankruptcies in England and Wales and covers all individuals and partnerships.

† Compulsory plus creditors voluntary — the two types which involve insolvency.

Electronic Research

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on electronics research in the last year for which figures are available; and what are the relevant percentages which went to *(a)* defence and *(b)* the non-defence areas.

Mr. Pattie: The latest available information shows industry expenditure on research and development in electronics products of £1,221 million in 1981. No information is available on the amount spent for defence.

Tourism

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to encourage tourism by American visitors in the regions.

Mr. Butcher: My department encourages tourism to and within Britain through the work of the statutory tourist boards—the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourist Board. It is mainly for the industry to develop facilities, attractions and hold events to encourage tourists to visit particular regions. Support for this work is provided by the English Tourist Board and the non-statutory regional tourist boards through grants under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 and by way of promotional activity within Britain.

The BTA feature a wide variety of attractions throughout Britain in their overseas promotional campaigns. In 1985 the BTA will be continuing with its successful theme of Britain's heritage with numerous events being staged throughout the country. Britain's heritage has a major appeal in the American market.

Biotechnology

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if support for biotechnology is included in the moratorium on research and development assistance, announced on 12 November.

Mr. Butcher: Of the range of assistance offered by the Department in support of biotechnology in industry, only research and development projects from individual firms on standard support for innovation terms are affected by the restrictions on new applications that my hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology announced on 12 November.

Collaborative applied research projects and demonstration projects can still be considered. Grants also remain available for consultancy for strategic studies, feasibility studies and problem solving.

Firms with projects in mind should seek advice from the biotechnology unit at the Laboratory of the Government Chemist about the assistance available.

Electronics Components (Aid)

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will increase the level of his Department's assistance to the electronics components industry to respond to the report by the National Economic Development Office's electronics components committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie : The Electronic Components EDC, in its report to the National Economic Development Council on 5 December, provided a useful view of the electronic components industry. There is much in the conclusions and recommendations, particularly on integrated circuit manufacture in the United Kingdom, which my Department would support.

The report underlines the importance of integrated circuits, especially those designed to meet individual applications, and the connection between a strong bases in this area and a sound and competitive electronics industry. While the United Kingdom's integrated circuit industry has improved markedly in recent years, with the encouragement of Government support, the competition is also growing fast, on average between 20 and 25 per cent. yearly. My Department accepts that the United Kingdom's growth rate in production of integrated circuits must at least reflect worldwide growth, and the prime objective of the £120 million microelectronics industry support programme (MISP 2) has been to aid this development.

The EDC recommends an increase in the United Kingdom annual investment in electronics to £400 million and that additional funds and a higher level of grant are needed to achieve this.

I informed the House on 12 November that the demands on Government support for research and development have increased over recent years and that the 1985-86 allocation for innovation grants is now virtually committed. I therefore decided to review the balance of this support and announced that no further applications would be accepted while the review is being undertaken. MISP 2 is included within this review.

The Electronic Components EDC's findings and recommendations will be considered carefully by my Department and will be taken into account in the review. I undertook to report to the council in six months on the recommendations and how they may be implemented.

Columbus Space Station

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom contribution to the construction of the Columbus space station.

Mr. Pattie: The Government are considering President Reagan's invitation to participate in an international space station in the context of the proposed long-term plan of the European Space Agency, which will be decided at a Ministerial Council of the European Space Agency in January.

Advanced Manufacturing Technology

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support he will give to proposals for a national centre for advanced manufacturing technology.

Mr. Butcher: In its response to the ACARD report "New Opportunities in Manufacturing", the Government accepted that advanced manufacturing technology (AMT) activity should be concentrated in a limited number of centres. These should emerge rather than be created, and strong industrial commitment is essential. The Government will encourage the development of such centres, which would have priority for funding through normal channels. In the west midlands, Warwick university is emerging as such a centre and DTI officials are discussing ways of working with it to promote the application of AMT in the west midlands along the Telford to Rugby axis.

EC (Manufactured Trade)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the size of the deficit in manufactured trade with the European Economic Community over the past 12 months.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Data for this trade on the balance of payments basis are available only quarterly. In the year ending September 1984 the deficit was £7·9 billion.

Laboratory Accreditation

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the arrangements in his Department for laboratory accreditation.

Mr. Pattie: The British Calibration Service (BCS) and the National Testing Laboratory Accreditation Scheme (NATLAS), both operated by the National Physical Laboratory, are essential elements for laboratory accreditation in the national measurement system. The BCS is responsible for assessing and accrediting calibration laboratories and, on 1 November 1984, there were 129 accreditations in force from both the private and public sectors, with the majority from the former. NATLAS is concerned with the assessment and accreditation of testing laboratories in a wide range of physical, chemical and engineering disciplines and, at present, there are 244 accreditations in force most of which are in the private sector.

Both schemes are continuing to grow and I have decided, in the interest of improved efficiency, to merge

them into a single unified scheme by 1 October 1985. The unified scheme will be known as the National Measurement Accreditation Service (NAMAS) but the terms BCS and NATLAS which are now widely recognised both in this country and abroad will be retained as groupings within the scheme.

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has seen copies of the telex exchanges between the Caribbean countries involved and the European commissioner regarding the purchase of Super 748 aircraft for Leeward Islands Air Transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *439*.]: I am aware that there have been extensive contacts between the Caribbean Development Bank, Leeward Islands Air Transport and the European Commission. I understand that these contacts are continuing.

EMPLOYMENT

Community Programme

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on plans for the community programme in 1985-86.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend set out our plans for the development of the community programme in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) on 30 July, at columns 121-22. We have previously guaranteed its future until at least October 1986.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to extend the Manpower Services Commission community programme to two years.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *312*]: No. The position has not changed since the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 7 February 1984, at column 588.

Wages Councils

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Employment if Her Majesty's Government intend to abolish the wages councils and minimum wage legislation.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government have yet to make decisions on the future of the Wages Councils Act.

Theatre Technicians

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many vacancies for theatre technicians in regional theatres are currently advertised in jobcentres; and what were the corresponding figures in November 1983, November 1982 and November 1981, respectively.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the numbers of men and women unemployed, and the percentage rate of unemployment, in the Armley, Bramley, Kirkstall, Pudsey North, Pudsey South and Wortley wards of Leeds city council.

Mr. Alan Clark: Unemployment data for individual wards will not be available until the middle of next year. Furthermore, the smallest local areas for which unemployment rates are calculated are travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the percentage of people in the United Kingdom who, on becoming unemployed, find jobs within *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months and *(c)* 12 months; and what relationship there is between the corresponding local figures and the local overall unemployment rate.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage change in employment in England in *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* the service industry for each year since 1979; what is the cumulative total since 1979; and if he will give separate figures for men and women.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is as follows:

Percentage change in employment in England

June each year	*Manufacturing industries*		*Service industries*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1979-80	− 3·6	− 4·8	0·6	1·3
1980-81	− 9·3	−11·9	−2·5	−1·4
1981-82	− 4·4	− 5·5	−0·4	0·4
1982-83	− 4·1	− 4·9	0·4	0·7
1983-84	− 0·9	− 1·3	2·1	2·2
1979-84	−20·6	−25·7	0·2	3·3

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment, in each of the travel-to-work areas which have newly been given assisted area status, what percentage of employed people work in *(a)* manufacturing industries and *(b)* service industries; and what are the corresponding figures for the Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest available information from the September 1981 census of employment is as follows:

Travel-to-work area	*Employees in Employment*	
	Manufacturing industries per cent.	*Service industries per cent.*
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	47	42
Birmingham	37	56
Coventry and Hinckley	46	47
Dudley and Sandwell	49	44
Kidderminster	43	48
Telford and Bridgnorth	38	51
Walsall	45	44
Wolverhampton	41	52
Sheffield	35	55
Blackburn	46	49
Oldham	48	45
Stoke	44	44

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people there were per job vacancy, at the latest date for which figures are

available, for each of the travel-to-work areas which have newly been given assisted area status; and what are the corresponding figures for the Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: While unemployment totals are available, vacancy figures have not been compiled for the new travel-to-work areas. Moreover, the available statistics of vacancies notified to jobcentres and careers offices only cover a proportion of the total unfilled vacancies.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give figures showing which of the travel-to-work areas newly given assisted area status had their boundaries redrawn for which there was a resultant *(a)* increase and *(b)* decrease in the unemployment rate; how large the changes were in each case; and if he will give corresponding figures for the Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: Comparable unemployment rates for the old and new travel-to-work areas are not available. The complete map of travel-to-work area boundaries has been revised. The new areas were defined using the latest available data on commuting patterns from the 1981 census of population. They represent the best approximation to a subdivision of the country into separate labour markets for which unemployment rates provide a measure of the local mismatch between labour supply and demand, and as such are the local areas for which the Department publishes unemployment rates.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what percentage of the work force in each of the travel-to-work areas which have newly been given assisted area status have been unemployed for more than *(a)* one year and *(b)* two years; and what are the corresponding figures for the Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area;

(2) what are the percentages of unemployed people who have been unemployed for more than *(a)* one year and *(b)* two years in each of the travel-to-work areas which have newly been given assisted area status; and what are the corresponding figures for the Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested in respect of claimants unemployed for more than one year is available in the House of Commons Library. The figures are provisional and include an estimate for those whose claims are not dealt with by computer. Full analysis by duration, including figures for those unemployed for over two years, will not be available for the new travel-to-work areas until next year.

North-West Area

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Employment what he forecasts for unemployment trends in the north-west in 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department does not make forecasts of unemployment trends.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Intervention Stores

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide funds for the construction of storage accommodation suitable for storing European Economic Community intervention grain in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: No. I am informed that adequate suitable storage accommodation is already available.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the implications for Northern Ireland public expenditure programmes of the announcement made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 12 November.

Mr. Hurd: The autumn statement laid before the House by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 12 November, at column 415, contained a total public expenditure planning total for the Northern Ireland programme of £4,240 million for 1985-86. Because of subsequent technical adjustments the figure now stands at £4,253 million, which is an increase of some £195 million on the forecast outturn for 1984-85 and £30 million on the previously planned total for 1985-86 which underlay the 1984 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9143). As indicated in my right hon. Friend's statement, the figures will continue to be subject to further technical adjustments before publication in the 1985 public expenditure White Paper.

I have decided on the following cash allocations to individual programmes (rounded to the nearest £5 million):

	1985-86 £ million
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	85
Trade, Industry, Energy and Employment	425
Transport	120
Housing	360
Other Environmental Services	165
Law, Order and Protective Services	440
Education, Libraries, Science and Arts	615
Health and Personal Social Services	700
Social Security	1,275
Other Public and Common Services	70
Total	4,255

These planning figures will form the basis for preparation by Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office of Main Estimates for the coming year. These will provide for the detailed allocation to services for which each Department is responsible and will be presented to Parliament in due course.

The allocations reflect my assessment of how best to distribute the Northern Ireland public expenditure total in response to local needs and circumstances. Copies of a more detailed statement on these allocations have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Subsidies

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated amount of housing subsidies for 1984-85, distinguishing between rate-borne and centrally funded subsidies.

Mr. Gow: Local authorities have claimed £393 million main housing subsidy for 1984-85. Based on their claim forms, it is estimated that net transfers from the general rate fund to the housing revenue account will total £420 million during the year.

Council House Sales

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the assumptions used to estimate the capital receipts to local authorities for 1985-86 in respect of the sale of council dwellings, including the number of sales, the sale price net of discount, the average level of discount and the ratio of private finance.

Mr. Gow: Total local authority housing capital receipts in England in 1985-86 are forecast to be £1,595 million, of which £1,460 million will be from the sale of council dwellings. The detailed forecasts, including the underlying assumptions about council house sales, are as follows:

	£ million cash
Receipts from sales of land	100
Initial receipts from council house sales	890
Repayments of discounts	15
Repayments of sums left outstanding on sales	400
Repayments of loans to private persons	155
Repayment of loans to housing associations	35
Total	1,595

The assumptions about council houses sales on which these forecasts are based are: Number of completed sales, 95,000.

Average selling price, net of discount	£14,400
Average level of discount	40 per cent.
Average level of private finance	65 per cent.

Seaside and Country Homes

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of the 3,400 seaside and country homes at present owned by the Greater London council together with the names of the district councils to which it is proposed to transfer them.

Sir George Young: No list of dwellings is held centrally. However, the Library of the House has available the response made by the GLC Conservative group to the White Paper "Streamlining the Cities"; this gives on page 52 the number of dwellings owned by the GLC in 1983 in the area of each district council concerned.

Petrol (Lead Content)

Mr. Woodcock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that unleaded petrol should not be introduced throughout the European Community before 1989.

Mr. Waldegrave: In my statement on 10 December, at column 741, I explained that the Council of Environment Ministers has reached agreement on a directive which provides for the introduction of unleaded petrol throughout the Community not later than 1989, or earlier if individual member states wish. The Government would welcome the sale of unleaded petrol in this country before 1989 if the oil companies see a market for it.

Mr. Woodcock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's Government will support a derogation in the draft directive on lead and benzene content of petrol to allow Italy and France to retain the maximum lead content of 0·4 g per litre.

Mr. Waldegrave: The directive as originally drafted by the European Commission would have acquired the maximum permitted lead content of leaded petrol to be 0·15 grammes per litre from 1 October 1989; but made provision for temporary waivers for member states with particular difficulties. The text as agreed by the Environment Council now requires members states to reduce the lead content of leaded petrol to this level as soon as they consider it appropriate.

Mr. Woodcock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider Her Majesty's Government's decision to reduce the lead content in petrol in the United Kingdom from 0·4 g to 0·15 g from the beginning of 1986.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. This move will reduce petrol-lead emissions by around 60 per cent. immediately; and the Government regard it as an important step towards the eventual elimination of lead from petrol.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer on Monday 19 November, *Official Report*, column 33, if any of the existing areas of outstanding natural beauty designated by the Countryside Commission in East Anglia have suffered intrusions from commercial development or any other activity.

Mr. Waldegrave: Records are not kept centrally of commercial or other types of development in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Inner City Partnership Funds

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the totals of inner city partnership funds allotted by authority, distinguishing between funds going to local authorities for their own projects and funds going to the voluntary sector.

Sir George Young: The information is as follows:

1984-85 Inner area

£ million

Partnership authority	*Programme allocations*	**Local authority*	*Voluntary sector*
Birmingham	24·5	19·11	5·39
Hackney	12·0	6·84	5·16
Islington	10·4	8·22	2·18
Lambeth	13·5	7·42	6·08
Liverpool	24·1	21·69	2·41
Manchester/Salford	24·5	22·05	2·45

Partnership authority	Programme allocations	*Local authority	Voluntary sector
Newcastle/Gateshead	18·0	15·66	2·34
Total	127·0	100·99	26·01

* Including projects involving private sector participation.

Urban Development Grant

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total of urban development grant for 1983-84; and in which local authority areas it was spent.

Sir George Young: In 1983-84 my Department gave final approval to 57 projects worth £87 million comprising £69 million of private investment and £18 million of urban development grant and other public funds. Since then a further 51 projects worth £155 million, involving £124 million of private investment and £31 million of UDG and other public funds, have been approved. Expenditure on these projects will be spread over several years. Another 24 projects worth £108 million, involving £90 million of private investment and £18 million of UDG and other public funds, have received offers of grant to which responses from local authorities remain outstanding.

A list of local authorities with finally approved schemes is below:

Brent
Birmingham
Bolton
Coventry
Dudley
Ealing
Gateshead
Greater London Council
Hackney
Hartlepool
Hull
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Lewisham
Manchester
Merseyside County Council
Middlesbrough
Newcastle
North Tyneside
Nottingham
Oldham
Rochdale
Rotherham
Salford
Sandwell
Sheffield
Southwark
Trafford
Wakefield
Wandsworth
Walsall
Wigan
Wirral
Wolverhampton

Ronan Point

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the records of the public inquiry into the Ronan Point disaster will be available for authorised inspection; what is the period during which they have not been available; and what are the reasons for their non-availability.

Mr. Gow: I understand that access was given to the records of the public inquiry in the period immediately after it reported. When the papers were recovered from storage in order to reply to the hon. Member on 23 October 1984 at columns 553-54 they were found to be in a disordered state and some papers are missing. The task of ordering, securing and cataloguing the papers in order to give the further access which the hon. Member has requested is substantial. The papers should be available for access early in the new year.

Wildlife Inspectorate

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the work of the Wildlife Inspectorate.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am aware that allegations have been made against a part-time voluntary inspector. I understand that these are being investigated by the police, who are receiving every co-operation from my Department. The investigation will not in any way hamper the very effective work done by the Wildlife Inspectorate in monitoring compliance with the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Power Stations (Emissions)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the contribution from emissions from fossil fuel-fired power stations in the United Kingdom to the total acid deposition in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 November 1984, c. 446]: The relationship between emissions and deposition can be derived only from mathematical models. On this basis it is estimated that about half of the total acid deposition within the United Kingdom comes from United Kingdom fossil fuel-fired power stations.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the fall in total sulphur dioxide emissions from United Kingdom sources *(a)* between 1970 and 1980 and *(b)* from 1980 to date, has been because of reductions in emissions from Central Electricity Generating Board power stations.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 November 1984, c. 446]: The information, based on provisional figures for 1983, is as follows:

(a) none
(b) 30 per cent.

DEFENCE

Correspondence

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he will reply to the several letters from the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne on a matter originally raised in a letter dated 22 February, and subsequently given his Department's reference D/US of S(AF)DGT/2262.

Mr. Lee: An extensive search has been made for records that might enable me to answer my hon. Friend's inquiry—which relates to the battle of Monte Cassino in 1944—without success so far. Our inquiries will shortly be drawn to a conclusion and my noble Friend will then write to my hon. Friend.

Royal Artillery Range, Hebrides

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any further consultations have taken place between Her Majesty's Government and the United States' Government on the use of the royal artillery range, Hebrides, by the United States Army since the visit of the United States Army delegation to the range in 1982.

Mr. Lee: No.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the foreign military units or delegations which have visited the royal artillery range, Hebrides, since 1979.

Mr. Lee: Various foreign units and delegations have visited the royal artillery range, Hebrides, principally in connection with missile sales demonstrations. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to release details of this kind.

Hi-Fix Transmitter Sites (Western Isles)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has any plans to instal further Hi-Fix transmitter sites in the Western Isles in addition to those at Ledaig, Scalpay and Uiskevagh.

Mr. Lee: No.

Stornoway Airport

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many air misses have been recorded in the vicinity of Stornoway airport in each year since 1979; and if he will provide a breakdown of these figures into air misses between (*a*) two civil aircraft, (*b*) two military aircraft and (*c*) a civil and a military aircraft.

Mr. Lee: None.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many practice approaches and practice diversions by military aircraft have been made at Stornoway airport in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lee: Records are not kept in such a way as to allow me to provide this information.

RAF Stornoway

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist for military exercises at RAF Stornoway on completion of the current North Atlantic Treaty Organisation redevelopment work there.

Mr. Lee: No firm plans have yet been made. Peacetime exercises at Stornoway will be limited to six weeks in any one year but no timetable has yet been decided.

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with represenatives of business and industry about energy saving during the miners' strike.

Mr. Peter Walker: On taking up office I launched a nationwide energy efficiency campaign, including early morning briefings with senior executives. In these I and my fellow Ministers have continued to stress the long-term benefits of switching to coal-firing, despite the damage the strike has done to the prospects of improved markets for coal.

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give information on how his Department calculates the amount of plutonium being produced by British nuclear reactors.

Mr. Goodlad: This information is calculated by the operator from the operating records of the reactors.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the number and percentage of employees in employment in each of the four main sectors in Dundee in 1975; what are the corresponding figures for the latest available date; and what are the corresponding figures for Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is set out in the table. It is based on the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification.

	Numbers in thousands				*Percentages*			
	Dundee travel-to-work area		*Scotland*		*Dundee travel-to-work area*		*Scotland*	
	1975	*1981*	*1975*	*1981*	*1975*	*1981*	*1975*	*1981*
Primary	1·0	0·9	84·8	87·9	1·1	1·2	4·1	4·4
Manufacturing	33·9	21·5	636·9	495·5	36·3	26·4	30·7	24·9
Construction	6·7	5·3	173·1	147·2	7·1	6·4	8·3	7·4
Gas, electricity and water	1·0	1·2	25·8	29·1	1·1	1·5	1·2	1·5
Services	50·7	52·6	1,155·1	1,231·0	54·3	64·4	55·6	61·8
TOTAL	93·3	81·6	2,075·7	1,990·7	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage of people in the following age groups in Scotland who were economically active in 1979 and at the latest date for men and women (*a*) 16 to 17, (*b*) 18 to 24, (*c*) 25 to 34, (*d*) 34 to 44, (*e*) 45 to 54, (*f*) 55 to 59 and (*g*) 60 to 64 years.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The estimated percentages of the population in Scotland who were economically active in the labour force are set out in the table.

	Males		*Females*	
Age	*1979*	*1983*	*1979*	*1983*
16 to 24	80·2	81·1	73·1	70·6
25 to 34	95·7	93·4	56·8	57·2
35 to 44	95·5	95·1	68·9	68·6
45 to 59	93·7	88·8	64·8	59·8
60 to 64	74·6	57·6	24·7	19·1

The estimates for the most recent date available relate to 1983 and have been prepared by the Department of Employment. Estimates for the precise age groups requested are not available.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the average length of time an unemployed person has remained on the unemployment register in Dundee and Scotland in 1965, 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is not available in the precise form requested and could be made available for 1965 only at disproportionate cost. However, the following table shows for Dundee jobcentre area and for Scotland the median length of unemployment of:

(a) registrants remaining unemployed at the October count in 1980, 1981 and 1982 and claimants remaining unemployed at the October count in 1983 and 1984; and

(b) claimants who had completed a spell of unemployment during the 12 months up to the October count in 1983 and 1984.

*Median number of weeks unemployed**

	Dundee	*Scotland*
(a) Uncompleted spells of unemployment		
Registrants at 9 October 1980	21·2	19·8
Registrants at 8 October 1981	30·9	27·1
Registrants at 14 October 1982	38·6	32·9
Claimants at 13 October 1983	33·2	33·1
Claimants at 11 October 1984	37·4	35·2
(b) Completed spells of unemployment†		
12 months ended 13 October 1983	13·5	12·8
12 months ended 11 October 1984	14·1	12·7

* The median length of unemployment is the length of time spent unemployed exceeded by 50 per cent. of those included in the count.

† Median figures for completed spells of unemployment were introduced in August 1983.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the percentage of local authority expenditure for Dundee and Scotland met by central Government funds in each year since 1980-81.

Mr. Ancram: The table sets out the information in the budgets of local authorities based on the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Publication "Rating Review".

	Dundee District Council	*Scotland (All Authorities)*
	per cent.	*per cent.*
1980-81	35·5	57·8
1981-82	28·1	53·6
1982-83	22·3	51·5
1983-84	17·4	49·8
1984-85	18·3	48·8

Notes:

1. For the purpose of this question, local authority expenditure is relevant expenditure for rate support grant purposes, including loan charges, total expenditure on the housing relevant account and rate fund contributions other than to the housing revenue account.

2. Government grants are specific revenue grants, needs and resources elements of rate support grants and housing support grants. In its budget, Dundee assumed no income from housing support grant in the years 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers currently on the waiting list for treatment at Dundee hospitals; and what have been the average annual figures for each year since 1980.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The following numbers were on waiting lists for Dundee hospitals at 30 September in the years in question—

	Number
1980	3,283
1981	3,383
1982	4,334
1983	5,626

The 1984 numbers are not available centrally. 1982 waiting list data were seriously affected by the industrial dispute and the figure quoted includes an estimate for Ninewells hospital.

School Meals

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the amount of subsidy paid per annum to provide school meals in Scotland; and what proportion is paid to subsidise the cost of midday meals to boarding pupils.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government does not directly subsidise school meals. However provision for net expenditure by local authorities on school meals of £37·6 million has been included in the relevant expenditure for 1985-86, on which rate support grant is payable. This figure includes provision for midday meals for pupils accommodated in school hostels, but the amount involved cannot be separately identified.

Lothian (Nurses)

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of qualified nursing staff in the Lothian health board area; what were the corresponding staff figures for 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and how many vacancies currently exist.

Mr. John MacKay: The numbers of qualified nursing staff in the Lothian health board area were:

At 30 September	*Number of qualified staff*	*Wholetime equivalent*
1980	4,842	4,159·7
1981	5,080	4,367·8
1982	5,426	4,683·4
1983	5,568	4,852·6
1984	5,550	*4,859·1

* Provisional.

I understand that there were 120 vacancies at mid-October 1984.

NHS (Privatisation)

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has received from the Lothian health board about the privatisation of parts of the National Health Service in Lothian.

Mr. John MacKay: None. I have asked Lothian and other health boards to report in April 1985 what progress they have made in testing the cost-effectiveness of their support services.

Ambulance Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* ambulance staff, *(b)* police, and *(c)* fire brigade staff have been (i) assaulted and (ii) admitted to inpatient hospital care, following assaults upon them, in the Strathclyde area, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ancram: Precise records are not kept. The information available is set out in the table.

Year	Number of assaults			Numbers admitted to in-patient care		
	Ambulance staff	Police	Fire Brigade staff	Ambulance staff	Police	Fire Brigade staff
1979	Nil	1,488	Nil	Nil	Information not available	Nil
1980	1	1,633	Nil	Nil		Nil
1981	4	2,106	Nil	Nil		Nil
1982	1	2,168*	3	Nil		Nil
1983	2	*2,175	6	Nil		1

* Includes 1 police officer murdered while on duty.

Police Houses

Mr. Fairbairn asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police houses there are in each of the regions of Scotland; and how many have been sold and how many are held vacant in each region.

Mr. Ancram: Information is not readily available in the form requested. I shall reply to my hon. and learned Friend as soon as possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Middle East

5. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current peace initiatives in the middle east.

11. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is planning new initiatives in the middle east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's policy in the middle east.

50. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press for a European initiative on the middle east.

52. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes to take following his recent visit to the middle east to help towards a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, particularly regarding the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

56. **Mr. Walters** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes taking to assist in progress toward peace in the middle east.

Mr. Hicks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends making any fresh proposals designed to resolve the Palestinian issue; and if he will make a statement.

66. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there are any plans for a European Economic Community initiative to bring about a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict in the middle east.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Heads of State and Government of the European Community reaffirmed in Dublin their desire to see urgent efforts made to establish peace and stability in the middle east, and their willingness to assist efforts to that end. We shall continue to do all we can to encourage negotiated solutions. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister held talks with King Hussein earlier this week, and I discussed the middle east with Mr. Shultz yesterday. But it must be for the parties themselves to take the initiative in peace efforts.

Gulf War

12. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives the European Community is taking to bring about an early end to the Iran-Iraq war.

Mr. Luce: The European Community wishes to see the earliest possible end to this tragic conflict and believes that the differences between Iran and Iraq must be resolved through dialogue and negotiation. On 4 December leaders of the Ten announced that they would continue to work for an early, just and honourable settlement and would give full support to any efforts to limit the scope of the conflict.

Chemical Weapons

13. **Mr. Churchill** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been in the Geneva negotiations on chemical weapons.

Mr. Luce: Further progress has been made towards a treaty, but more slowly than we would have wished. Key problems of verification remain to be resolved. When the negotiations resume in January we trust that other countries, including the Soviet Union, will join us in showing the flexibility and determination needed to achieve a total ban.

South Africa

14. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the

effect on bilateral relations of the failure of the South African Government to return the four South African nationals who failed to answer to their bail at Coventry.

Mr. Rifkind: I strongly condemned the South African Government's action in my statement of 23 October. Their continuing failure to return the four to the United Kingdom is a factor we shall have to take into account in future bilateral dealings.

48. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of United Kingdom—South African relations.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor).

Cyprus

15. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now call upon the United States Government to join Britain in new initiatives with Ankara, following the breakdown of the proximity talks in regard to Cyprus.

Mr. Renton: The proximity talks organised by the United Nations Secretary General have not broken down. We, the United States Government and our allies have given every support to the Secretary General's initiative. We are in constant touch with all the parties to the dispute to that end.

36. **Mr. Hickmet** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current negotiations in New York on the future of Cyprus.

Mr. Renton: The third round of proximity talks held under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary General, started on 26 November. We have given every support to the Secretary General in his search for a settlement of the Cyprus problem.

Syria

16. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has received from the Syrian Government that they will assist the international fight to combat terrorism and disband all organisations based in Syria, whose methods include those of terrorism; and what response he has had to any requests he has made to the Syrian Government for co-operation in dealing with terrorism.

Mr. Luce: During my right hon. and learned Friend's visit to Damascus in January, he made clear our views about terrorist activities, as I did in December 1983. The Syrian Government have assured us of their opposition to terrorism.

East-West Relations

17. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of East-West relations.

Mr. Rifkind: We continue to work, with our allies, for a better relationship between East and West. We look forward to discussions later this month with Mr. Gorbachev and to a visit next year by Mr. Gromyko. We welcome signs of a somewhat more forthcoming attitude on the part of the Soviet Union, and in particular the announcement that Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Shultz will meet in Geneva next month. Nevertheless, we recognise that progress on matters of substance is likely to be slow, and that to achieve results will require patience, persistence and realism.

Nicaragua

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to seek to visit Nicaragua in the near future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has at present no plans to visit Nicaragua. He met the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister at the San José conference in September and told him that we strongly support a peaceful settlement of the problems of the region in accordance with the Contadora principles.

23. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: We have normal diplomatic relations with Nicaragua.

28. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to pay an official visit to Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing).

41. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in relation to the International Court's decision on United States action in Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: We have taken note of the decisions by the International Court of Justice of 10 May and 26 November 1984.

58. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to increase the level of United Kingdom diplomatic representation in Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: No.

India

19. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of relations with the Government of India.

37. **Mr. Colin Shepherd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to develop Anglo-Indian relations following the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Our relations with India are excellent. We shall continue to work closely with the Government of India under their new Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi.

to seek to visit Brazil; and if he will make a statement on current relations between that country and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker).

Ethiopia

43. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Ethiopia by the Minister for Overseas Development.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The visit to Ethiopia by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development lasted from 25 to 27 November. He had useful discussions with Chairman Mengistu and other members of the Ethiopian Government, and met representatives of the voluntary agencies and international organisations. He visited relief camps at Korem and Mekele and the port of Assab and was impressed by the superb operation of the RAF detachment. Following his visit he announced to the House on 3 December further British assistance to Ethiopia of 15,000 tonnes of cereals, costing about £2·7 million, and other measures to assist relief operations.

65. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anglo-Ethiopian relations.

Mr. Rifkind: We have normal diplomatic realations with Ethiopia. Over the past 12 months, we have resumed a modest technical co-operation programme and cancelled repayment of certain development loans. (Retrospective Terms Adjustment.) In addition, we have announced £11·3 million of emergency relief and food aid in the past two months, over and above the £15·5 million already allocated since 1982.

Departmental Budget (Overseas Representation)

44. **Mr. Temple-Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on that proportion of his Department's budget to be spent on overseas representation for the next financial year; and whether such proportion represents a cut in real or cash terms.

Mr. Renton: Detailed information on the allocation of funds to the overseas representation and other Foreign and Commonwealth Office programmes in 1985-86 will be presented in the 1985 public expenditure White Paper.

Honduras (El Salvadorean Refugees)

45. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had any discussion with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about El Salvadorean refugees in Honduras.

Mr. Renton: No. We continue, however, to monitor the refugee situation in Honduras.

Diplomatic Immunity

46. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to seek to renegotiate the Vienna convention on diplomatic immunity.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to make a statement to the House on the review of the vienna convention in due course.

Iraq

49. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the bilateral and international issues raised during the recent visit to Baghdad by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

53. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister of State, during his visit to Iraq, informed the Iraqi Government of Her Majesty's Government's policy of strong abhorrence of terrorism, especially state-sponsored terrorism; and what representations were made by him concerning the implications of this policy for future relations between Iraq and the United Kingdom.

61. **Mr. Leadbitter** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during the recent visit to Iraq of the Minister of State, indications were given concerning the release of two British subjects currently serving long prison sentences in that country.

Mr. Luce: A number of subjects were discussed during my visit to Iraq. These included:

Our bilateral political relations, on which it was agreed that there should be a regular dialogue in the future.

The Iran-Iraq conflict, where I made clear our wish to see an early end to the fighting.

The cases of the two British subjects currently serving long prison sentences in Iraq for whom I strongly urged clemency. Unfortunately, I received no assurance that either prisoners would be released in the near future.

Our cultural relations, with particular reference to the good work of the British Council in Baghdad.

Our commercial relations, in the light of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade's earlier visit.

I also reiterated our strong condemnation of terrorism. For their part, the Iraqi authorities declared that they were firmly against terrorist actions.

El Salvador

51. **Mrs. Roe** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to pay an official visit to El Salvador.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has at present no plans to visit El Salvador.

Soviet Union (Foreign Minister's Visit)

54. **Mr. Nelson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a date has yet been fixed for the planned visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister to Great Britain.

Mr. Rifkind: Mr. Gromyko has accepted my right hon. and learned Friend's invitation to him to come to the United Kingdom next year. Dates are still under discussion.

Gibraltar

57. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of the agreement reached between Her Majesty's Government and the Spanish Government on 27 November on the

removal of all restrictions at present in existence between Gibraltar and Spain, the restrictions will be lifted progressively in the near future or will all be removed on 15 February 1985.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Our agreement with the Spanish Government announced on 27 November envisages the establishment of the free movement of persons, vehicles and goods between Gibraltar and the neighbouring territory not later than February 1985. This does not rule out action before that date.

70. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the negotiations he has been having with the Spanish Foreign Minister as to Gibraltar.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made in the House on 28 November.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Spanish building contractors will be permitted to compete for work in Gibraltar using their own labour and equipment as a result of the Brussels agreement.

Mr. Renton: Under the Brussels agreement, Spanish labour working for an employer would remain subject to prior national authorisation; that is, the Gibraltar work permit regime. Subject to the terms of proposals to be introduced in the Legislature of Gibraltar, self-employed Spanish contractors would be entitled to compete for work in Gibraltar on the same basis as other European Community nationals.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the right of residence being granted to Spanish nationals under the Brussels agreement will qualify them for the right to apply for inclusion on the Government housing waiting list.

Mr. Renton: The allocation of Government housing in Gibraltar is a matter for the Gibraltar Government under the housing allocations scheme.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Moroccan nationals made redundant by the naval dockyard will have priority of employment over Spanish nationals in the commercial dockyard.

Mr. Renton: The selection of employees in the commercial dockyard is a matter for judgment by the employers.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Spain will permit the reintroduction of a Gibraltar — Madrid flight on the lifting of restrictions.

Mr. Renton: The question of air services between Spain and Gibraltar is governed by the 1950 air services agreement between the United Kingdom and Spain. Aviation will, of course, also be among the matters discussed in the negotiations envisaged by the Lisbon declaration.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there will be a ferry service between Gibraltar and Algeciras on the lifting of restrictions

Mr. Renton: The Lisbon declaration envisages the re-establishment of direct communications in the region of Gibraltar. The nature of the services to provide such communication will be a matter for the commercial operators concerned.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Spain has indicated that it expects to obtain landing rights at Gibraltar for Iberia Airlines as a result of the Brussels agreement.

Mr. Renton: We have received no communication on this subject from the Spanish Government.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Spanish nationals will be free to use Gibraltar medical services on the same terms as visiting European Economic Community nationals.

Mr. Renton: On implememtation of the Lisbon declaration, emergency medical assistance would be provided in Gibraltar to visiting Spaniards as to visiting European Community nationals.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether persons providing cross-frontier services will be liable to income tax in Gibraltar if they are paid for their services in Spain.

Mr. Renton: The tax system in Gibraltar is a matter for the Gibraltar Government. The rules for the charging of tax when two countries are involved are often complex, and only the authorities concerned could express a view.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Spanish nationals in employment in Gibraltar will be able to claim family allowances in respect of dependent children living in Spain on the implementation of the Brussels agreement; and if the same rights will be granted to Moroccan nationals at the same time.

Mr. Renton: The question of the payment of family allowances to Spanish nationals employed in Gibraltar remains subject to the proposals for legislation to be introduced into the Gibraltar Legislature on the advance implementation of the European Community rights in accordance with the Brussels agreement. In principle, Spanish nationals employed in Gibraltar would not be entitled to claim family allowances for children who are not resident with them in Gibraltar. The position of Moroccan nationals will be unchanged.

Namibia

Mr. Rogers asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in implementing United Nations resolution 435 in relation to the future of Namibia,

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of talks on Namibia.

Mr. Rifkind: The Angolan and South African Governments have now put forward separate proposals on the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola. The United States is discussing these with both parties in an effort to help achieve an agreement which would enable implementation of Security Council resolution 435. This process offers the best prospect for early Namibia independence.

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support proposals on Namibia made by the Angolan President in his letter to the United Nations Secretary General of 20 November.

Mr. Rifkind: We welcome any move which will bring a Namibia settlement closer. The South African Government have also made proposals on Cuban withdrawal. Negotiations are continuing. We much hope that the parties concerned can reach an early agreement.

Guatemala

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit Guatemala.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Disarmament Talks

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current disarmament talks and prospects for the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ministerial meeting in January 1985.

Mr. Luce: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone).

We remain anxious to make progress towards agreements in the current negotiations in Stockholm, Vienna and Geneva and will continue to make an active and positive contribution to that end.

72. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the mutual and balanced force reduction talks at Vienna.

Mr. Luce: In the latest round—27 September to 13 December—of the mutual and balanced force reduction talks, the West has continued to promote the initiative it tabled in April which offers a real opportunity to resolve the long-standing dispute over the size of Eastern forces. The East's response is still very negative. It maintains that each side should determine for itself the size of reductions necessary to reach the agreed common ceiling of 900,000 ground and air forces on each side.

Chile

67. **Dame Judith Hart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to review British relationships with Chile in the light of developments within that country.

69. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what effect the state of seige in Chile will have on British relations with that country.

Mr. Renton: We continue to review the situation in Chile so as to ensure that our relations with that country properly reflect both our concerns and our interests there.

Human Rights

68. **Mr. Steen** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the Soviet Union's adherence to the human rights articles of the Helsinki agreement.

Mr. Rifkind: Our most recent assessment is contained in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) on 17 July. I regret to say that there have been no signs of any general improvement in the Soviet Union's compliance with the provisions of the Helsinki final act since then, though we welcome the decision to grant exit visas in three cases raised by my right hon. and learned Friend in Moscow last July.

Poland

71. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of Anglo-Polish relations.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 14 November. My recent visit to Poland marked the successful resumption of United Kingdom-Polish contacts at ministerial level.

Our aim now is to work for a more normal bilateral relationship and to encourage the much needed process of reconciliation in that country.

United Kingdom-Polish commercial relations are developing satisfactorily. The United Kingdom-Polish joint commission for economic, industrial, scientific and technological co-operation resumed its work with a meeting in Warsaw in October.

UNESCO

75. **Mr. Carter-Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Government about the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Mr. Raison: The Government have kept in regular touch with the United States Government about UNESCO.

76. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the scientific implications of any decision by Her Majesty's Government to withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Mr. Raison: Before taking the decision to give notice, we consulted interested bodies, including the Natural Sciences Advisory Committee of the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO, the Royal Society and Government Departments. This consultation will continue and all the views will be taken into account before a final decision is made after the 1985 general conference.

77. **Mr. Johnston** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries of the Commonwealth and the European Community have made representations to Her Majesty's Government against the United Kingdom giving notice of leaving the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Mr. Raison: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) on 29 November, exchanges

between Governments are confidential. We have been in touch with a number of Community and Commonwealth Governments since the announcement of our intention to submit formal notice of withdrawal this year. Some have expressed regret, but most of these have said that they understood our position.

Argentina

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what talks are currently in progress with the Government of Argentina.

Mr. Renton: None. We are not prepared to negotiate on sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. But we remain ready to talk about practical ways of improving bilateral relations with Argentina, as we had hoped to do during the talks in Berne in July. These talks regrettably ended in deadlock because the Argentines, contrary to what had been agreed, insisted on linking discussion of the normalisation of relations with discussion of sovereignty. This remains their position.

UMELCO Delegation (London Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the scope and purpose of the recent visit from Hong Kong of the UMELCO delegation to London.

Mr. Luce: A delegation representing the Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils of Hong Kong, led by Sir S. Y. Chung, arrived in London on 1 December. During their stay, the delegation had meetings with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and myself, when they explained the view of the people of Hong Kong on the draft agreement on the future of Hong Kong. They also attended the debate on the draft agreement in the House of Commons on 5 December. Some members of the delegation attended the debate on the draft agreement in the House of Lords on 10 December.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of the recent visit of UMELCO members to London; and if Her Majesty's Government or the Hong Kong Government will bear the cost.

Mr. Luce: The estimated cost of the recent visit of Unofficial Members of the Executive Council and Legislation Councils — UMELCO — to London is approximately Hong Kong $500,000 — approximately £52,600. This will be met by the Hong Kong Legislative Council from the public funds appropriated each year for the expenses of the UMELCO office.

Decade for Women Conference, Nairobi

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will be representing the United Kingdom at the United Nations conference on the decade for women in Nairobi in July of next year.

Mr. Renton: The composition of the United Kingdom delegation to this conference has not yet been decided. It is likely to be similar to that of our delegations to the two previous conferences of the United Nations decade for women.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated cost of sending the United Kingdom delegation to the forthcoming Nairobi conference on the United Nations decade for women.

Mr. Renton: It is too early to be able to give the information sought by my hon. Friend. The cost of the British delegation will depend on its composition, which has still to be decided.

Discrimination Against Women Convention

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received objecting to the ratification by the United Kingdom of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Mr. Renton: We have received 13 such representations this year from private individuals, Members of Parliament and members of interested organisations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what amendments he would consider essential to the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women before it would be ratified by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: States cannot seek amendments to the convention before ratifying it, but they may enter reservations and make interpretative declarations upon ratification.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* those organisations with which his Department has discussed the possible ratification of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Mr. Renton: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received, and taken into account, representations from a wide range of non-governmental organisations, including, during the last year, the National Council of Women of Great Britain, the British Federation of University Women, Change, the Responsible Society and the Family and Child Protection Group.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from religious organisations concerning those aspects of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women which would affect the conduct of such organisations.

Mr. Renton: We have not received representations from religious organisations. We have informed individuals who have inquired about this aspect that the reservations we would enter upon ratification would cover the affairs of religous ministries.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the effects upon domestic legislation of

ratification of the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in those English-speaking nations which have already ratified it.

Mr. Renton: The Austrialian Government introduced the Sex Discrimination Act following ratification of the convention. One of the Act's stated objects is to give effect to certain provisions of the convention. The Canadian Government have recently been reviewing their legislation on equality. The convention's provisions have been borne in mind during this process.

Hong Kong

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement about the introduction of direct elections in Hong Kong prior to 1997.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Hong Kong Government White Paper, published on 21 November, set out arrangements for the indirect election of 24 Members of the Legislative Council which will be introduced in 1985. There will be a review in 1987 which will cover matters such as the introduction of direct elections.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environment

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will give a date for the publication of a Green Paper on agriculture and the environment.

Mr. Jopling: I am considering whether to publish a statement of the Government's views on future agricultural and food policy, including environmental aspects.

Agricultural Buildings (Asbestos)

Mr. George asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to cease subsidising the construction of buildings on agricultural land with asbestos roofing.

Mrs. Fenner: The Health and Safety Executive has published guidelines for the safe handling of asbestos material in building work. We have therefore no plans to disallow its eligibility for grant.

Pesticides

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what speaking engagements either he or others in his Department have undertaken or are proposing to undertake at meetings or conferences, dinners or luncheons, arranged by, or with organisations concerned with, production, marketing or use of pesticides in 1984.

Mrs. Fenner: I and my officials are in regular contact with organisations concerned with the production, marketing and use of pesticides, through all the means mentioned. My concern extends well beyond those organisations with a direct financial interest in pesticides.

Council of Ministers (Meeting)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food held in Brussels on 11 December.

Mr. Jopling: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement which I made earlier today.

Grain Stocks

Mr. Foulkes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of grain stocks held by the European Economic Community under the intervention policies of the common agricultural policy on 1 January; and what has been the increase in those stocks for each month since 1 January.

Mr. MacGregor: The following table shows the EEC's intervention stocks of cereals on the first day of each month since 1 January 1984:

	Million tonnes
January	8·92
February	7·80
March	6·96
April	5·71
May	5·30
June	4·95
July	4·59
August	4·33
September	4·98
October	5·98
November	7·62
December	10·30

Source:
EEC Cereals Management Committee.

TRANSPORT

Seafarers (Health and Safety)

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for Transport what resources were provided to the section of his Department responsible for the occupational health and safety of seafarers for each of the financial years since 1978-79 expressed in cash and in constant prices.

Mr. David Mitchell: The information is not fully available, but the costs would include providing the following services:

In addition to the direct and the general costs incurred by the staff mentioned in my answer to the hon. Member on Tuesday 11 December, at columns 407-8, my Department bears the costs of : enforcing legislation, various occupational health and safety publications issued free of charge to seafarers or to masters or shipowners; the collection and analysis of accident data; certain research projects; and various other activities, including a number associated with enforcing legislation.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether his Department is able to estimate the change in traffic volume for the A206 if the east London river crossing is constructed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether his Department is able to estimate the change in traffic volume for the A2016 if the east London river crossing is constructed; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether the current proposals for the east London river crossing include a location for an interchange between that road and the A2016; and if he will make a statement;

(4) whether the current proposals for the east London river crossing include a location for an interchange between that road and the A206; and if will make a statement;

(5) whether any consultation has taken place between his Department and the London borough of Bexley concerning the east London river crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The traffic data for the east London river crossing, including that on the A206 and A2016, are currently being updated and I shall let my hon. Friend have the relevant figures when these are available early next year. The proposals provide for an interchange with the A2016, but not with the A206. The London borough of Bexley has been fully consulted about the proposals and has attended presentations on them, and has had a number of discussions with my Department.

Railway Investment

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Transport how railway investment approved by Her Majesty's Government since 1979 north of Manchester compares with that elsewhere in England.

Mr. David Mitchell: Of the 16 major railway investment projects approved by Government since 1979, six relate wholly or partly to the area north of Manchester. In addition, BR itself has authorised other investment projects in that area which did not require our approval.

A1 (Improvements)

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further plans he has to improve the English section of the A1.

Mrs. Chalker: "Policy for Roads in England 1983" (Cmnd. 9059) shows the major improvements intended for the A1 (including the Newcastle western bypass and other improvements on the A69). It also shows that we are undertaking a study of further needs of the road between Dishforth and Scotch Corner in north Yorkshire.

Radar Station (Tiree)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the function of the new radar station under construction on Tiree.

Mr. Ridley: The Tiree radar is part of the National Air Traffic Services' programme to improve and modernise radar facilities in the United Kingdom. It replaces outdated equipment located elsewhere. The new station will improve the coverage of radar used for control of air traffic over Scotland and in the western approaches.

Cycle Lanes

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider recommending the conversion of some bus lanes into partial cycle lanes, with the remaining areas reverting to car lanes.

Mrs. Chalker: Bus lanes can normally be used by cyclists. Whether they should be installed or retained should depend on whether they provide a net benefit to the community.

Motorways (Lighting)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the likely reduction in accidents that would occur on unlit sections of motorways if they were lit.

Mrs. Chalker: Research results show the reduction in casualty accidents to be extremely variable. Further studies are in hand to try and improve the information.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of lighting *(a)* the remaining stretches of the M1 and *(b)* all other stretches of the motorway network.

Mrs. Chalker: The estimated cost (at 1982-83 prices) of lighting the unlit lengths of the M1 and all other stretches of the motorway network are £9 million and £81 million respectively.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the completion of lighting between the Newport Pagnell service centre and junction 16 of the M1; and whether he has any plans to provide additional lighting on the remaining unlit stretches of the M1.

Mrs. Chalker: The installation of lighting on the M1 motorway between Newport Pagnell service area and junction 16 will be done in phases to accord with the programme for other roadworks and should be completed by spring 1987.

I am keeping under review the need to provide additional lighting on the remaining unlit stretches of the M1.

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to introduce quantified non-financial objectives for the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The agreement of objectives, both financial and non-financial, is a fundamental part of the Department's discussion with the Civil Aviation Authority of its corporate plan. Discussions on the 1985 corporate plan are to begin very shortly and I hope that as a result of these it will be possible to agree more quantified objectives. However, the agreement of a full set of quantified objectives will have to await the completion of the authority's work on performance indicators.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed with the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority the authority's response to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the national air traffic services.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Civil Aviation Authority has kept me and my officials in touch with the progress made in following up the commission's recommendations and the chairman and I discussed this when we met on 4 October. I expect to make a statement on this shortly.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what are the main objectives in the current corporate plan of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The primary objectives of the authority stem from its statutory duties and are:

—to promote high safety standards in civil aviation by information, consultation and judicious administration of safety regulations;

—to maintain and develop, in association with the Ministry of Defence, an efficient national air traffic system geared to the requirements of the users;

—in carrying out its air transport licensing functions, and in related activities, to impose the minimum of constraint consistent with the promotion of high safety standards, the interests of air travellers and the economic health of the industry.

In pursuing its primary objectives the authority will have regard to the importance of strict control of costs so as to contain, and where possible reduce, its charges to those it regulates and serves.

A fuller summary of the 1984 corporate plan may be found in appendix 2 of the CAA's annual report and accounts 1983-84, a copy of which is available in the Library.

M25 (Accident)

Mr. Howard asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has anything to add to the information given by his hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) about the accident on the M25 on 11 December.

Mrs. Chalker: The latest information available to me is that it is hoped to open both carriageways tomorrow morning, Thursday. Repairs are being carried out overnight.

Yesterday I said that a 30 mph limit had been in operation for all vehicles throughout the night. I made this statement on the information available to me at the time, but I am sorry to say that I have since learnt that this was not the case. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has called for full reports from the chief constables of Kent and Surrey. When these have been received, consideration will be given to what further action may be required. I repeat my assurance that my Department will examine all the data, using all relevant resources, to see what we can learn from this terrible tragedy.

Trinity House Lighthouse Board

Mr. John Townend asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the Trinity House Lighthouse Board.

Mr. David Mitchell: Under the Merchant Shipping Act 1894, the Corporation of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond is the general lighthouse authority for England and Wales. The day-to-day management is undertaken by a subordinate, non-statutory body, the Trinity House Lighthouse Board, the members of which up to now have been drawn from the Elder Brethren and their senior staff.

The Public Accounts Committee, in its twenty-ninth report for the session 1981-82 (HC 438), dealing with the general lighthouse fund, said it found it anomalous that the Department has no power to appoint the lighthouse authorities, despite its specific responsibility for the fund and its general responsibility for marine safety.

In view of those observations, and with close regard to the work that has been done in pursuing them, I am glad to say that Trinity House has responded constructively and decided to restructure the Lighthouse Board so that, under the chairmanship of the deputy master, Sir Miles Wingate, it will in future consist of four further Elder Brethren and four nominees of the Secretary of State, as voting members, with three senior Trinity House officials as non-voting members.

My right hon. Friend warmly welcomes this initiative; he is particularly concerned that the notable marine skills of Trinity House should be augmented from the financial and business world, and accordingly has invited the corporation to appoint to the board Sir Michael Colman, finance director of Reckitt and Colman Limited; Mr. Lester George, a director of Ferranti plc; Rear Admiral Hubert Hollins, CB, formerly general manager of the Middle East Navigation Aids Service; and Mr. William Thomson, the chairman of the Forth Ports Authority.

TRANSPORT

GLC (Lorry Ban)

Mr. George Gardiner asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will now take steps to set up a public inquiry into the Greater London council's proposed lorry ban; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Following the decision by the GLC's transport committee today in favour of implementation of its night-time and weekend lorry ban proposals; I am formally consulting the council under schedule 9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

In the letter of consultation I am making it clear to the GLC that I am disposed to think that the duty of the GLC under section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 is not being satisfactorily discharged. Because of this, I am minded to issue a direction to the council prohibiting it from making (or if made, from bringing into effect) the order for this scheme without my consent.

If I do give such a direction, it would then be my intention to establish a public inquiry into the GLC's proposals, and the objections duly made to them. I would then determine whether to give or to withhold my consent to the order in the light of the findings of that inquiry.

The GLC is being given until 20 December to provide me with its formal views.

My objective is to ensure that, given the potentially far-reaching effects of the GLC's proposals on the movement of traffic, particularly commercial traffic, those proposals and the thousands of objections duly lodged to them are fully and impartially examined at public inquiry. An inquiry would provide an independent assessment of the environmental benefits of the GLC's proposals and their disadvantages to the movement of traffic.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Pesticides

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give figures for the numbers of people aged 0 to 4, 5 to 11, 12 to 20, 21 to 60 and over 60 years poisoned by pesticides in each of the years from 1970 to 1984.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not available in the exact form requested. The tables give the numbers of deaths in England and Wales in the available age groups from 1970 to 1983 attributed to accidental poisoning and the estimated number of discharges (excluding deaths) from National Health Service hospitals following treatment for poisoning by pesticides from 1970 to 1982. The sample information held centrally in the latter is too small for reliable estimates to be made of the number of discharges in the older age groups. The figures for hospital discharges do not distinguish whether administration was accidental or due to self-administration.

Numbers of deaths in England and Wales resulting from accidental poisoning by pesticides.

Year	Age group 0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-59	60 and over	All ages
(i) *Accidental poisoning by pesticides, fertilisers or plant foods (ICD Code E865)*							
1970	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
1971	2	—	—	—	3	1	6
1972	1	—	—	1	1	3	6
1973	1	—	—	—	3	—	4
1974	—	—	—	1	5	2	8
1975	—	—	—	—	6	2	8
1976	—	—	—	—	5	2	7
1977	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
1978	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
(ii) *Accidental poisoning by agricultural and horticultural chemical and pharmaceutical preparations other than plant foods and fertilisers (ICD Code E863)*							
1979	—	—	—	1	2	—	3
1980	—	—	—	—	1	2	3
1981	—	—	—	—	7	3	10
1982	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
1983	—	—	—	—	2	—	2

Estimated numbers of in-patient discharges (excluding deaths) from National Health Service hospitals in England and Wales following treatment for poisoning by pesticides.

Year	Age Group 0-4	Others	All ages
1970	340	80	420
1971	680	70	750
1972	390	180	570
1973	420	240	660
1974	590	250	840
1975	630	370	1,000
1976	560	440	1,000
1977	670	480	1,150
1978	450	460	910
1979	560	440	1,000
1980	450	300	750
1981	560	480	1,040
1982	450	450	900

Electorate (Statistics)

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the shire counties, London boroughs and metropolitan boroughs in England in ranking order according to the degree by which their electorates vary from the nationally averaged electorate appropriate to the number of parliamentary constituencies within them.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the table.

Area	1984 Parliamentary Electorate	Average Parliamentary Electorate Per Constituency	
		Number	Percentage difference from national average
Isle of Wight	96,614	96,614	41·1
Wiltshire	401,618	80,324	17·3
Gloucestershire	391,412	78,282	14·4
Dudley	233,429	77,810	13·7
Harrow	155,625	77,813	13·7
Sunderland	232,614	77,538	13·3
Sefton	232,336	77,445	13·1
West Sussex	537,696	76,814	12·2
North Tyneside	152,092	76,046	11·1
Solihull	151,651	75,826	10·8
Suffolk	453,049	75,508	10·3
Hampshire	1,131,745	75,450	10·2
North Yorkshire	524,702	74,957	9·5
Cambridgeshire	448,923	74,821	9·3
Berkshire	523,495	74,785	9·3
Bedfordshire	373,225	74,645	9·0
Hertfordshire	736,783	73,678	7·6
Hounslow	147,305	73,653	7·6
Doncaster	219,884	73,295	7·1
Calderdale	146,493	73,247	7·0
Warwickshire	364,987	72,997	6·6
Humberside	656,707	72,967	6·6
Buckinghamshire	435,725	72,621	6·1
Leicestershire	651,837	72,426	5·8
Avon	723,416	72,342	5·7
Shropshire	288,750	72,188	5·5
Haringey	144,314	72,157	5·4
Essex	1,146,023	71,626	4·6
Cheshire	715,785	71,579	4·6
Surrey	786,102	71,464	4·4
Kirklees	285,475	71,369	4·3
St. Helens	142,347	71,174	4·0
Sheffield	425,578	70,930	3·6
Lincolnshire	425,555	70,926	3·6
Kent	1,134,343	70,896	3·6
Cleveland	425,176	70,863	3·5
Staffordshire	778,441	70,767	3·4
Hackney	141,261	70,631	3·2
Derbyshire	705,829	70,583	3·1
Wigan	231,918	70,278	2·7

Area	1984 Parliamentary Electorate	Average Parliamentary Electorate Per Constituency	
		Number	Percentage difference from national average
Hereford and Worcester	491,837	70,262	2·6
Lancashire	1,053,832	70,255	2·6
Dorset	488,660	69,809	2·0
Nottinghamshire	764,709	69,519	1·6
Bradford	344,675	68,935	0·7
Salford	185,433	68,679	0·3
Norfolk	549,316	68,665	0·3
Camden	137,219	68,610	0·2
Ealing	204,736	68,245	−0·3
Cities of London and Westminster	135,891	67,946	−0·7
East Sussex	542,708	67,839	−0·9
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	338,775	67,755	−1·0
Northamptonshire	405,882	67,647	−1·2
Somerset	337,199	67,440	−1·5
Devon	739,945	67,268	−1·7
Oxfordshire	403,135	67,189	−1·8
Enfield	201,648	67,216	−1·8
Durham	469,662	67,095	−2·0
Sutton	133,884	66,942	−2·2
Wandsworth	200,163	66,721	−2·5
Walsall	199,946	66,649	−2·6
Bury	133,160	66,580	−2·7
Leeds	550,038	66,270	−3·2
Gateshead	165,414	66,166	−3·3
Stockport	223,904	65,854	−3·8
Bolton	197,043	65,681	−4·0
Wirral	261,967	65,492	−4·3
Liverpool	389,466	64,911	−5·2
Manchester	341,622	64,457	−5·8
Oldham	167,505	64,425	−5·9
Newcastle Upon Tyne	224,836	64,239	−6·2
Rotherham	192,550	64,183	−6·2
Merton	128,172	64,086	−6·4
Tameside	166,608	64,080	−6·4
Wakefield	236,353	63,879	−6·7
South Tyneside	127,477	63,739	−6·9
Rochdale	152,853	63,689	−7·0
Wolverhampton	190,931	63,644	−7·0
Trafford	171,729	63,603	−7·1
Birmingham	759,854	63,321	−7·5
Brent	188,911	62,970	−8·0
Cumbria	375,513	62,586	−8·6
Knowsley	124,577	62,289	−9·0
Havering	186,816	62,272	−9·0
Croydon	245,581	61,395	−10·3
Richmond upon Thames	122,444	61,222	−10·6
Lewisham	183,506	61,169	−10·6
Islington	120,267	60,134	−12·2
Coventry	239,549	59,887	−12·5
Hillingdon	179,219	59,740	−12·7
Redbridge	177,878	59,293	−13·4
Lambeth	177,857	59,286	−13·4
Bromley	235,558	58,890	−14·0
Sandwell	235,468	58,867	−14·0
Northumberland	232,491	58,123	−15·1
Barking & Dagenham	116,082	58,041	−15·2
Southwark	173,383	57,794	−15·6
Barnsley	172,132	57,377	−16·2
Bexley	169,120	56,373	−17·6
Tower Hamlets	112,255	56,128	−18·0
Barnet	223,760	55,940	−18·3
Greenwich	164,325	54,775	−20·0
Waltham Forest	164,164	54,721	−20·1
Newham	163,038	54,346	−20·6
Kingston-Upon-Thames	105,314	52,657	−23·1
Kensington & Chelsea	101,378	50,689	−25·9
Hammersmith & Fulham	98,779	49,390	−27·8
England	35,800,362	68,452	—

Single Payments (Gas Appliances)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will instruct his Department's local officers to authorise single payments for the purchase of gas appliances bought only from approved dealers and to instruct them positively to discourage claimants from purchasing such items from non-approved dealers.

Mr. Whitney: Single payments for gas appliances are intended to meet the cost of reconditioned items if these are available and of new items if they are not. We believe it right that our claimants should have the freedom to locate reasonably priced items of their own choice, and we would not wish to introduce a general restriction on where claimants should spend their single payments. However, our guidance (in paragraph 7214(2) of the S manual—a copy of which is in the Library) tells local office staff that, where a reconditioned item is to be provided for, the claimant should be advised to obtain one that has been checked and will be installed by a suitably qualified person.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the effects upon the pharmaceutical industry of the Government's decision to introduce a limited list of generic drugs for the treatment of certain therapeutic conditions under the National Health Service.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what response he has sent to the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry in answer to its representations on the effects of limited drugs prescription on investments, production and exports within the sphere of the pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend on 10 December, at column *384*.

Homeless Households

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many households in London are in receipt of board and lodging allowance for accommodation in bed and breakfast hotels; and if he will provide the information for people aged *(a)* up to 25 years, *(b)* 25 to 40 years and *(c)* over 40 years, giving the average and the total amount of such benefits paid.

Mr. Whitney: The information is not available in the precise form requested. Estimated numbers of boarders in

ordinary board and lodging accommodation and hostels and common lodging houses for December 1982, the latest date for which reliable estimates are available, are as follows:

Estimated number of Boarders in Greater London Council area 1982

	Thousands
Over Pension Age	2·5
Unemployed under 25	3·3
Unemployed over 25	7·4
All other allowance cases	2·5

Source: "Annual Statistical Enquiry".

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many households are in receipt of supplementary benefit housing addition payments for mortgage interest in *(a)* London and *(b)* Great Britain.

Mr. Whitney: Provisional estimates for December 1983* indicate that in some 250,000 cases in Great Britain an amount for mortgage interest was included in the supplementary benefit assessment.

Separate estimates for London are not available.

* The latest date for which information is available.

Source: "Annual Statistical Enquiry".

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated total for 1984-85 of mortgage interest paid for recipients of supplementary benefits.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that an estimate for 1984-85 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 22 October to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), at columns *510-11*, which gives the latest available information.

Family Incomes

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number and percentage of households in Scotland at the latest available date whose incomes were *(a)* below supplementary benefit level, *(b)* at a level eligible for supplementary benefit and *(c)* at or up to 40 per cent. above supplementary benefit level; and what were the corresponding figures for May 1979.

Mr. Whitney: The latest available information relates to estimates of numbers of families and single people on low incomes in 1981. These estimates and those for 1979 represent the average over each year and are shown in the table. The assumptions on which the estimates are based are those used and described in a set of tables entitled "Low Income Families — 1981", a copy of which is lodged in the Library.

Families and Single People in Scotland with Income at Specific Levels.

	Below supplementary benefit level		*In receipt of supplementary benefit*		*Above supplementary benefit level but less than 40 per cent. above*	
	1981	*1979*	*1981*	*1979*	*1981*	*1979*
Estimated number of families and single people (thousands)	110	110	300	260	400	270
Percentage of all families in Scotland	4	5	12	11	16	11

Note:

The figures for 1979 and 1981 are not strictly comparable because of changes in the rules relating to heating additions.

Health Authorities (Strategic Plans)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the timetable allowed to district health authorities to prepare their strategic plans.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The amount of time allowed to districts is a matter for regional authorities to decide upon. I am not aware of any existing general problem. If the hon. Member has a particular instance in mind he should write to the chairman of the appropriate regional health authority.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received regarding the timetable arranged for the submission of strategic plans by regional health authorities;

(2) if he will extend the timetable for submission of strategic plans by the regional health authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have held discussions with regional health authorities where they have told us they may have a problem in meeting the deadline for submission. As a result, it has been agreed that five regions may submit their plans after the original deadline. Two regions have already submitted their strategic plans and the remaining regions are still working to the original deadline of 31 March 1985. We have not received any other representations on this matter.

Doctors (Prescription Forms)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he proposes to curb the incidence of doctors issuing pre-signed blank prescription forms.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 7 December, at column *315*.

Blond McIndoe Centre (Exhibition)

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to the Blond McIndoe Centre to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am very pleased to confirm that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 17 to 21 December.

Ambulance Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many ambulance staff have been admitted to inpatient hospital care, following assaults on them in the Greater London area in each of the last five years;

(2) how many ambulance staff have been *(a)* assaulted and *(b)* admitted to inpatient care in hospital, following assault, in each of the metropolitan counties in each of the last five years;

(3) how many assaults there have been on ambulance men in each of the last five years in the Greater London area.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect this sort of detailed local information centrally. The hon. Member may wish to seek information from the chairman of the South West Thames regional health authority, which is responsible for the management of the London Ambulance Service.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what terms and conditions apply to ambulance staff who are unable to work, following injuries received while at work.

Mr. John Patten: An agreement of the ambulancemen's Whitley Council provides for payment equivalent to full pay for up to six months, followed by half pay for up to a further six months. There are additional provisions applying to all Health Service employees who are absent on reduced or no pay because of an injury or whose earning ability is permanently reduced.

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the ratio of nurses to patients in National Health Service hospitals in 1970, 1975 and 1980 and at the latest available date;

(2) what was the ratio of doctors to patients in National Health Service hospitals in the years 1970, 1975 and 1980 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 November 1984, c.*326*]: I do not consider that meaningful ratios of the type requested can be produced. Manpower statistics cover staff working in hospitals and are collected at a particular point in time; but they do not show what activities within the hospital the staff are engaged upon —for example, whether they are providing treatment to inpatients, outpatients or accident and emergency patients. By contrast, activity statistics show the number of cases treated during the year in NHS hospitals divided into day cases, inpatient and outpatient cases (including accident and emergency cases). Any overall staff-patient ratio is an extremely crude measure both for these reasons and because it does not take into account varying factors such as age of patients and type or complexity of treatment given.

Relevant information on manpower and activity for 1970, 1975 and 1980 and 1983 (the latest available date) is given in the tables.

NHS Hospitals in England: activity during the year

	1970	*†1975*	*1980*	*1983*
Inpatient discharges and deaths	5,011,713	4,975,750	5,670,001	6,018,585
Day case attendances	*N/A	421,698	670,794	813,218
Total outpatient attendances	32,354,802	30,947,482	35,242,980	36,519,550
Total Accident and Emergency attendances	13,321,653	12,791,720	13,052,622	13,603,075

* Day case figures not collected separately before 1972
† Activity levels in 1975 were affected by industrial action in the health service.

Staffing in NHS Hospitals in England at 30 September (whole-time equivalents)

	1970	*1975*	*1980*	*1983*
*Medical and Dental staff	23,692	29,752	34,732	36,628
†‡Nursing and Midwifery Staff	240,080	304,510	330,170	350,560

* Includes hospital practitioners, clinical assistants and locums
† Includes all agency staff: in 1983 around 2 per cent. of these were employed in the community but it is not possible to separate these from hospital staff for all the years requested.
‡ Not adjusted for the reduction in working hours in 1980 (from 40 to 37½ hours per week).

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has anything to add to his reply of 30 October, *Official Report*, column 959, about housing benefit high rent schemes.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1984, c. *79*]: I now understand that the hon. Member is referring to my reply of 30 October, at columns *957-59*, in which I listed those local authorities which, on the information available to the Department, would have qualified for high rent scheme authorisations but had not applied at that time. My reply needs to be revised to take account of fresh information about some of the authorities listed and to correct certain errors, as follows:

Ashford would qualify for authorisation for council tenants as well as private tenants;

Castle Point, Havering, Isle of Wight and Peterborough development corporation were listed as qualifying for authorisation for council tenants, but do not do so;

Dover and Wokingham were listed as qualifying for authorisation for private tenants, but do not do so.

Racism (Nursery Schools)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take on the report by his Department on racism in nursery schools and playgrounds.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *381*]: I assume that the question refers to the recently published report on provision for under-fives from ethnic minority communities, copies of which are in the Library. The report, which is not about racism, was commissioned by the inter-departmental consultative group on provision for under-fives, jointly with representatives of the local authority associations, the National Association of Health Authorities, and voluntary organisations working in the under-fives field. The commissioning bodies decided that the report should be made widely available without charge, which has been arranged by the Department, and that there should be a series of regional seminars further to disseminate the report's recommendations. The National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations has agreed to make arrangements for such seminars next year, with some financial support from this Department.

Northern Ireland

20. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the Irish Foreign Secretary to discuss further the future of Northern Ireland.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I frequently meet the Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic during EC meetings and discuss with him matters of mutual concern. These from time to time include aspects of the situation in Northern Ireland.

Arms Control

21. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives he is considering in the various areas of arms control.

22. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiative Her Majesty's Government are taking to stimulate talks to achieve mutual, balanced and verifiable arms reductions.

Mr. Luce: We are strongly committed to the pursuit of arms control agreements. We have already, with our allies, put many proposals on the negotiating table in Stockholm, Vienna and Geneva. We will continue to pursue proposals which make a practical contribution to progress in arms control; and to support the United States in its search for agreements with the Soviet Union at the bilateral talks which resume in Geneva on 7 January.

27. **Mr. George Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he expects the United Kingdom to play in the Geneva discussions on arms control in January.

Mr. Luce: We will continue to maintain close consultations with the United States and its other allies on the whole range of arms control matters, including those relating to nuclear and space questions. We hope the meeting between Mr. Shultz and Mr. Gromyko in Geneva will lead to agreement on how to carry forward negotiations on these matters. The negotiations will, of course, be bilateral.

UDF Activists (Durban)

24. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will allow visits by lawyers representing the three UDF activists in the British consulate in Durban to obtain instructions for their appeals to the South African Supreme Court.

47. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now permit family and solicitor visits to the three men currently in occupation of the British consulate in Durban.

Mr. Rifkind: Our main objective must be to resolve this difficult problem. We are therefore prepared to consider a visit by the three men's lawyers if its purpose would be to contribute to the early departure of the three men from the consulate.

BBC (External Services)

25. **Mr. Lawrence** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the allocation from his Department's budget for 1985-86 to the external services of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and if he will indicate the criteria which he has applied in determining that figure.

Mr. Renton: The total allocation for external broadcasting for 1985-86 will be approximately £110 million. This sum includes the cost of relay stations operated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on behalf of the BBC external services.

This amount has been arrived at on the basis of the planned expenditure on the 10-year audibility programme announced in 1981 and estimated running costs of the broadcasting services prescribed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, taking into account the financial resources available to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

73. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received since 22 November on the future of the external services of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Mr. Renton: We have received no formal representations on this subject, but we are aware of the concern in the House and among the public that the British Broadcasting Corporation's level of broadcasting should be maintained.

74. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to act on the findings of the report he has recently received on the efficiency and effectiveness of the British Broadcasting Corporation external services.

Mr. Renton: I have nothing to add at this stage to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) on 16 November.

Central America (Contadora Process)

26. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's contribution to the Contadora process in Central America.

Mr. Renton: As my right hon. and learned Friend told the House on 9 November, we together with our European partners, are giving our wholehearted support to the Contadora process. The presence of my right hon. and learned Friend at the San José meeting in September underlined our determination to support that process.

59. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Governments of Mexico, Panama, Columbia and Venezuela about the future of the Contadora talks.

Mr. Renton: We strongly support a peaceful solution to the problems of Central America in accordance with the Contadora process. My right hon. and learned Friend was able to make this clear to the Foreign Ministers of the Governments listed above at the San José meeting in September.

Honduras and Nicaragua

29. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British doplomats there are in Honduras and Nicaragua at present.

Mr. Luce: There are three United Kingdom based staff in Honduras and one in Nicaragua.

Law of the Sea Convention

30. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the United Nations law of the sea convention.

Mr. Rifkind: We have received representations from a number of Governments, including those of some European and Commonwealth countries, and from various private organisations and individuals in the United Kingdom.

55. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the terms and conditions upon which Her Majesty's Government will continue their participation in the development of the United Nation's convention on the law of the sea.

Mr. Rifkind: I draw the attention of the hon. Member to the statement I made during the Adjournment debate on the law of the sea convention last Thursday, 6 December. We remain entitled to be observers at the Preparatory Commission.

Belize

31. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for Her Majesty's Government's defence responsibilities in Belize of the presence of United States service men in Honduras.

Mr. Renton: The British presence in Belize is in no way related to the presence of United States service men in the region. British troops are in Belize at the request of the Belizean Government to assist that country in its external defence. They are not involved in any other Central American country.

Privatisation (Departmental Savings)

32. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the current estimated savings by his Department for 1984-85 as a result of privatisation schemes.

Mr. Renton: The privatisation of the hydraulic research station of the Department of the Environment in 1982 will result in estimated savings of some £80,000 to the Overseas Development Administration in 1984-85.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is also contracting out some cleaning services and this will be extended at the end of this financial year. This will result in savings in the long term. The Department will also be considering whether there are any other areas of work, including travel and canteen services in the Overseas Development Administration, which can be put out to contract.

Falkland Islands (Peruvian Peace Proposals)

33. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what day and at what time his Department first received indications of Peruvian peace proposals in May 1982.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated in paragraph 15 of the annex to her letter of 19 September to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), which was published in the *Official Report* on 29 October at columns 788-91,

"as has been frequently made clear the first indications of these proposals did not reach London from Washington until 11.15 pm London time on 2 May—over three hours after the attack on the Belgrano—and from Lima until 2 am London time on 3 May".

Islamic States (Religious Freedom)

34. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to Governments of middle eastern Islamic states, such as Saudi Arabia, regarding the right of Christians living or working in those countries to celebrate religious services, especially at Christmas time; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: None. The difficulty is not a widespread one, but we are, of course, concerned that British subjects in all countries should be able to worship in private groups in accordance with their conscience at Christmas as at other times. In places where problems may occur, the embassy monitors the situation closely in consultation with concerned members of the British community, and endeavours to ensure that suitable arrangements for worship are made.

Mr. Abu Nidal

35. **Mr. Freeson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information Her Majesty's Government have as to whether Mr. Abu Nidal is still alive.

Mr. Luce: We have seen several reports that Abu Nidal has died, but others claiming that he is still alive. It is not possible to judge which version is correct.

Soviet Union

39. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has for discussions with the members of the delegation of the Supreme Soviet, which is shortly to visit Britain as the guests of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. and learned Friend will be having talks with the leader of the delegation, Mr. Gorbachev, during his visit.

Space Weapons

40. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proposed negotiations on space weapons between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Luce: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks.)

Brazil

42. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans

The Prime Minister: With the agreement of the Secretary of State for Social Services, I have approved the appointment of Mr. Victor Paige, CBE, to the post of chairman of the NHS management board. Mr. Paige will take up this new post, which carries the rank of second permanent secretary in the Department of Health and Social Security, on a three-year contract beginning 1 January 1985.

Soil Survey

Mr. Lilley asked the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy that the funding of the "Soil Survey of England and Wales" should be shared between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of the Environment.

The Prime Minister: No. The Soil Survey of England and Wales, although forming part of the Agricultural and Food Research Council organisation, has, since 1973-74, been funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. At present my right hon. Friend is reviewing the level of funding by his Ministry.

WALES

Primary Schools (Welsh Units)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the Welsh units in primary schools in Wales, by county, and indicate which of these are in schools with monoglot English head-teachers.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: This information is not available.

Education (Welsh Language)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the linguistic effects of the establishment of *(a)* bilingual classes in English medium schools and *(b)* Welsh medium primary schools.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: I am satisfied that pupils can recieve a satisfactory Welsh medium education in both bilingual classes and in Welsh medium schools.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department has made any assessment of the likely growth in demand for Welsh medium education over the next 10 or 20 years.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: No.

Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many firms in Wales have been convicted under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations Act 1980, since 1981.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available centrally.

Free School Meals

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many schoolchildren in *(a)* Clwyd, *(b)* Mid Glamorgan and *(c)* Wales now receive free school meals.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The latest available information relating to the academic year 1983-84, is as follows:

	Number of pupils in maintained schools taking free school meals
(a) Clwyd	10,021
(b) Mid Glamorgan	18,892
(c) Wales	85,204

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of children receiving free school meals in each Welsh county, for Wales as a whole and for the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The latest available information relating to the academic year 1983-84, is as follows:

	Percentage of pupils present on census day taking free school meals*
Clwyd	15·6
Dyfed	15·2
Gwent	22·8
Gwynedd	19·6
Mid Glamorgan	21·7
Powys	13·8
South Glamorgan	20·5
West Glamorgan	19·8
Wales	19·3
United Kingdom*	16·6

* Autumn term 1983-84 in Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Spring term 1983-84 in Scotland.

Post Office (Employees)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed by the Post Office in Wales for each of the years 1978-79 to 1984-85, inclusive.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is as follows:

Date	*Number of employees*
December 1978	6,977
December 1979	7,107
December 1980	7,228
December 1981	7,033
December 1982	6,943
December 1983	6,848
November 1984	6,929

Elderly Persons

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales are over retirement age; and what this figure represents as a percentage of the total population.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: At 30 June 1983 the estimated population over retiring age was 528,100, representing 18·8 per cent. of the total.

Afforested Land

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the area of land newly afforested since 1980

to the latest available date in Wales, making a distinction between coniferous plantations and other forestry schemes.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Planting statistics are published by the Forestry Commission in its annual reports. During the period 1 April 1980 to 31 March 1984 a total of 5,260 hectares of new planting — 4,997 hectares of conifers and 263 hectares of broadleaves— was carried out in Wales by the Forestry Commission and by the private sector with the aid of grants from the commission.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the area of land newly afforested since January 1980 to the latest available date in Wales; and if he will indicate the proportions planted by the Forestry Commission and private landowners, respectively.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Planting figures are compiled centrally on the basis of financial years beginning 1 April. During the period 1 April 1980 to 31 March a total of 5,260 hectares of new planting was undertaken in Wales, of which 1,720 hectares were planted by the Forestry Commission and 3,540 hectares by the private sector with the aid of grants from the commission.

Educational Establishments (Assistance)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales to which education establishments outside the state sector he has given regional development grant and special financial assistance.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Under arrangements announced in July 1974, details of selective financial assistance are published in *British Business* after the first payment is made. Pending such publication, information relating to individual applications is normally treated in confidence. In fact, only one offer of selective assistance has been made in respect of a private sector educational establishment in Wales. Exceptionally, the principal of the establishment concerned, New College, Cardiff, has agreed to my confirming that an offer of grant of £80,000 has been made subject to a number of conditions relating to the overall financing of the project.

No regional development grants have been paid in respect of such educational establishments.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details of the Mid-Wales grant for the Development Board for Rural Wales for each of the years after the loss of assisted area status by Mid-Wales in 1980; and if he will indicate the amount of Mid-Wales grant for 1985-86 and 1986-87.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Mid Wales development grant scheme was launched in November 1982. The basic allocation for 1983-84 was £175,000. The figure for 1984-85 is £380,000.

Details of the 1985-86 allocation will be published in the 1985-86 Supply Estimates. Allocations for subsequent years have not yet been determined.

Laura Ashley Company

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the amounts of cash to be given by the Development Board for Rural Wales to the Laura Ashley company for its expansion projects, as announced in the House on 10 December, and details of aid given by his Department and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Development Board for Rural Wales has not grant-aided the projects; its role will be to provide a new factory in Newtown for use by the company. Under arrangements announced in July 1974, details of selective financial assistance are published in *British Business* after the first payment is made. Pending such publication, information relating to individual applications is normally treated in confidence.

Tiryberth Primary School

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish all evidence received by his Department concerning the establishment of bilingual classes at Tiryberth primary school.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: No.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what submissions have been made to him by Mid-Glamorgan county council concerning the establishment of bilingual classes at Tiryberth primary school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: In accordance with section 12(3) of the Education Act 1980, Mid-Glamorgan local education authority submitted observations on the objections.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales on what information he bases his decision to establish bilingual classes at Tiryberth primary school, Mid-Glamorgan.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Information was received from objectors, Mid-Glamorgan local education authority and Her Majesty's inspectors of schools.

Welsh Medium Schools

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on Welsh medium schools;

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on Welsh units in English language schools in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The Government's policy for Welsh medium education was set out in "Welsh in Schools". It is for local education authorities, acting within the statutory framework, to decide what provision for such education is required and whether it should be made in units or separate schools.

ENERGY

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy how his Department and its sponsored agencies classify, describe or define the plutonium, or the types of plutonium, produced in British nuclear reactors.

Mr. Goodlad: The plutonium produced in British civil nuclear reactors is not classified into different grades by the Department or its sponsored agencies. It is described simply as "plutonium".

Electricity Generation (Coal)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how much coal per annum his Department and the Central Electricity Generating Board expect will be used in the generation of electricity in Britain by 1990, 2000, and 2010;

(2) what projections his Department and the Central Electricity Generating Board have made for the amount and percentage of electricity which will be generated by coal by 1990 and 2000.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department's most recent projections were published in October 1982 in an annex to its proof of evidence to the Sizewell inquiry.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ten o'clock Rule (Suspension)

Mr. Sayeed asked the Lord Privy Seal how many times per week on average the 10 o'clock rule has been suspended in this Parliament to date; and what is the corresponding figure for the last Parliament.

Mr. Biffen: Up to 7 December, the 10 o'clock rule has been suspended on average, 1·34 times per week in this Parliament; the corresponding figure for the last Parliament was 1·39.

Sitting Times

Mr. Sayeed asked the Lord Privy Seal how many times per week on average the House has sat after 11 o'clock in this Parliament to date; and what was the corresponding figure for the last Parliament.

Mr. Biffen: Up to 7 December the House has sat, on average, 2·6 times per week after 11 o'clock in this Parliament; the corresponding figure for the last Parliament was 2·6.

Departmental Select Committees

Mr. George asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many visits were made by each of the Departmental Select Committees, including visits by Sub-Committees, in the last Session, abroad and within the United Kingdom; and what is the total cost for each Committee for this Parliament to date, together with global figures for each Committee and for all Departmental Committees for the last Session.

Mr. Beith [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *361*]: The information for Session 1983-84 is as follows. The accounts* for some of the visits are not complete and the figures given represent the costs to date.

Select Committee	*Number of visits*	*Cost of visits* £
United Kingdom visits in 1983-84		
Agriculture	2	1,466
Defence	9	4,674
Education, Science and Arts	1	1,407
Employment	4	—
Energy	—	—
Environment	3	4,173
Foreign Affairs	—	—
Home Affairs	1	36
Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration	5	3,340
Scottish Affairs	6	11,560
Social Services	8	5,968
Trade and Industry	3	1,127
Transport	9	8,255
Treasury and Civil Service	1	193
Welsh Affairs	1	404
Total	53	42,603
Overseas visits in 1983-84		
Agriculture	2	5,030
Defence	3	5,949
Education, Science and Arts	—	—
Employment	2	23,295
Energy	1	30,576
Environment	2	15,394
Foreign Affairs	3	25,764
Home Affairs	—	—
Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration	2	15,365
Scottish Affairs	1	5,127
Social Services	1	12,435
Trade and Industry	1	1,554
Transport	2	31,075
Treasury and Civil Service	—	—
Welsh Affairs	—	—
Total	20	171,564
Total visits in 1983-84		
Agriculture	4	6,496
Defence	12	10,623
Education, Science and Arts	1	1,407
Employment	6	23,295
Energy	1	30,576
Environment	5	19,567
Foreign Affairs	3	25,764
Home Affairs	1	36
Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Immigration	7	18,705
Scottish Affairs	7	16,687
Social Services	9	18,403
Trade and Industry	4	2,681
Transport	11	39,330
Treasury and Civil Service	1	193
Welsh Affairs	1	404
Total	73	214,167

In the present Session, 1984-85, a further seven visits within the United Kingdom have been made by six Committees at a cost to date of £2,022.

All-party and Parliamentary Groups

Mr. Cormack asked the Lord Privy Seal when it is proposed to implement the recommendations of the Second Report of the Services Committee, 1983-84, dealing with all-party and parliamentary groups.

Mr. Biffen: It has not proved practicable to bring the new system into force in time to affect bookings made by all-party and registered groups for the period between Christmas and Easter. Bookings for the period after

Easter, which will open when the dates of the Easter adjournment are announced, will be the first to be made under the new system.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Telecommunications (Share Issue)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money was spent advertising the British Telecom share issue in evening or weekly newspapers published in Greater Manchester; and how much in total was spent on advertising on independent television channels, nationally and in the Granada viewing area.

Mr. Butcher: Payments to individual suppliers of services are commercially confidential, but the hon. Member may be assured that media expenditure in the Greater Manchester area was commensurate with that in other areas of the country.

BL (Public Money)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public money has been made available to British Leyland in the last year.

Mr. Butcher: None: the final tranche of £90 million equity funding was paid in November 1983.

Micros in Schools

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on micro computers in schools in each of the last five years; how many computers were procured for the money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Department of Trade and Industry has spent some £13·4 million on the various micros in schools schemes over the past five years. The detailed figures are as follows:

	£ million
1980-81	nil
1981-82	1·2
1982-83	3·3
1983-84	6·7
1984-85*	2·2
	13·4

* To date.

6,511 computers were provided to secondary schools under the schemes representing almost all secondary schools. To the end of November, just under 26,000 primary schools had applied for a computer out of an estimated 27,000 primary schools. The relevant offer to primary schools closes at the end of 1984 and it is anticipated that the majority of the remaining thousand will apply.

The figures represent assistance towards schools in purchasing computers, monitors and printers and a range of peripheral equipment.

These figures represent a considerable investment in educational micro-computing. They represent, however, only a small proportion of total spend in this area as schools have brought considerable numbers of additional micro-computers from their own resources and latest figures available suggest that the average number of micro-computers per secondary school is about 10. The average in primary schools is approximately 1·8. In addition, the Department of Education and Science and the Scottish Education Department have provided considerable financial support through the Micro-electronics Education Programme and the Scottish Micro-electronics Development Programme which have provided resources for curriculum development, software and teacher training.

As a result of these initiatives, the United Kingdom has a more advanced educational IT programme than any comparable country. No other country has a similar level of penetration within schools and most experts believe that United Kingdom educational software in particular is the most advanced in the World. The use of the computer as a teaching aid throughout the curriculum is a particular strength of the United Kingdom programme.

BSC (Stanton and Staveley Works)

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the proposed sale by the British Steel Corporation of its Stanton and Staveley works.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend announced on 5 December 1984 that he had decided, on the information before him and in accordance with the recommendation of the Director-General of Fair Trading, not to refer the proposed acquisition of Stanton and Staveley Ltd. by la Compagnie de Saint Gobain to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Car Exports (Spain)

Mr. Patrick Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to end discrimination by Spain against the United Kingdom export of cars; whether he would favour the establishment of a three-year programme for the progressive and substantial liberalisation of the Spanish car market independent of European Economic Community accession negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The Spanish car market is, in comparison with the United Kingdom market, heavily protected although United Kingdom car imports are not treated any less favourably than imports from other Community countries. The only long term solution is through Spanish membership of the Community and during the accession negotiations the Government have been attempting, in consultation with our EC partners, to aim at a satisfactory solution of the high tariff problem in particular as it affects cars.

Auctions (Bidding Agreements)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, whether he will review the working of the Auctions (Bidding Agreements) Act 1927; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The Auctions (Bidding Agreements) Act 1927, which was amended in 1969, is not being considered for review at this time. I therefore see no need to make a statement.

Regional Policy

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received with regard to the new provisions for regional policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Over 500 written representations were received in response to the invitations in our White Paper "Regional Industrial Development". In addition, Ministers at the Department saw a great number of delegations representing a wide range of opinion.

My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Industry, made a statement announcing the outcome of our review of regional industrial policy on 28 November.

Furs (Imports)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will now take steps to ban the import of skins of fur-bearing animals taken in the wild by steel-toothed traps.

Mr. Channon: Trade in skins of endangered species is already regulated under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976. It would not be practicable to ban imports on the basis of trapping methods because of the difficulty in determining how furs had been obtained.

Free Trade Agreement (EC-Israel)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what evidence he has of third countries exploiting the free trade agreement between the EEC and Israel for the purpose of gaining duty-free access for manufactured goods to the EEC.

Mr. Channon: I have no information that there are any goods being imported into the Community duty-free from Israel which are not of Israeli origin for the purposes of the Community's agreement with Israel.

Regional Aid

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the recent changes to the assisted areas map for the purpose of regional aid will affect the eligibility of areas presently the subject of preparatory studies prior to integrated operations where a recommendation for an integrated development operation is made.

Mr. Trippier: The areas under study remain wholly or partly eligible for United Kingdom regional assistance and European regional development fund assistance, but there are no detailed EEC procedures or eligibility criteria for integrated operations and it is not possible to assume that integrated operations will follow after any of the studies. The studies should be seen as part of a continuing exploration of the concept of integrated operations.

Industrial Assistance

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the amount of money saved on each of the industrial assistance programmes as a result of the moratorium for the rest of the current financial year; and when he will entertain new applications for aid under each of these programmes.

Mr. Butcher: When the review was announced on 12 November, offers of innovation assistance to individual companies were running at the rate of about £10 million to £15 million per month. As my hon. Friend said in his announcement, the review will be completed within five months and a further announcement will be made then both on the balance of the Department's support and on when new applications can be considered.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Lightbown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report by Professor Silberston on the multi-fibre arrangement is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: Today. A copy of the Report has been placed in the Library of the House.

My right hon. Friend, the then Secretary of State, asked Professor Silberston in July 1983 to carry out an independent study into the effect of trade restrictions in textiles and clothing, both on the British textiles and clothing industries and on the British economy generally. I am grateful for Professor Silberston's report, which I hope will be read widely.

The report notes that temporary restrictions have for some years applied to imports of textiles and clothing from developing countries under the multi-fibre arrangements, which suspends the normal trading obligations of the GATT. The report indicates that:

(i) these restrictions raise the retail price of clothing by perhaps 5% (more for lower-cost clothing) at a total cost to consumers of about £450m per annum; they also raise the cost of materials used by British clothing manufacturers;

(ii) the benefits of these higher prices accrue in part to British textile and clothing manufacturers, though the main benefit is to foreign suppliers;

(iii) the import restrictions make employment in the British textile and clothing industries somewhat higher than it would be without them. However, their macro-economic effects tend to depress employment elsewhere in the British economy. Overall, the restrictions tend to leave employment in the economy lower than it would be without them;

(iv) the cost-per-job of the employment safeguarded in the textiles and clothing industries (leaving aside jobs lost in other industries) exceeds average earnings in those industries;

(v) the British textiles and clothing industries face formidable barriers to their own exports in most parts of the world.

This is an important report about an important industry, which employs 2 per cent. of the nation's work force.

The Government would welcome the views of interested parties on Professor Silberston's report. It would be helpful to have comments as soon as possible before the Government takes a position on the future trade regime for textiles and clothing, prior to negotiations in the EC and the GATT.

Credits (Guarantees)

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he intends to make any new arrangements to facilitate the restructuring, in accordance with Paris club or other similar international agreements, of credits guaranteed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Channon: In order to facilitate the restructuring, in accordance with the terms of Paris club or other,

similar, inter-governmental agreements, of commercial credits granted by United Kingdom suppliers and banks and guaranteed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department, I intend to use the powers contained in section 2(1) of the Export Guarantees and Overseas Investment Act 1978 to give guarantees in the national interest for the purpose of rendering economic assistance to countries outside the United Kingdom. The Export Credits Guarantee Department will give such new guarantees as may be necessary to implement such international debt restructuring agreements. The use of these powers in the circumstances I have described will assist the orderly repayment of debts owed to the United Kingdom.

Mineral Exploration

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement about the review of the scheme for providing grants for mineral exploration under the Mineral Exploration and Investment Grants Act 1972.

Mr. Trippier: When I announced the review of the mineral exploration grants scheme on 30 July, I hoped to be able to complete the review by November. However, on 12 November my hon. Friend the Minister of State announced a wider review of the balance of the Department's support for industrial research and development. Completion of the mineral exploration grant scheme review is now expected to be delayed until this wider review of the Department's support for innovation has been completed, in about four months' time.

The suspension of further offers of grants for mineral exploration, announced on 30 July, will continue during this extended review period.

China

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take further to promote trade between Britain and the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to the reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *345*]: There are good prospects for the steady development of trade between Britain and China. The government will continue to give active support to the British companies' exporting efforts to China. During her visit to Beijing, my right hon. Friend the prime Minister, hopes to discuss trade questions with Chinese leaders.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government are deeply concerned about the current level of unemployment, and some 698,000 people are at present benefiting from our employment and training measures. Sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy, competitive industry and a more flexible labour market. Our policies are directed to those ends and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage of men in the following age groups who were economically active in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1983: (i) 18 to 24, (ii) 25 to 34, (iii) 35 to 44, (iv) 45 to 54, (v) 55 to 59 and (vi) 60 to 64 years of age.

Mr. Alan Clark: The proportions of men in the civilian labour force in Great Britain were as follows:

Per cent.

Age	*1979*	*1983*
16-24	79·4	79·5
25-34	95·4	93·7
35-44	96·3	95·4
45-54	95·4	93·2
55-59	90·8	84·2
60-64	73·0	59·5

Engineering Apprenticeships

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of new engineering apprenticeships *(a)* starting and *(b)* completed as a result of the work of the engineering industries training board in each of the latest two years for which data are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The engineering industry training board reports that it was notified of 10,857 new registrations for craft and technician apprenticeships for the year ended 31 March 1983, and 8,911 for the year ended 31 March 1984.

The board issued 13,137 certificates of craftsmanship to apprentices completing a second training module in the year ended 31 March 1983 and 11,919 certificates in the year ended 31 March 1984.

The number entering traditional apprenticeships will increasingly become irrelevant as a measure of the amount of skill training being undertaken in industry, due to the reform of existing training arrangements and public funding of first-year training under the youth training scheme.

Community Programme

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Employment further to his reply of 30 November, *Official Report*, column 620, how many unfilled places there are on the community programme; and where they are located.

Mr. Alan Clark: At the end of October, the community programme was some 4,000 places below its national target of 130,000 filled places. All those places would have been taken up in London and the south-east if their rate of progress in providing job opportunities on the programme had matched other regions. My hon. Friend announced on 26 March at c. *29* our targets for correcting imbalances in filled places between regions up to October 1986. On that basis, London will need to increase its current number of filled places by 60 per cent., the south-east by 35 per cent. and the midlands by 8 per cent. while other regions will either remain constant or make some reductions.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment, using information from the latest community programme follow-up survey, and in respect of the over 25-year-olds, over 52 weeks duration grouping, what percentage of those in employment at the time of the follow-up survey were *(a)* male (i) supervisory-married

and (ii) supervisory-single, widowed, divorced or separated, or *(b)* female (i) supervisory-married and (ii) supervisory-single, widowed, divorced or separated; what proportion of each married sub-grouping has an employed spouse; and what percentage of each sub-category has children within the 0 to 15 years age range.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available exactly in the form requested. The information, where available, is:

	per cent.
Male:	
Married	41
Single, Widowed, Separated or Divorced	30
Total	71
Female:	
Married	28
Single, Widowed, Separated or Divorced	0
Total	28

Some survey forms were completed giving no indication of marital status.

The survey of former participants does not provide information on whether participants were supervisors, the employment status of any spouse or the ages of any children.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment, using information from the latest survey of participants on the community programme, if he will give the percentage of participants within the following categories: for the two standard eligibility groupings of 18 to 24 years of age, over 26 weeks duration grouping, and over 25 years of age, over 52 weeks duration grouping, what proportion are (I) married *(a)* male (i) supervisory and (ii) non-supervisory and *(b)* female (i) supervisory and (ii) non-supervisory; what proportion are (II) single, widowed, divorced or separated *(a)* male (i) supervisory and (ii) non-supervisory or *(b)* female (i) supervisory and (ii) non-supervisory; what proportion of each married sub-grouping have an employed spouse; and what proportion of each sub-grouping have children within the 0 to 15 years age range.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available exactly in the form requested. The information, where available, is:

	per cent.
Those aged 18-24	
Married	
Male	7
Female	4
Total	11
Single, Widowed, Divorced or Separated	
Male	68
Female	19
Total	87
Those aged 25 and over	
Married	
Male	42
Female	18
Total	60
Single, Widowed, Divorced or Separated	
Male	33
Female	5
Total	38

Some survey forms were completed giving no indication of marital status.

The survey of former participants does not provide information on whether participants were supervisors, the employment status of any spouse or the ages of any children.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment, for the year to date, for Avon, the south-west and for Great Britain as a whole, for the Manpower Services Commission standard groupings of 18 to 24 years of age, over 26 weeks duration grouping and over 25 years of age, over 52 weeks duration grouping, what percentage of community programme participants are male (i) married and (ii) single, widowed, separated or divorced; what proportion of each sub-group are supervisory; and what percentage of each sub–group are not in receipt of any major benefit, such as housing benefits, supplementary benefits or family income supplement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available exactly in the form requested. The information, where available, is set out in the table:

Entrants during the year ending 31 October 1984	*South-West Per cent.*	*Great Britain Per cent.*
Aged 18-24	58	57
Aged 25 and over	42	42
Male	78	77
Female	22	23
Married	27	30
Single, widowed, divorced or separated	73	70
Not in direct receipt of unemployment and/or supplementary benefit at the time of entry to the Programme	8	13

Figures for the County of Avon are not available.

Information is not collected on whether entrants are supervisors or were in receipt of housing benefit or family income supplement.

Hazardous Chemicals

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Employment if Her Majesty's Government will seek to negotiate an international convention on the manufacture of hazardous chemicals.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The manufacture of hazardous chemicals is already subject to extensive controls in the United Kingdom in respect of potential health hazards and risks to safety.

My right hon. Friend will this month be laying before the House the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations implementing the European Community Directive on major accident hazards. Aside from this directive, there are other international instruments relevant to the subject of hazardous substances. The Government will be ready to join in discussion of any proposals for further instruments prepared by the international agencies concerned.

In addition, the knowledge and expertise of the Health and Safety Executive is readily available to other countries who may wish to take advantage of it.

Health and Safety Inspectors (Hospital Visits)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment, in the last year for which figures are available, how many visits to hospitals were made by health and safety inspectors; and how many hospitals have not had a basic visit from a Health and Safety Executive inspector under the programme basic visits and follow-up.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: During 1983, 3,788 visits to hospitals were made by inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive.

HSE records show that 50 hospitals have yet to receive a basic inspection under the basic inspection programme.

Hospitals (Crown Improvement and Prohibition Notices)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many Crown improvement notices and Crown prohibition notices were issued in each year since 1978 relating to hospital activity; and to what areas of hospital activity they related.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following tables provide a summary of the numbers of Crown notices issued relating to hospital activities:

Crown improvement notices relating to hospital activities

Hospital activity	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Safety organisation, safety policy instruction and training	—	—	2	6	5	3
General environmental conditions (heating, lighting etc.)	—	1	—	5	2	3
Asbestos (works departments)	—	—	—	2	5	3
Laboratories	—	2	5	29	25	6
Post mortem facilities	—	—	—	4	9	1
Disposal of clinical waste	—	1	—	7	1	1
Other matters connected with potentially infected material	—	1	—	—	1	—
Anaesthetic gases (theatres)	—	—	—	—	1	1
Dangerous machinery (workshops, kitchens, laundries)	—	—	2	13	5	3
Pressure plant (works department)	—	—	—	—	—	1
Storage and use of liquids, gases and solids (not already included above)	—	3	10	21	18	12
Unsafe places of work and dangerous buildings	—	2	—	6	3	1
X-ray departments, radiotherapy departments and other uses of ionising radiations	—	2	5	—	1	—
Electricity	—	—	—	—	2	—
Other	—	—	—	—	1	3
Totals	—	12	24	93	79	38

Note: 1983 figures to September only.

Crown "work should be stopped" notices relating to hospital activities

Hospital activity	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Safety organisation, safety policy instruction and training	—	—	—	—	—	—
General environmental conditions	—	—	—	—	—	—
Asbestos (works departments)	—	—	1	1	5	4
Laboratories	1	—	1	1	—	1
Post mortem facilities	—	—	—	1	3	—
Disposal of clinical waste	—	—	—	—	—	1
Other matters connected with potentially infected material	—	—	—	—	—	—
Anaesthetic gases (theatres)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dangerous machinery (workshops, kitchens, laundries)	2	1	2	2	4	—
Pressure plant (works department)	—	—	—	—	1	—
Storage and use of liquids, gases and solids	—	1	1	—	1	3
Unsafe places of work and dangerous buildings	—	—	—	1	1	1
X-ray departments, radiotherapy departments and other uses of ionising radiations	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity	—	2	—	—	—	—
Other	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	3	4	5	6	15	10

Note: 1983 figures to September only.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Home Defence Manual (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he hopes to issue the revised police manual of home defence, nuclear weapons, to include the effects of conventional and chemical or biological attack.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A revised version which includes the effects of conventional attack will be issued early next year. The Government are a party to the 1972 convention banning biological weapons. In the absence of a chemical weapons ban active consideration is being given to the detection and warning of danger presented by them and what protective measures can be taken. When this work is completed the results will be incorporated into the manual.

Parole

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young persons had been released from youth custody establishments on parole aged *(a)* 15 to 16 years, *(b)* 16 to 17 years, *(c)* 17 to 21 years, by the most recent date available.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available information is given in the following table; it is not possible to distinguish between those discharged from youth custody establishments and those discharged from local prisons. Of the 1,483 young persons discharged, 444 were discharged in the 13¼ months up to 30 June 1984, and 1,039 (including all those aged under 17) in the following four months after the reduction of the minimum qualifying period for parole.

Young persons discharged from Prison Department establishments on parole licence, by age, 24 May 1983—31 October 1984

Age	*Number*
15 and under 16	6
16 and under 17	27
17 and under 21	1,450
Total	1,483

Police and Fire Services

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria he uses when considering whether to approve capital projects such as centralised command and control systems within the fire services;

(2) what criteria he uses to approve capital projects, such as centralised vehicle repair workshops, within the fire services in England and Wales.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The approval of my right hon. and learned Friend is not required.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria under which he gives approval to the establishment numbers of the police forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend considers applications for additional police officer posts in the light of the resources available nationally for increases in police manpower, and advice from Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary. The main factors which he takes into account are set out in paragraphs 3 to 5 of Home Office circular No. 114/83, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Drugs Offences

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions for drug pushing have been secured in the Merseyside county police area in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is given in the following table:

Persons found guilty of unlawful supply of a controlled drug or possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply unlawfully Merseyside police force area, 1979-83 *Number of persons*

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Unlawful supply	4	8	4	4	29
Possession with intent to supply unlawfully	5	2	7	11	24
Total*	9	10	10	15	46

* In some cases the same person was found guilty of both offences so the sum of the individual figures is not always equal to the total.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied with the efforts being made to stop drug trafficking and drug abuse.

Mr. Mellor: We are satisfied that Her Majesty's Customs, the police and other agencies are acting vigorously to combat drug trafficking and drug misuse. As shown by the recent initiatives described in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), on 22 November, at column *397-98*, we attach a high priority to measures directed at achieving this objective.

Shoplifting

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further steps he is contemplating to encourage self-service stores to take preventive measures against shoplifting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Following the report published last year by the Home Office standing committee on crime prevention on "Shoplifting and Thefts by Shop Staff", we are now preparing a new publicity leaflet aimed primarily at small retailers which will contain a wide range of advice on preventive measures.

Police Pay

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the salary scales of police officers for April 1984 and April 1983; and if he will express these figures in both cash terms and in April 1980 prices.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The salary scales were as follows:

Rank	*April 1983*		*April 1984*	
	Minimum £	*Maximum* £	*Minimum* £	*Maximum* £
Constable	6,189	9,798	6,708	10,620
Sergeant	9,369	10,749	10,155	11,652
Inspector	10,749	12,789	11,652	13,863
Chief Inspector	12,204	14,160	13,230	15,348
Superintendent	16,848	18,411	18,102	19,959
Chief Superintendent	18,564	20,241	20,124	21,750
Assistant Chief Constable	21,069	—	22,809	—

Rank	April 1983 Minimum £	April 1983 Maximum £	April 1984 Minimum £	April 1984 Maximum £
Deputy Chief Constable	21,621	25,143	23,949	27,222
Chief Constable	25,419	31,107	27,519	33,678
Senior officers in Metropolitan Police				
Commander	21,429	—	23,199	—
Deputy Assistant Commissioner	23,913	—	25,890	—
Assistant Commissioner	29,442	—	31,875	—
Deputy Commissioner	32,388	—	35,064	—

The tax and price index stood at 130·8 in April 1980, 171·8 in April 1983 and 178·8 in April 1984.

Crime (Young Persons)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans for diverting as many young people as possible from the criminal justice system.

Mr. Mellor: We intend shortly to issue to chief officers of police new guidelines on cautioning which will encourage the more consistent and effective use of the caution. The guidelines will embody the principle that in the case of juvenile offenders there should be a presumption in favour of courses of action which fall short of prosecution, unless the individual circumstances of the case, in particular the seriousness of the offence, dictate otherwise.

Mr. Edward Hopson

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that Mr. Edward Hopson does not return to Coxley Close, Ealing, following his release from prison after serving his current sentence; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he proposes to take to ensure that Mr. Edward Hopson does not have private access to children after release from serving his current prison sentence;

(3) what psychological psychiatric help and personal supervision he is arranging for Mr. Edward Hopson while serving his current prison sentence and after his release.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Hopson's position as a restricted patient who has been conditionally discharged from hospital under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 will be reviewed during his current prison sentence in the light of the medical and other reports my right hon. and learned Friend receives, and a decision will be made towards the end of the sentence. The particular points mentioned by my hon. Friend will be fully considered.

The prison authorities are considering Mr. Hopson's needs while he is in prison. Responsibility for his medical care rests with the prison medical officer.

Prosecuting Solicitors Departments

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the county police force areas without a prosecuting solicitors department.

Mr. Mellor: Wiltshire is in the process of establishing a prosecuting solicitors' department. The remaining police areas without prosecuting solicitors' departments are Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, north Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Surrey.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the management consultants are likely to report on their study of various prosecuting solicitors departments.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to receive the report early next year.

Prisoners (Member's Correspondence)

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department intends to reply to a letter dated 17 September from the hon. Member for Barking concerning self inflicted injuries suffered by three prisoners; and why, after nearly three months, the hon. Member was informed on 5 December that a reply would take a further few weeks.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Member enquired in her letter about three prisoners involved in incidents in Holloway prison. Her letter also covered general questions of staffing and the new powers of remand to hospital under the Mental Health Act. Detailed inquiries were necessary: these had to be pursued against a background of the heavy pressure of work and correspondence which has resulted from the critical interest in Holloway prison this autumn. The recent consideration of the future of Holloway has led to the appointment of a project committee which will advise the Director General.

My noble Friend will reply very shortly and will then explain developments in greater detail.

Prisons (Drug Smuggling)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to the reply of 5 December, *Official Report*, column 184, how many incidents of attempted drug smuggling into Walton prison there have been over the past three years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the problems of drug smuggling into Her Majesty's Prisons at the latest date.

Mr. Mellor: We attach much importance to keeping unauthorised drugs out of prisons and are determined that all appropriate counter-measures should be taken. These include calling in the police to investigate (and, if necessary, carry out a search) where there is reason to believe that a visitor intends to smuggle drugs. At Liverpool prison during 1984 so far (up to 11 December) the police have detected attempts of drug smuggling on 19 occasions and prison officers on nine occasions. No reliable figures are available for earlier years.

CND Communications (Interception)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has asked the Post Office and British Telecom to notify him of the results of their investigations into allegations of telephone tapping and interference with the mail of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Mr. Brittan: The complaints which have been made about the provision of postal and telephone services are matters for the Post Office and British Telecom, but I would expect them to draw my attention to any matters arising from their investigations that may be relevant to my Ministerial responsibilities.

Elections (Impersonation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of *(a)* the number of offences reported and *(b)* the number of prosecutions for voting more than once in the general elections of 1983, 1979 and 1974 in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) Great Britain.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *349*]: In England and Wales the information collected centrally on notifiable offences recorded to the police does not separately distinguish offences against the Representation of the People Act 1949 or 1983. The available information on court proceedings is given below and does not separately distinguish offences of personation from other voting offences or between offences committed at general elections from those at by-election or local elections; information for 1974 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Persons proceeded against for offences under sections 47 and 48 of the Representation of the People Act 1949 under sections 60 and 61 of the Representation of the People Act 1983

England and Wales *Number of persons*

Year	*Persons proceeded against*
1979	4
1983	14

NATIONAL FINANCE

Shipowners (Investment Allowance)

18. **Mr. Hill** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to increase the investment allowances available to British shipowners.

Mr. Moore: I have no plans, beyond those already announced, for a provision in the next Finance Bill which will provide shipowners with greater flexibility in the use of writing down allowances on new ships.

Johnson Matthey

20. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the governor of the Bank of England regarding the rescue of Johnson Matthey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: I have discussed with the governor of the Bank of England the events leading up to the rescue operation for Johnson Matthey Bankers. I hope to make a statement to the House shortly.

Government Policies (Finance)

21. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what areas of policy currently financed by the United Kingdom budget will in future be financed by the European Economic Community budget in the event of an increase in United Kingdom gross payments to the European Economic Community.

Mr. Moore: The main effect of the agreement reached at the Foreign Affairs Council in Dublin on 4 December will be to restrain the growth in agricultural expenditure. This should allow non-agricultural expenditure such as regional and social expenditure, research and development, energy, science and technology expenditure, to take an increasing share of the Community budget.

Books and Periodicals (VAT)

22. **Mr. Strang** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received opposing the imposition of value added tax on books.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick).

Books and Periodicals (VAT)

36. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representation he has received about value added tax on books and periodicals during October and November.

43. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received about the prospect of value added tax being introduced on the sale of books, newspapers and periodicals.

Mr. Hayhoe: Treasury Ministers have received over 500 representations about the possible imposition of VAT on books, newspapers and periodicals. It is not practiable to give a seperate breakdown of representations received on books and periodicals alone.

Unemployment Rates (Assumptions)

23. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will revise the Treasury's methods of preparing assumptions of future rates of unemployment.

Mr. Peter Rees: I have no plans to do so.

Value Added Tax

24. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for extending the scope of value added tax.

Mr. Hayhoe: Although the Government favour a shift in the burden of taxation from taxes on earnings to taxes on spending, we have no set views at present on how this might best be done.

27. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reply Her Majesty's Government have made to the reasoned opinion received from the Council of the European Communities regarding the incidence of value added tax zero rate in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 December.

7. **Mr. Madden** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the Government's response to the European Economic Community reasoned opinion on the sixth value added tax directive regarding value added tax zero rating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hayhoe: Our reply makes it absolutely clear that the United Kingdom Government do not accept the views set out in the reasoned opinion.

Mr. Sayeed asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the amount of tax raised by increasing value added tax to 20 per cent. for *(a)* all items which currently have 15 per cent. value added tax imposed and *(b)* all items which currently have 15 per cent. value added tax imposed on them, except those associated with the building trade;

(2) what is his estimate of the expected amount of value added tax raised in a full year on those areas of the building trade liable to value added tax at 15 per cent.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Sayeed asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount of tax that would be raised by imposing value added tax at 15 per cent. on all books, periodicals and newspapers, except those specifically published for educational purposes.

Mr. Hayhoe: Imposing VAT at 15 per cent. on all books, newspapers and periodicals would raise about £375 million in a full year at 1984-85 prices. The effect of excluding those specifically published for educational purposes would depend on how broadly the term "educational" was defined.

Schedule D Assessments

26. **Mr. Stern** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to introduce a current-year basis of assessment for partnerships and individuals assessed under schedule D, cases I and II.

Mr. Moore: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion, but have no immediate plans to introduce a current-year basis for partnerships and individuals assessed under cases I and II of schedule D. However, such a change remains a possibility for the future.

Workplace Nurseries

28. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the taxation of places at work place nurseries.

Mr. Moore: In common with most other benefits-in-kind, the benefit of an employer-subsidised nursery place is subject to tax in the hands of directors and certain employees—currently those earning at a rate of £8,500 a year or more—under legislation first introduced by the Labour Government in 1948.

£1 Coin

29. **Mr. Janner** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will redesign the £1 coin.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No.

Hot Take-away Food (VAT)

30. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the impact in terms of takings and employment of the imposition of 15 per cent. value added tax on hot take-away food.

Mr. Hayhoe: The limited information so far available suggests that during the first few months of VAT on hot take-away food, the overall level of sales was slightly down on the same period in 1983. But there has been substantial real growth in the take-away food industry in recent years and this long-term trend can be expected to continue.

Unemployment Costs

31. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost to the Exchequer in terms of lost receipts and extra expenditure of the increase in unemployment over the most recent 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Rees: Additional expenditure from the increase in unemployment over the 12 months to November 1984 is estimated to be about £269 million assuming the extra unemployed have average family circumstances.

Changes in revenue depend upon the causes of unemployment, and there is a wide range of possible effects. No single estimate can be given.

Economic Progress

32. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest available statistics of economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the likely duration of the recovery.

Mr. Peter Rees: Economic growth averaged 2¾ per cent. a year between the first halves of 1981 and 1984. Total fixed investment has contributed strongly to this, increasing by 6½ per cent. a year. The Industry Act forecast presented to the House on 12 November forecast GDP growth of 3½ per cent. for 1985.

Home Improvements (VAT)

33. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning value added tax on home improvements.

Mr. Hayhoe: Representations from both businesses and consumers are still being received, but much less frequently than in the weeks after the last Budget.

Pension Contributions (Tax Relief)

34. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue would accrue from the abolition of tax relief on pension contributions.

Mr. Moore: I assume the hon. Member has in mind tax relief on pension contributions made by employees. The estimated cost of such relief is about £1,250 million at 1984-85 levels of income and pension contributions. However, the revenue which would accrue from abolition of the relief would depend on any changes which resulted in the levels and methods of provision for retirement and on whether—to avoid double taxation—any changes were made to the tax treatment of pensions in payment.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 December 1984

PRIME MINISTER

President Mitterrand (Meeting)

Q25. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the outcome of the discussions which she had with President Mitterand of France on 29 November.

The Prime Minister: Discussions during the Anglo-French summit in Paris on 29-30 November covered a wide range of bilateral and international questions and took place in a constructive and co-operative atmosphere. The President and I discussed collaborative projects, including the Channel tunnel, East-West relations and future development of the Community.

President Reagan (Meeting)

Q27. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister whether she will make a statement on her objectives in her forthcoming meeting with the President of the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: At my meeting with President Reagan on 22 December I expect to review a range of international questions of importance to both our countries. Our meeting will provide a timely opportunity for me to hear the President's assessment of his Administration's priorities and policies for the next four years and to give my views on a number of issues of particular concern to Britain.

Disarmament

Q37. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's contribution and attitude to multilateral disarmament negotiations since June 1983.

The Prime Minister: Our aim in the current multilateral arms control negotiations is the achievement of balanced and verifiable agreements which will guarantee security at a reduced level of armaments. To that end, since June 1983 we have continued to play an active and positive part in all areas of multilateral disarmament negotiations:

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT (CD) IN GENEVA

June 1983

UK working paper on peaceful nuclear explosions in context of comprehensive test ban (CTB).

August 1983

UK working paper on verification of a CTB.

February 1984

UK proposal for challenge inspection in cases of suspected non-compliance with a future treaty banning chemical weapons.

July 1984

UK proposal for verification of non-diversion of chemicals to illicit military use.

CONFERENCE ON CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY BUILDING MEASURES AND DISARMAMENT IN EUROPE

January 1984

Western proposals for concrete confidence and security building measures.

MUTUAL AND BALANCED FORCE REDUCTIONS (BMFR)

April 1984

Presentation at MBFR talks in Vienna, of major Western initiative offering flexibility on data in return for agreement to enhanced verification measures.

We have also played an active part in the discussions on disarmament issues at the United Nations, including the UN First Committee, the Disarmament Commission and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean Peace Zone.

Baldernock

Q46. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Baldernock.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Boyes asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

Mr. Malone asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 December.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 December.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister (1) if, in view of the policies publicly stated by the Secretary of State for Transport regarding plans for a third London airport, he will have any role in determining quasi-judicially the Government's decision on the inspector's report on the Stansted inquiry;

(2) whether the speech by the Secretary of State for Transport, given in Manchester on Friday 7 December, regarding plans for a third London airport, represents Government policy.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport explained in his speech to the Manchester Central Conservative Association on 7 December that the Government's policy is to encourage the maximum use of regional airports where this can be justified by demand. It is not part of this policy to force traffic to the regions by constraining capacity in the south-east. The speech in no way prejudices his quasi-judicial role in determining the Stansted applications, which will be decided by him and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

National Health Service Management Board

Sir Peter Mills asked the Prime Minister when the Government will appoint a chairman for the National Health Service Management Board as recommended by the Griffiths inquiry.

depreciation allowance for new and second-hand United Kingdom ships, in addition to the present 25 per cent. allowance.

Mr. Moore: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and Harborough (Sir J. Farr).

Gross National Product

Mr. Freeman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will compare the United Kingdom public sector borrowing requirement as a percentage of the gross national product over the past five fiscal years with that of the United States of America on the same statistical basis.

Mr. Peter Rees: Internationally comparable statistics on the public sector borrowing requirement are not available. The available statistics relate to general Government financing. On this basis, the United Kingdom deficit (as a proportion of GDP) fell from 4¼ per cent. to around 3¼ per cent. between 1978 and 1983, whilst the United States balance (as a proportion of GNP) changed from a surplus of ¼ per cent. to a deficit of 4 per cent. over the same period.

Budget Proposals

Mr. Canavan asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had about new taxation measures for the 1985 Budget.

Mr. Moore: Several.

Industrial Demand and Output

Mr. Latham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the level of industrial demand and output.

Mr. Lawson: Total industrial production in the three months to October was down 1 per cent. on a year earlier. This reflects a 9¾ per cent. fall in energy output, affected by the coal strike, and a 2¾ per cent. rise in manufacturing.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bookshops (Police Raids)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Attorney-General what advice was given by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the police concerning raids on bookshops for books dealing with drugs and homosexuality.

The Solicitor-General: Decisions as to the exercise in particular cases of powers of search and seizure are operational matters within the discretion of the chief officer of the police force or other enforcement agency concerned. In appropriate cases the Director of Public Prosecutions may give legal advice as to the extent of powers of search and seizure and the suitability of particular material as the basis of such action. Chief officers of police are under no obligation to tender advice to other enforcement authorities but it would be perfectly proper for them to do so.

I understand that the hon. Member has in mind the seizure of certain material from the bookshop Gay's the Word in Mount Pleasant, London by officers of HM Customs and Excise. No advice was given concerning this matter by the DPP. I have no reponsibility for the police and am not aware of the answer to the question in relation to them.

TRANSPORT

Marine Pilotage

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about marine pilotage.

Mr. Ridley: For the past 2½ years the Pilotage Commission with the assistance of Messrs. Samuel Montagu and Co. has been discussing with representatives of the pilots and the shipowners the terms of a voluntary severance scheme for marine pilots. Unfortunately it has not proved possible to reach agreement on such a scheme.

I have therefore reviewed the whole question and I have concluded that the present statutory arrangements for pilotage, which have remained substantially unchanged since 1913, are inappropriate to present day requirements, and impose an unnecessary financial burden on the shipping industry.

I am today publishing a Green Paper containing proposals for a reform of pilotage legislation and am inviting views of the various groups affected. I have placed copies of the Green Paper in the Library. Copies are also available in the Vote Office.

The central feature of my proposals is the abolition of the present structure of pilotage authorities and pilotage committees, and the placing on harbour authorities of the responsibility for settling local arrangements for pilotage and for the provision of pilotage services into and out of their harbours. The statutory responsibilities of the Secretary of State would be much reduced.

The proposals envisage a statutory compensation scheme for pilots whose services are not required under the new regime: the scheme will be financed by shipping using United Kingdom ports. The Pilotage Commission will eventually be abolished, but I hope it will remain in being to assist with the transitional problems that will arise. Trinity House will cease to be a pilotage authority as such, but all harbour authorities will be free to engage Trinity House to assist them in meeting their new responsibilities if they choose.

I am confident that these proposals offer the chance of a new framework which will allow the provision of safe and efficient pilotage services in the future, while at the same time dealing equitably with existing members of a profession which can look back with pride on a distinguished tradition.

Air Accident, Bristol

Mr. Wiggin asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will conduct an inquiry into the recent accident at Bristol airport when an A300 Airbus of Iberian Airways overshot the runway with 245 people on board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The incident referred to did not involve serious damage to the aeroplane or injury to any persons and because of this it was not a notifiable accident as statutorily defined. It is not the usual practice for the accident investigation branch to investigate this type of occurrence and so on this occasion the chief inspector of

accidents has decided that no further action from him is necessary. He is content for the Spanish authority to continue its own investigation as permitted by international agreement.

Aerial Crop Spraying

Mr. Body asked the Secretary of State for Transport how close aircraft are permitted to fly for the purposes of the aerial application of pesticides to, respectively, dwelling houses, schools, hospitals, buildings containing farm animals, other buildings and roads in each of the other member countries of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Comprehensive information is not available; the following figures, however, were produced for the Council of Europe committee of experts on pesticides:

Belgium
2,000 metres from dwellings
300 metres from single buildings
Denmark
300 metres from dwellings
25 metres from roads
Federal Republic of Germany
50 or 100 metres from other fields or objects*
Republic of Ireland
15 metres from buildings
50 metres from water
Netherlands
150 metres downwind from buildings
100 metres upwind

*It is not clear from the information provided how the two limits are applied.

Mr. Body asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to seek to obtain powers to ban aerial spraying from specified areas.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Aerial spraying is subject to a wide range of controls exercised by the Civil Aviation Authority under the Air Navigation Order 1980. These include minimum distances which aircraft must maintain from houses, congested areas and sensitive areas such as hospitals, schools, children's playgrounds and stables. In addition fresh powers are being sought in clause 15 of the Food and Evnironment Protection Bill which is under consideration in another place. These would enable regulations imposing controls on the environmental safety of aerial spraying to be made to complement the controls currently exercised by the CAA.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions there were in each of the years from 1980 for offences arising from aerial crop spraying.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The number of prosecutions brought by the Civil Aviation Authority and the Health and Safety Executive were as follows:

Year	*Number*
1980	0
1981	1
1982	1
1983	3
*1984	7

* Prosecutions initiated before 6 December 1984

In other cases where either the seriousness of the offence or the evidence available did not warrant bringing a prosecution operators and pilots were warned or cautioned.

Rail Accident (Salford)

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the formal inquiry into the rail accident at Salford on 4 December to take place; where it will be held; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The inquiry will open, in public, at the Portland hotel in Manchester at 10 am on Friday 11 January 1985.

British Transport Police

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has held any consultations or received any communication from the British Transport Police Authority concerning proposals to reduce the number of officers employed by that force.

Mr. David Mitchell: No, but there is no reason why I should do so. The number of officers in the British Transport Police is a matter for the British Railways Board to consider, in conjunction with the British Transport Police Committee.

Road Accidents Survey

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the "Road Accidents Statistics, English Regions: 1982-83".

Mrs. Chalker: Around March 1985. The 1982 edition was published in March 1984.

Severn Crossing

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the study of the proposed second crossing of the Severn; and if he will publish an interim report to inform interested parties of developments so far.

Mrs. Chalker: The study into how a second crossing of the River Severn might be provided commenced in August this year. During the first three months of the study the consultants have had preliminary discussions with local authorities and many statutory and representative bodies. They have also made an intial examination of traffic, engineering, environmental, planning and economic aspects of a second crossing. Many possibilities have been investigated for the location and type of a river crossing, and the link roads to the M4/M5 motorways.

A report on the work done in the first three months will be made available in the near future.

Overflights (Rules)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport what rules govern overflights of naval dockyards and other military installations.

Mr. Ridley: All aircraft flying within the United Kingdom must observe the Rules of the Air and Air Traffic Control Regulations 1981. Under rule 27, before an aircraft can fly within controlled air space the commander

of the aircraft must file a flight plan and obtain air traffic control clearance for it. Outside controlled air space, aerodrome traffic zone restrictions apply in the vicinity of any military installation with an airfield or helicopeter landing area.

Rule 5 prohibits low flying except in certain circumstances. In addition there are permanent restrictions on flying in the vicinity of certain atomic energy establishments, certain security and other establishments in Northern Ireland and Scampton airfield because of training flights by the Red Arrows.

Under Article 81 of the Air Navigation Order 1980 foreign registered aircraft require my permission before undertaking aerial photography or aerial survey work anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Concessionary Fares

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends concessionary fares grants to local authorities to be calculated on the basis of grant-related expenditure allocation.

Mr. Ridley: There are no specific grants for concessionary fares. Concessionary fares grant-related expenditure allocations have been, and still are one component of overall GREAs which form part of the mechanism for allocating block grant. It is for each local authority to decide how its block grant allocation is used and the priority it gives to expenditure on particular services, including concessionary fares.

ENVIRONMENT

Radioactive Waste (Sea Disposal)

Mr. Lightbown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received the report of the independent review of disposal of radioactive waste at sea, chaired by Professor Holliday; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The report of the independent review of sea disposal in the Atlantic, commissioned by the Government and the Trades Union Congress, has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library at the House. My right hon. Friend, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and I are indebted to Professor Holliday and the three members of his team for their report, which is an extensive and searching review of the scientific evidence and of all the issues. We shall be discussing it with the Trades Union Congress in the new year. The report recognises that the science undertaken in the United Kingdom, relating to the disposal of radioactive wastes at sea, has been of the highest quality; and that the methematical modelling used to assess the safety of dumping may overestimate rather than underestimate the risks to man. The report reveals no evidence of harm to man or the natural environment. But in the team's view there remain some uncertainties about the long-term natural processes involved.

They recommend that the use of the sea disposal route for low and intermediate-level wastes should not be resumed until completion of the international reviews now in progress. We accept that recommendation, which allows for the scheduled completion by September 1985 of the London dumping convention review, and the review of the site by the nuclear energy agency of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, also due to be completed in 1985. In addition future dumping would also be subject to any changes that might be made to the definition of prohibited wastes which is currently being considered by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Secondly, the report recommends that a comparative assessment should be made and published of all disposal and storage options, whether at sea or on land, in order to establish the best practicable environmental options for the various types of low and intermediate-level radioactive waste. My Department will carry out such an assessment, in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and with the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee, with the aim of producing a published report by the summer of next year.

The report makes further recommendations about research, on the storage of radioactive waste, and on the exclusion from sea dumping of persistent synthetic materials which may float. The Government accept these recommendtions and we are considering how best to implement them. As regards monitoring, we will discuss with other member countries of the NEA whether the existing international programme should be extended.

Zoological Society

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now announce details of the support the Government are giving to the Zoological Society of London.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Zoological Society of London is a learned society with an international reputation in the fields of conservation and scientific research. To further these aims the society maintains the Institute of Zoology and manages the animal collections at Regents Park and Whipsnade.

The Government support these objectives and have recognised that the society needs both short and long term assistance.

I propose to make a block revenue grant of £2 million a year, with an additional grant of £1 million in 1984-85 for the Society to pay off its overdraft. I shall make a capital grant of £1 million in 1985-86 and further capital grants thereafter of up to £¾ million a year to match £ for £ what the Society can raise from private sources. These figures are in cash terms and will not subsequently be adjusted for inflation. The grants will be subject to detailed conditions to be set out in a financial memorandum. The Government remain concerned that the society should use its full endeavours to contain costs and maximise income and has asked the Society to strengthen the marketing expertise available to it. The Institute of Zoology will be subject to an independent review. The Government will review the level and scope of its support after 3 years with particular regard to the progress the Society has made in implementing the Business Plan and to the extent to which they have been able to improve on the performance envisaged in it. The Government expects that there will be reductions after that in the annual call on the Exchequer.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is now able to make a statement about the Government response to the Ordnance Survey review committee recommendations.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Ordnance Survey review committee was appointed in January 1978, under the Chairmanship of Sir David Serpell, with the following terms of reference:

"Taking account of the views of users and other interested parties, in the context of national surveying and mapping needs, to consider and make recommendations about the longer term policies and activities of the Ordnance Survey and ways of financing them".

The committee reported in July 1979 and I would like to thank it for its excellent work. However, when the terms of reference were set, it had been assumed that Ordnance Survey would remain a Government Department, and therefore the committee's report considered no other structural possibilities. In July 1981 the then Secretary of State for the Environment announced that the long term future of the survey would be considered against the full range of possible structures whether inside the Civil Service or wholly or partially outside it. Widespread consultations were held and in January this year my right hon. Friend announced that he was accepting the Ordnance Survey advisory board recommendation that Ordnance Survey should remain a vote funded Civil Service Department. He also announced that a detailed response to the Serpell report would be published in 1984.

During the last few years Ordnance Survey has taken account of the recommendation of Sir David Serpell's committee when formulating its plans and programmes and, as a result, considerable progress has been made. This is reflected in the Government response to the Ordnance Survey review committee's report and copies of that response have been placed in the Library today.

The Government have also decided to increase the resources of Ordnance Survey in 1985-86. This will help Ordnance Survey to implement some of the more important recommendations which have not been implemented to date. In particular there will be increased activity on core tasks and the programme to digitise the Ordnance Survey large scale maps will be accelerated.

In January, my right hon. Friend also announced that a rolling policy and plan for the Ordnance Survey should be prepared and published. This plan has now been approved and copies have also been placed in the Library today.

The Ordnance Survey has been through a long period of uncertainty about its future and its remit. I am glad that this uncertainty has now ended. Throughout this period the continued enthusiasm and dedication of both management and staff has been impressive.

Housing

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes in the housing factor used in the grant-related expenditure assessment figures.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer to my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 11 December at c. *910* concerning the rate support grant settlement for 1985-86.

Welfield Site, Hatfield (Development)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the inquiry into the planned development of the Welfield site in Hatfield for the expansion of geriatric and other patient care by the health authority is to take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The public local inquiry into the demolition of Welfield, a grade II listed building in Hatfield, proposed by the East Hertfordshire area health authority for erection of a psycho-geriatric unit, is to take place on Wednesday, 13 February 1985. This date was the earliest possible one which was convenient for all the parties concerned. The inquiry will enable all the options to be considered before a decision is made on the future of this important building.

Centre 21, Enderby

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current position regarding the planning application for a proposed superstore, Centre 21, at Enderby, Leicestershire.

Mr. Macfarlane: This matter is still under consideration. I will announce very shortly how I propose to take this case forward.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the National Council of Building Material Producers concerning investment by Her Majesty's Government in infrastructure projects; and if he has any plans to meet their representatives in the near future.

Mr. Gow: The National Council of Building Material Producers has sent me copies of its two reports, by the Policy Studies Institute on "Rebuilding the Infrastructure —The Needs of English Cities and Towns"; and by Professor Paul Ormerod, of the Henley centre for forecasting, on "The Economic Impact of Increased Public Spending on Construction".

I met the president of the National Council of Building Material Producers on 11 December to discuss these reports. I agreed to consider both carefully, before arranging a further meeting.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Bulmer asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to establish the number and names of historic buildings financed or administered by the metropolitan county councils or Greater London council the responsibility for which will be affected by the Local Government Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: There is no immediate need to establish a precise list at this stage, but my right hon. Friend will keep this important aspect under review.

Fish Farms (Effluent)

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will initiate a grant for research into the effect of effluent from fish farms on river systems.

Mr. Macfarlane: My Department's long term water research requirements committee is considering whether

research is needed into the effects of fish farming on river quality. I will take their advice into account when formulating the Department's own research programme.

Agriculture and the Environment

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish the memorandum which was presented to the Council of Ministers of the European Communities on 6 December concerning the interaction of agriculture and the environment; and if he will publish a precis of it in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Waldegrave: The text of the United Kingdom memorandum on agriculture and the environment which was presented to the Council of Ministers on 6 December is reproduced below. In introducing it I stressed the importance of the subject to Her Majesty's Government. The Commission has undertaken to report to the Council on the issues mentioned in the memorandum.

This memorandum seeks the Council's support for a proposal that the Commission prepare a review of progress made towards ensuring that environmental concerns are taken into account in Community agricultural policies and reviewing the scope for further action.

There is increasing public interest within the Community about the effects of various policies on the environment and a growing recognition of the need for a rational and balanced approach towards the exploitation of natural resources, including the development of improved methods of food production. The third action programme on the environment reflects that awareness as well as the principles underlying the world conservation strategy in its commitment to the integration of the environmental dimension in the development of agriculture and socio-economic policies.

The United Kingdom has taken steps at both national and Community level to achieve a better balance between the promotion of a flourishing agricultural industry and safeguarding of the environment.

Nationally, Her Majesty's Government has introduced legislation providing increased protection for landscape and wildlife and creating a statutory framework for encouraging greater understanding between farming and conservation interests of each others' aims and objectives. Within the Community, the United Kingdom has tabled amendments to the proposed regulation on agricultural structures revising previous directives on the modernisation of farming which, if accepted, would enable member states to encourage farming practices in environmentally sensitive areas which are consistent with conservation objectives.

The United Kingdom believes it would be most helpful if, in the light of inter alia the negotiations on the regulation which are proceeding in the high level agriculture group, the Commission could report on general progress made towards reflecting the principles of the third action programme in the development of agricultural and environmental policy, including the question of research in this field, and identify the scope for further action. The Council is accordingly invited to endorse a proposal that the Commission might consider this further and report back to the Council within six months.

Environmental Pollution

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is yet in a position to respond to the Tenth Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: We have published our response today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The response is in two parts: part I is a brief statement of the principles which govern our approach to environmental protection policy; part II sets out in full our response to each of the Royal Commission's detailed recommendations, which covered a wide range of pollution control issues.

The Government are grateful to Professor Sir Richard Southwood and his colleagues for the hard work and careful analysis which they devoted to the production of the Tenth Report.

Boxing

Mr. Pendry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received alleging anti-competitive practices in boxing promotion; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have as yet received no representations alleging anti-competitive practices on boxing promotion. These would be a matter for the British Boxing Board of Control and, if warranted by the circumstances, the Office of Fair Trading.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Jack Thompson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if there will be a significant change in the rate support grant settlement for 1986-87 because of the loss of rate income from the National Coal Board due to the fall in production already apparent in the current year 1983-84 as a result of the current miners' dispute.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is too early to anticipate the decisions to be taken on the 1986-87 rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Jack Thompson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities and their associations which have made representations about the probable effects of the miners' dispute upon loss of rate income to local authorities from the National Coal Board, in view of the formula established under the National Coal Board Rateable Valuation Order 1977.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have received no such representations.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will be employing the special development order procedure under the Town and Country Planning Acts in respect of the application for the expansion of Stansted Airport.

Mr. Gow: During the second reading of the Civil Aviation Bill, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced that the inspector's report would be published and that the House would have an opportunity

to debate airports policy in the light of the report. The report was published on 10 December. After the debate, decisions on the Stansted applications will be taken under normal planning procedures.

Council House Sales

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the assumptions used to estimate the capital receipts to local authorities for 1985-86 in respect of the sale of council dwellings, including the number of sales, the sale price net of discount, the average level of discount and the ratio of private finance.

Mr. Gow [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 December 1984, c.*500*]: It is estimated that of the forecast of £1,595 million for total receipts, £1,305 million will be from the sale of council houses not £1,460 million as stated in the answer. The detailed forecasts and the underlying assumptions about council house sales, are as given in my earlier answer. I apologise to the hon. Member for this error.

SOCIAL SERVICES

National Insurance Contributions

53. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the increase in employees' national insurance contributions since 1978-79 in 1984 prices and current prices.

Mr. Whitney: It is not possible to provide the information in the form requested. Employees' national insurance contributions (NICs) are calculated as a percentage of gross earnings. The percentages for the relevant years are as follows:

	Employees not contracted-out of the state earnings related pension scheme	*Employees contracted-out of the state earnings related pension scheme†*
1978-79	6·5	4
1979-80	6·5	4
1980-81	6·75	4·25
1981-82	7·75	5·25
1982-83	8·75	6·25
1983-84	9·0	6·85
1984-85	9·0	6·85
1985-86*	9·0	6·85

* Proposed.

† These employees pay NICs at the not contracted-out rate on their earnings up to the lower earnings limit and at the contracted-out rate on earnings between the lower and upper earnings limits.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the recently announced additional £5 million funding in connection with drug abuse is to be used for treatment facilities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: £3 million has been allocated to our drugs initiative for projects to provide treatment and rehabilitation, which was previously over-subscribed. Much of this will be taken up by applications already received but a circular will be issued to health and local authorities and to the voluntary sector, advising that money will be available for especially innovative and interesting new projects.

In addition, the interdepartmental ministerial group on the misuse of drugs, which meets regularly under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs is giving the highest priority to reviewing prevention and enforcement policies. I have therefore decided that £2 million is to be earmarked for a prevention campaign.

Rent Rebates and Allowances

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the estimated totals for 1984-85 of rent rebates and rent allowances, distinguishing between certificated and non-certificated benefit.

Mr. Whitney: The latest estimates of rent rebate and allowance recipients in Great Britain for 1984-85 are as follows:

	Standard	*Certificated*
Rent rebates	1,545,000	1,919,000
Rent allowances	281,000	540,000

Current indications are that the final figures will be higher. Detailed, revised estimates are expected to be available during February 1985.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of people in Dundee in receipt of supplementary benefit in May 1979; what is the current figure; and how the figures are broken down for pensioners, one-parent families and unemployed claimants.

Mr. Whitney: Dundee is covered for supplementary benefit purposes by two DHSS Offices.

The total number of supplementary benefit cases handled by these two offices at may 1979 and May 1984, the latest date of which figures are available, was:—

	May 1979	*May 1984*
Dundee (East)	7,904	11,542
Dundee (West)	7,140	10,358

Of these, the figures for pensioners, single parent families and unemployed claimants at these dates were:—

	May 1979	*May 1984*
Dundee (East)		
Pensioners	3,524	2,912
Single parent families	1,086	1,645
Unemployed	2,497	5,485
Dundee (West)		
Pensioners	3,944	3,671
Single parent families	588	1,011
Unemployed	1,810	4,196

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what have been the public expenditure savings in each year since 1980 arising from the deduction from the supplementary benefit of strikers of amounts which they are deemed to be receiving in strike pay; and what is his estimate of the savings for the current year.

Mr. Newton: The deductions which are made under Section 6(1) of the Social Security (No. 2) Act do not depend upon, or assume, payment of strike pay.

It is not possible to provide precise figures for total public expenditure savings arising from these deductions.

This is because, in cases where the amount of supplementary benefit entitlement is less than the amount of the deduction, the application of the deduction will result in no benefit being paid; records are not kept of these cases.

Records are however available for the total number of actual payments to strikers and estimates of the amount of benefit withheld from these as a result of the deduction are as follows:

Year	*Number of payments to strikers*	*Estimated benefit savings arising from deductions* £
1981	28,032	341,000
1982	16,848	219,000
1983	48,648	707,000
1984*	1,322,170	19,833,000

* To 20 November

Dental Estimates Board Appeals

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of appeals outstanding under regulation 21 of the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1974; how many are processed per month; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for the appeal by Mr. G. J. Burkitt, of 8 Chilterns Close, Flackwell Health, Buckinghamshire, against a decision of the Dental Estimates Board to be heard before Christmas 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At the end of November 1984, there were 1,210 such appeals awaiting hearing. Since January 1984, 687 appeals have been heard, an average of 63 a month.

There has been a marked increase in the number of appeals made in 1984. In the 11 months from January to November 1984, 1,604 were received compared with 734 for the same period in 1983. Because of the unexpectedly high number of appeals there have inevitably been delays in arranging hearings.

As regards the appeal by Mr. Burkitt, our Department expects to arrange the hearing in January 1985.

Opticians

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many qualified opticians have been in practice during each of the last five years; how many have retired; and how many new opticians have been trained.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not have information in the form requested. The table gives the total number of opticians registered with the General Optical Council and the number of newly qualified registrants. The number who are practising is not known but the table shows the number who have undertaken to provide services under the NHS General Opthalmic Service (GOS).

(England figures)

	At 31 December				
	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Number on the General Optical Council Register					
Ophthalmic Opticians	4,925	5,013	5,033	5,086	5,165
Dispensing Opticians	2,121	2,322	2,487	2,594	2,674
Newly qualified registrants (United Kingdom figure)					
Ophthalmic Opticians	238	274	245	265	271
Dispensing Opticians	220	250	276	224	192
Numbers in the General Opthalmic Service					
Ophthalmic Opticians	4,617	4,715	4,738	4,797	4,871
Dispensing Opticians	1,919	2,084	2,204	2,306	2,392

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many trained opticians are women; and how many of these are practising.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At 31 December 1983 the General Optical Council's register listed 1,223 women as ophthalmic opticians and 826 as dispensing opticians in England. We do not have precise information about the number of women who are practising but 25 per cent. of opticians in the General Ophthalmic Service are women.

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to arrangements for refresher training for opticians.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The British College of Ophthalmic Opticians has recently taken over responsibility from the joint academic board for supervising refresher training courses for opticians. Our Department liaises with the college and provides financial support for courses relevant to the needs of opticians who provide services under the General Ophthalmic Service. In 1983-84 we sponsored 17 such courses.

Dental Preventive Care

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what level of funding was allocated to dental preventive care and the improvement of educational and treatment standards in each of the last five years; what is the figure for the current year; and if he has any plans to increase resources devoted to this part of the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not allocate predetermined funds centrally for dental preventive care to either the General or the Community Dental Services. Our method of funding dentistry means that the extent of such treatment is determined by dentists in the light of individual patients' needs.

The funding of dental education is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Our Department does however fund centrally postgraduate refresher training of general dental practitioners and the expenditure figures for the period requested are as follows:

	£ thousands
1979-80	145
1980-81	182
1981-82	208
1982-83	256
1983-84	262
1984-85*	277

* Estimate.

The improvement of treatment standards is a matter for the dental profession though the Government has a role to play through the monitoring undertaken by the dental reference service and the dental estimates board.

Dental Patients

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the trend in attendances by dental patients from moderate income brackets since the recent increases in National Health Service patient charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no recent informtion on attendances by adult patients.

Hospital Services (Privatisation)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total number of people so far made redundant as a consequence of the privatisation of hospital services; what percentage this is of the people previously providing the service; if he will categorise the redundancies by sex and by whether full or part-time; and whether following privatisation, there has been an increase in the proportion of women part-time workers in the National Health Service earning a rate of pay below the lower limit for national insurance contributions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect centrally information on total redundancies or the earnings of individual part–time workers.

Back Pain

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* which Government Committees are investigating back pain; if the results are to be published and on which dates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are not aware of any such Government Committees but there is a considerable body of research being conducted into the causes and treatment of back pain funded by the Department and the Medical Research Council. This is an area to which high priority has been given.

Back Injuries

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost, in the last year for which figures are available, to the National Health Service of back injuries to National Health Service employees caused by their work; how many working days are lost through such injuries; what advice was given to health authorities by his Department following the 1984 report of the Health and Safety Commission on the lifting of patients in the Health Services; and what response there has been from health authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this sort of detailed information centrally. The Healh and Safety Commission's report on the lifting of patients in the Health Services has been sent to every health authority. The Department has received the report of a major research project into back injuries sustained by nurses and other health service workers by the University of Surrey. We are examining its recommendations together with those of the Health and Safety Commission and other reports with a view to considering what further advice can usefully be given to health authorities.

NHS Services (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) in how many cases the competitive tendering process for National Health Service services has led to industrial unrest in the National Health Service, including strikes; and if he will identify the cases where the strike has lasted more than one week;

(2) in how many cases a district health authority has had complaints about the efficiency of private contractors to which it had awarded a service contract.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many contracts have so far been awarded by district health authorities after competitive tendering; what proportion and how many have gone to private contractors; if he will categorise the contracts according to the type of service provided; and what proportion and how many of the successful contractors belong to trade associations.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the right hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 30 October and 30 November at columns *967* and *623-24*, respectively.

NHS Employees (Accidents)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many accidents there have been in each year since 1980 to National Health Service employees and how many were *(a)* fatalities, *(b)* major injuries and *(c)* accidents resulting in absences of three days or more.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally.

Monitoring Services

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost for the average hospital of monitoring services provided by an external contractor compared with having the service provided internally.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally. Authorities need to monitor the standards of in-house or contractor-provided services. We have advised health authorities that any extra cost of monitoring should be included when comparing the lowest commercial tender with the in-house tender.

Private Contractors (Services)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will request district health authorities, in their monitoring of private contractors providing services, to ensure that contractors fulfill their statutory requirements, including those relating to wage levels agreed by wages councils.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Contractors will be well aware of the statutory requirements under which they must operate.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department takes to monitor the performance of private contractors who have been awarded contracts for hospital cleaning and laundry services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The monitoring of the performance of contractors is the responsibility of the health authorities concerned. It is obviously important for authorities to monitor the performance of in-house or contractor-provided services of this kind. If services do not reach the required standard, the authority should take management action to raise standards in the case of in-house services or require the contractor to comply with the specifications of his contract in the case of an outside contractor.

Child Sex Abuse

Mr. Pendry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many district health authorities do not list child sex abuse as a risk category; and if he will name them.

Mr. John Patten: Child abuse registers in most areas are held by local authority social services departments on behalf of all authorities—including health authorities—and agencies. The criteria for registration should be agreed by those bodies and will therefore vary locally. The Department does not collect information about or from the registers routinely, but we know that agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the need to recognise cases of sexual abuse and act accordingly.

Computer Dispute, Newcastle

Dr. Michael Clark asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that all practical steps have been taken to resolve the dispute at the national computer centre at Newcastle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have made every effort to reach a negotiated settlement to end the dispute and members of two of the unions concerned—the Society of Civil and Public Servants and the Civil Service Union — have accepted our proposals and resumed duty. I understand that representatives of the national executive committee of the other union — the Civil and Public Servants Association — are this week seeking to persuade their striking members to return to work. As I said in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) on 27 November, at columns *458-59*, we urge those still taking action to re-examine swiftly their position; meanwhile, we are considering what further steps should be taken to restore the service that pensioners and the public are entitled to expect.

Occupational Therapists

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations his Department has had about the Minister for Health's reply on 31 October concerning the shortfall in the number of trained occupational therapists in the National Health Service; what information had been conveyed to his Department by the College of Occupational Therapists on this matter before the parliamentary reply was given; if he now intends to revise the reply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received 10 letters from hon. Members on this matter.

Before my reply to the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) on 31 October, at column *1077*, our Department had received from the College of Occupational Therapists a short summary of the results of a survey of shortages of occupational therapists in the NHS. However, that summary provided insufficient detail about the scope and statistical basis of the survey to enable us to appraise the validity of the inferences drawn by the college about the extent of the reported shortfall.

Since 31 October we have received further information from the College of Occupational Therapists which, as I mentioned in my reply of 4 December at column *171*, to the hon. Member for Eccles, we are considering together with other information provided by health authorities.

Generic Products (Information Service)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has undertaken any study into the potential cost of supplying a medical and technical information service for generic products on a basis provided at present by research-based companies for their own drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The generic drugs to be prescribable under the proposals for limiting the range of minor drugs on the National Health Service are well known to the medical and pharmaceutical professions and are well documented. I therefore see no need for any such service.

Prisoners (Relatives' Visits)

Mrs. Jill Knight asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, how much public money has been paid since 1974 to the wives and children of prisoners in Parkhurst prison to enable them to visit their relations in the prison.

Mr. Whitney: Information about visits to prisoners is not collected in the form requested.

Overseas Medical Students

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, in which Third world countries arrangements exist for medical students to be allowed to use their six-week elective period for study in those countries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The General Medical Council education committee's recommendations permit elective periods of study to be undertaken overseas at the discretion of medical schools. Ministers are not responsible for these arrangements, and we do not collect detailed information about them.

Private Patients

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the report of the audit of 37 health authorities of the collection of money from private patients using National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Ministers asked for this special audit to be carried out. Statutory audit reports have now been issued to those individual health authorities in which the auditors' findings indicate a need for action. The authorities must consider what steps they need to take, and we expect them to do this in open session unless there are compelling public interest reasons for not doing so.

Cell Culture Techniques

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on progress being made in research relating to cell culture techniques designed to replace the use of animals in experiments.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that very considerable progress has been made in the use of cell cultures. They are now routinely used in the early screening of new chemicals and, over the whole field of biomedical research, we understand that there are now more experiments using in vitro alternatives, such as isolated organs, tissues, cells or cell constituents than whole animals.

The Government welcome this progress and are taking active steps to promote it further. All licensees under the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 are regularly reminded of the need to develop and use alternatives wherever practicable. Under the new legislation proposed to replace the 1876 Act they will be effectively required to do so. In addition, the Government have made a substantial grant to the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments for its work on the development and use of cell cultures.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe (Aid)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of United Kingdom aid to Zimbabwe was spent on seconding foreign consultants in each of the last four years.

Mr. Raison: None.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent on aid to Zimbabwe in each of the last four years; and of that sum how much and what percentage was spent on health care, education and the secondment of foreign consultants in medicine and surgery.

Mr. Raison: British aid to Zimbabwe in the last four years was as follows:

	£ million
1980	36·405
1981	17·132
1982	21·464
1983	19·590
Total	94·591

Neither health nor education are sectors which the British and Zimbabwe Governments have identified as priority ones for British aid. Of the total, £35,000 (0·04 per cent.) was spent on health care and £1·3 million (1·6 per cent.) on education. None of it was spent on the secondment of foreign consultants in medicine and surgery. A substantial part of a £12 million grant for reconstruction and a £20 million grant for land resettlement has been used by the Zimbabwe authorities to provide facilities such as schools and clinics, but the precise figures are not readily available.

Ethiopia

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the shipping and other costs broken down into separate categories of shipping grain from Southampton to Massawa in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: No grain financed from the United Kingdom aid programme has been shipped from Southampton to Massawa this year. However, 6,500 tons of wheat is expected to leave Hull on 12 December for Massawa. Final costs are not yet available but expenditure is estimated to be:

	£
6,500 tonnes of wheat (with bags)	708,500
Sea freight	182,000
Port and handling costs; charges at Massawa (including bagging)	105,300

These figures do not include the cost of transport and distribution in Ethiopia, which will be around £700,000, and which we have promised to meet.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Awards

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much is spent by each local authority on processing student awards.

Mr. Brooke: Each authority will have its own machinery to deal with student awards and information on the cost or operation of specific aspects of LEA administrative arrangements is not held centrally.

Student Unions

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will estimate the cost to public funds of contributions on the students' behalf to compulsory membership of student unions;

(2) if he will consider introducing legislation to provide for the voluntary membership of student unions;

(3) if he will estimate the savings to his Department if membership of student unions were made voluntary.

Mr. Brooke: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Student Funds (Misuse)

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he proposes to take to prevent the abuse of public funds through students representatives incurring expenditure for political purposes; whether he will introduce legislation on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General issued guidance in autumn 1983 which makes it clear that student unions in England and Wales may not spend money from funds subject to charitable trusts in supporting political causes which are not incidental to the objects of the charity. My right hon. and learned Friend will consider documented complaints alleging the misuse of such funds and will, where appropriate, act on them—as he has done in one case this week.

Children (Special Educational Needs)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has considered ways in which more detailed statistics and information can be collected *(a)* to identify those children with special educational needs and *(b)* to monitor implementation of the Education Act 1981; what information his Department currently collects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: I am writing to the hon. Member.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis information is collected at birth or in early childhood on children with special educational needs by local education authorities; and if this is followed up by further data collection.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

Teachers

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers are known to be employed within Leicestershire; and whether he has any information as to the number of teachers who are unemployed.

Mr. Dunn: The number of teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in Leicestershire in September 1984 was 7,716, counting part-time teachers on the basis of their full-time equivalences. The September return does not include teachers in special education or qualified teachers providing education otherwise than at school. No information is available on the number of teachers in Leicestershire who are unemployed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Short Brothers plc

Mr. Conway asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about funding in the current year of Short Brothers plc.

Mr. Hurd: Following a review earlier this year of Short Brothers' corporate plan, and taking current market conditions into account, the Government have now authorised an external financing limit of £95 million for the period April 1980 to 31 March 1985. Within this sum the Government have agreed to provide £6·5 million grant assistance this year to enable the company to continue development of its aircraft, aerostructures and missile activities. The assistance will include payments under a launch-aid contract for the SD360 and design, development and training grants.

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider allocating to those dairy farmers who, during the last 10 years, have been driven from their holdings close to the frontier with the Irish Republic as a result of terrorist activity a dairy produce quota consistent with their level of production at the time when they were forced to leave their farms.

Dr. Boyson: The European Community regulations make no specific provision for allocation of additional quota to producers who have left border farms as a result of terrorist activity. However, producers in these circumstances who submitted a claim by 21 August 1984 under the exceptional hardship provisions of the United Kingdom Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1984 will have their case considered by the independent dairy produce quota tribunal for Northern Ireland.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners are presently serving sentences for offences connected with terrorism in Northern Ireland, having been sentenced to be detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure.

Mr. Scott: There are at present 61 persons serving sentences of detention during the Secretary of State's pleasure. All were convicted of murder charges tried as scheduled offences.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure have served *(a)* eight years, *(b)* nine years, *(c)* 10 years and *(d)* more than 10 years.

Mr. Scott: Eighteen have served between eight and nine years; 19 between nine and 10 years; and eight have served 10 years or longer.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure have had a release date set *(a)* prior to 23 October and *(b)* since 23 October.

Mr. Scott: During the period from 1 January 1980 until 23 October 1984, seven persons serving sentences of detention during pleasure were released on licence or had provisional release dates fixed. Since 23 October, two more have been given provisional dates.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure will have their sentences reviewed, with the prospect of a release date being set, during the next six months.

Mr. Scott: On present indications about 15 such prisoners will have their cases reviewed within the next six months: but it is not possible to say at this stage what the outcome will be.

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he has implemented, since 23 October, any measures designed to provide information for persons detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure and their relatives about procedures for the review of indeterminate sentences; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has, since 23 October, developed procedures for informing persons detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure of the results of reviews of their cases; and if he will make a statement.

(3) if he has, since 23 October, altered or modified the review system for persons detained during the Secretary of State's pleasure; and if he has any plans to do so in the future.

Mr. Scott: I hope early next year to be able to make widely available a memorandum explaining the law in Northern Ireland relating to life and other indeterminate

sentences and the procedures for the review of individual cases. This will include the law relating to persons held during the Secretary of State's pleasure. Copies will be given to the inmates concerned, and to relatives and others who inquire on their behalf. Meanwhile, steps are being taken to inform inmates in advance when their cases are to be considered by the review board and of the subsequent result, and inmates will be given the opportunity to make written representations to the board. These procedures will be explained in the forthcoming memorandum of guidance. I have no plans at present to make other changes to the system for reviewing the cases of persons held during the Secretary of State's pleasure, but I continue to keep it under regular review.

Incident (Linden Street)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, of the Royal Ulster Constabulary officers who took part in a Landrover patrol in the vicinity of Linden Street, Belfast, on 9 July 1981, how many *(a)* are still serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and *(b)* have been promoted in rank since that date.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *298*]: The 11 police officers involved in the patrol are still serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary: three have been promoted.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims for damages have been made to date for alleged injury by plastic bullets fired by *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland; what have been the results so far; in how many cases liability has been admitted; in how many cases the court has made the findings of liablity; and what is the total sum of damages paid to date.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *298*]: 68 claims have been made against the Police Authority for Northern Ireland in respect of injury allegedly caused by plastic baton rounds fired by the police. The courts have made findings of liability in four of these cases. Three other cases have been settled out of court without an admission of liability. The total sum involved in these seven cases was £83,065. Information in respect of similar claims against the Army and in respect of any applications under criminal injuries compensation legislation is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sri Lanka

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he is proposing with the Sri Lankan Government concerning the rights of Tamil-speaking people repatriated from the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: None.

Poland (Human Rights)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Polish Government about the respect for human rights in Poland on the occasion of the third anniversary of the banning of Solidarity on 13 December.

Mr. Rifkind: We made clear publicly in 1982 and have subsequently repeated, that we deplored the action of the Polish authorities in dissolving Solidarity and in refusing to allow Polish workers to decide for themselves what trade union organisations should represent them. The ban was inconsistent with the spirit of the Helsinki final act.

During my official discussions in Poland from 3-7 November I raised various aspects of human rights with the Polish authorities and conveyed the widespread parliamentary and public concern in the United Kingdom at the continued detention of political prisoners, including Solidarity members Bogdan Lis and Piotr Mierzejewski.

We welcome the recent release from detention of Mr. Lis and Mr. Mierzejewski. We remain concerned, however, about human rights in Poland. In our further exchanges with the Poles we will emphasize those concerns where appropriate.

Non-visa foreign Nationals

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what fee is charged for non-visa foreign nationals who require letters of consent in order to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: The charge is £6. However, from 1 January 1985, the fee for a letter of consent will be increased to £10.

EEC Financial Guidelines

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the recently agreed EEC financial guidelines are to be conveyed to the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Rifkind: The text on budget discipline, which was formally adopted by the Council in Dublin on 4 December, is recorded in the minutes of the Council and is already available to the Council of Agriculture Ministers and to all other compositions of the Council.

Council of Agriculture Ministers (Agenda)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to ensure that the recently agreed EEC financial guidelines are placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Rifkind: We shall ensure that the requirements of budget discipline as now agreed are taken into account in all future discussions of the Agriculture Council.

Falkland Islands

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made plans to restrict the number of fishing vessels operating in Falkland Islands waters in order to control the depletion and renewal of fish stocks in the areas in question.

Interest Rates

35. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is satisfied with the level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Interest rates have fallen back substantially from their July peak, and are now close to post-Budget levels which were the lowest for several years. But I should always like them to be as low as possible consistent with the needs of monetary policy.

41. **Mr. Maples** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he makes of the relationship between the size of the public sector borrowing requirement and the level of general interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: A sustained reduction in the PSBR should contribute to a sustained reduction in the general level of interest rates. But there are other influences on interest rates, particularly in the short-term. For example, higher overseas rates will tend to increase the level of United Kingdom rates consistent with any particular level of the PSBR.

EC (Budgetary Discipline)

37. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a mechanism for ensuring budgetary restraint by the European Economic Community has yet been agreed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reported to the House on 5 December, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted the text on budgetary discipline on 4 December. The document was among those of which the House was invited to take note in its debate on 11 December.

Merchant Fleet

38. **Sir John Farr** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce fiscal improvements designed to reverse the decline in the number of ships owned and registered in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Moore: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion. It has already been announced that the next Finance Bill will include a provision to give greater flexibility in the use of writing down allowances for new ships.

House Prices

39. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumption he has made on interest rates in 1985 to arrive at his forecast figure in table 1·3 of his autumn statement of a 4 per cent. increase in housing prices in the fourth quarter of 1985.

Mr. Peter Rees: It has never been the practice to reveal interest rate assumptions.

Employment Trends

42. **Mr. Tracey** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his best estimate of the current trend of employment.

Mr. Peter Rees: The employed labour force is estimated to have risen by a quarter of a million in the year to June 1984. The forecast published in the autumn statement is consistent with continued growth in the year ahead.

Third World Indebtedness

44. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate by how much Third world indebtedness to British banks increases for each 1 per cent. increase in British interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: As 1 per cent. rise in sterling interest rates would increase the servicing costs of non-oil developing countries' debt with British banks by at most around £29 million a year. There would be an offsetting increase of about the same amount in interest due on sterling deposits from these countries.

Land Conservation (Capital Transfer Tax)

45. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will seek to extend capital transfer tax relief to land of conservation interest.

Mr. Moore: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion. He will, I know, however, be aware that conservation objectives are already recognised in the capital transfer tax code, which provides exemption for land of outstanding scenic, historic or scientific interest, and for land adjoining a historic house which is essential for the protection of the character and amenities of the house.

Local Government Reform (Expenditure)

46. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, in the next public expenditure White Paper, he will include a table drawing together all expenditure in connection with the abolition of the metropolitan councils and the Greater London council.

Mr. Peter Rees: No. The financial effects of the Local Government Bill are, however, considered in the explanatory and financial memorandum of that Bill.

Tax Credit Scheme

47. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate the feasibility of a tax credit scheme.

Mr. Moore: We have no present plans to introduce such a scheme.

Merchant Seamen (Tax Relief)

48. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the withdrawal of tax relief on merchant seamen spending more than 30 days outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moore: During the passage of the Finance (No. 2) Bill 1984, Treasury Ministers received some 1,500 letters from seafarers and those representing them. Since the Bill became law we have received about 160 more letters on this issue, mostly within the last month.

Public Expenditure Targets

49 **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress towards achieving the public expenditure targets outlined in the "Autumn Statement".

Mr. Peter Rees: I have nothing to add at this stage to my right hon. Friend's autumn statement and his and my comments in the House when it was debated on Thursday 6 December. I intend to publish the annual White Paper detailing the plans outlined in the autumn statement in the new year.

Taxation Revenues

50. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in taxation revenues since 1978-79 measured in 1984 prices.

Mr. Moore: The estimated increase in taxation revenues and national insurance contributions since 1978-79 measured at 1984-85 prices is £24 billion, £11 billion of which is the estimated increase in North sea tax revenues.

Occupational Pension Funds (Taxation)

51. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to tax the income and capital gains of occupational pension funds.

Mr. Moore: I am aware of recent speculation on this subject. It is our normal policy not to comment on such speculation.

Personal Taxation (Employment Creation)

52. **Mr. Forman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will detail the stages in the process by which Her Majesty's Government believe that reductions in the burden of personal direct taxation will reduce the number of those now unemployed.

Mr. Peter Rees: A reduction in personal taxation will improve incentives and the supply side of the economy. These effects are difficult to model precisely, but the net result over time is likely to be higher output, employment and demand. Greater dynamism in the economy would mean an increased rate of economic growth, thereby creating the conditions under which more jobs will be created.

Finance Council

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the meeting of the European Community Economic and Finance Council in Brussels on 10 December.

Mr. Lawson: I represented the United Kingdom at this Council.

The Council adopted negotiating mandates on export credits for aircraft and mixed credits. The Council reached agreement to extend for two years the medium term financial assistance facility and to adopt the Commission's annual report on the economic situation in the Community.

Ministers also considered a Commission paper on strengthening the European monetary system. This issue was referred back to Committees for further consideration.

The Council also considered a number of other issues, including FEOGA guidance expenditure; the non-life insurance services draft directive; measures concerning travellers' allowances; the draft unit trust directive; and the 20th VAT directive.

Investment

16. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the fall in net investment by industrial and commercial companies from nearly £4 billion in 1979 to £½ billion in 1983.

Mr. Peter Rees: Gross investment is a better measure of capital expenditure. On that basis, gross domestic fixed capital formation in 1980 prices stood at £43·9 billion in 1979, at £38 billion in 1981 and by 1983 had risen to £42·4 billion.

Money Supply

25. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the money supply is growing within the Government's target ranges.

Mr. Peter Rees: A large build-up in bank deposits associated with the BT issue has distorted the broad money figures for banking November, although MO was not affected. Over the target period to banking October, both aggregates were within their target ranges, and MO is still well on track.

Job Creation

40. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what factors he attributes the difference in the growth in the number of jobs in the economy between 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to 1984.

Mr. Peter Rees: The difference in the growth in the number of jobs in the economy between 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to 1984 reflects a long overdue reduction in levels of overmanning in British industry, the depth of the world recession and excessive growth in real wages. The Government's policies have laid the foundation for a sustainable increase in employment. The employed labour force has in fact been rising since March 1983.

Pension Funds (Taxation)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, in any consideration of additional taxation of pension funds, he will take into account the possible effects on the solvency of those funds or of the institutions which have guaranteed the payment of the benefits.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people have contributed to pension schemes for which income tax is reclaimable on contributions in each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) how many pension schemes have been in operation for each of the last five years for which figures are available, from which, under present regulations, lump sum payments would be tax free.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Ships (Depreciation Allowance)

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will introduce a 50 per cent.

million in 1983-84. Information as to the cost of subsidising midday meals for boarding pupils is not available centrally.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Grist asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the proposed reorganisation of the Forestry Commission in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: My right hon. Friend has received representations on this matter from the following, as well as from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central:

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower);
The right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan);
The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley);
The trade union side of the Forestry Commission's south Wales Whitley Council;
The Wales TUC;
Cardiff city council.

However, the prime responsibility for the organisation and efficient management of the Forestry Commission in Wales lies with the forestry commissions.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Human Settlement Projects

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the level of support from the overseas aid programme for human settlement projects over the last five years; what projects are currently being supported; and which British companies have benefited from contracts in connection with these.

Mr. Raison: The information requested, covering housing and land settlement projects, is as follows:

Year	*Housing* £000	*Land settlement* £000
1979	2,931	1,303
1980	2,269	929
1981	49	2,130
1982	9,159	4,777
1983	5,313	2,981

Note: Projects in the dependencies or recently independent countries in the Caribbean and Pacific are not included in these figures as the detailed statistical data are not readily available.

Projects currently being supported are as follows:

Country	*Project*	
India	Housing and Urban development	
Malawi	Rural housing	
Solomon Islands	Housing development	through the Commonwealth Development Corporation
Botswana	Low cost housing	through the Commonwealth Development Corporation
Kenya	Land purchase	
Swaziland	Land purchase	
Zimbabwe	Land resettlement	

Information is not available about British companies benefiting from contracts under these projects; however, in both categories, the bulk of expenditure covers local costs where British companies are not usually involved.

UN Development Programme

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the level of funding of the United Nations development programme by Her Majesty's Government *(a)* in constant prices and *(b)* as a percentage of total overseas aid for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Raison: The information requested is as follows, together with the cash contributions to UNDP for each of the years quoted:

UNDP Contribution

	Cash £ million	*Constant 1983 prices* £ million	*As percentage of total overseas aid*
1974	9·3	29·5	2·5
1975	14·7	36·7	3·2
1976	13·6	29·7	2·5
1977	20·0	38·3	3·3
1978	25·4	43·9	3·4
1979	28·5	43·0	3·0
1980	15·0	18·9	1·6
1981	17·5	19·7	1·5
1982	18·5	19·4	1·7
1983	18·5	18·5	1·6

CIVIL SERVICE

Government Legislation (Drafting)

Mr. Lawrence asked the Minister for the Civil Service if any preparation of Government legislation has been done by other than the official parliamentary draftsmen in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Hayhoe: Apart from a certain number of Consolidation Acts drafted under contract by retired parliamentary counsel, some drafting of Consolidation Acts was done by parliamentary agents in 1974 and 1975.

Parliamentary Draftsmen

Mr. Lawrence asked the Minister for the Civil Service whether he has any plans to increase the number of parliamentary draftsmen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: There are at present 23 parliamentary counsel—of all grades—of whom four are seconded to the Law Commission. Steps are being taken to recruit five more assistant parliamentary counsel, with a view to increasing from 19 to 22 the number of counsel working in the Parliamentary Counsel Office, and from four to six the number seconded to the Law Commission.

Mr. Lawrence asked the Minister for the Civil Service how many pages of legislation have been prepared by parliamentary draftsmen in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Hayhoe: In round figures, the number of pages of non-Scottish legislation prepared by parliamentary draftsmen in each of the past 10 years was:

	New Acts	*Consolidation Acts*	*Total*
1974	1,360	320	1,680
1975	1,690	640	2,330
1976	1,400	370	1,770

	New Acts	Consolidation Acts	Total
1977	790	370	1,160
1978	830	280	1,110
1979	580	660	1,240
1980	1,470	780	2,250
1981	1,330	690	2,020
1982	1,360	400	1,760
1983	660	590	1,250

Mr. Lawrence asked the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list the total number of parliamentary draftsmen who have been working full-time on the preparation of legislation in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Hayhoe: The number of parliamentary draftsmen who were working full-time on the preparation of non-Scottish legislation on 1 January in each of the years in question was:

	In the Parliamentary Counsel Office	At the Law Commission	Total
1974	17	5	22
1975	19	5	24
1976	19	5	24
1977	20	5	25
1978	20	5	25
1979	20	4	24
1980	18	5	23
1981	18	4	22
1982	17	4	21
1983	19	6	25

ENERGY

British Gas Showrooms

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made concerning the privatisation of British Gas showrooms.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: During the past year the sale of the British Gas interest in Wytch farm and the flotation of Enterprise Oil have been successfully carried through. In gas, as in other industries, the possibilities for further introduction of private capital are being carefully examined.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement about the miners' strike.

Mr. David Hunt: This damaging dispute has been sought and provoked by the NUM leadership and imposed on its own membership without a ballot. There is no justification for this strike. The board's offer is the best in the industry's history and has been accepted by the other unions in the mining industry.

No one wishes more than this Government to see an early and constructive settlement to this dispute. Any initiative is welcome if it offers the prospect of a realistic settlement that can offer the industry a good future. The NUM has yet to show that it is interested in such a settlement.

Plutonium (Isotope Composition)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information the Central Electricity Generating Board records as to the isotope composition of the plutonium vested in the United Kingdom civil nuclear power programme.

Mr. Goodlad: This is a matter of day-to-day management for the CEGB.

PRIME MINISTER

Children (Boarding Schools)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the cost to Her Majesty's Government of *(a)* educating the children of servants of the Crown at boarding schools and *(b)* financing places in boarding schools for the children of other persons; and if, in each case, she will set out the parental contributions at various income levels compared with the parental contribution to be demanded of those whose children win a place in an institution of higher learning.

The Prime Minister: The total cost of the various Government boarding allowance schemes for public servants was about £83 million in 1983-84. Such allowances are paid only in appropriately limited circumstances and are not related to income. The only other Government expenditure on boarding fees arises under the aided pupils scheme for music and ballet schools and amounted to some £400,000 in 1983-84. Parental contributions may by required under that scheme, but details of the scale for 1985-86 have yet to be determined. Details of the 1985-86 parental income scale for student grants were set out in the reply of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 14 November 1984 at columns *238-39*.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what would be *(a)* the loss of revenue if tax thresholds were raised to £3,000 per year for a single person and £6,000 a year for a married couple and *(b)* the saving in expenditure if child benefit were abolished; and if she will estimate the financial effect on a man with a wife and two children whose income was £100 per week of (i) each of the above changes and (ii) the introduction of both changes simultaneously.

The Prime Minister: The cost of raising tax thresholds to the levels specified would be about £12 billion in a full year, at 1984-85 levels of income and allowances. The public expenditure cost of child benefit at the current rate of £6·86 per child per week is about £4,430 million in a full year, on the basis of the number of beneficiaries in 1984-85. A married couple with gross income of £100 per week, where the wife was not working, would pay £613·50 less tax than under the 1984-85 tax regime. They would lose £13·70 per week—£712.40 in a year—from the abolition of child benefit. If the two changes were introduced simultaneously, they would lose £98·90 in a full year.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether the latest agreement on the EEC budget meets the requirement that spending under the common agricltural policy should fall as a proportion of the total; and if she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage of the total budget taken by the common agricultural policy each year since 1972, the anticipated figure in the current year, and the forecast for 1985.

The Prime Minister: The Council's agreement on budgetary discipline provides that expenditure relating to agricultural markets, as defined for the purposes of the agreement, will increase by less than the rate of growth of the Community's own resources base.

Expenditure on the common agricultural policy as a percentage of the total Community budget between 1972 and 1984 is as follows. The 1985 budget has not yet been adopted.

Year	*Percentage*
1972	89·0
1973	82·4
1974	75·4
1975	78·1
1976	76·6
1977	74·3
1978	79·2
1979	75·7
1980	73·3
1981	65·4
1982	64·0
1983	68·6
1984	70·3

Sources: 1973-77 EC Court of Auditors Reports. 1978-83 EC Commission Financial Reports and Court of Auditors Reports. 1984 supplementary budget.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether the decision to set aside more money for spending on the common agricultural policy in 1985 implies an increase in agricultural surpluses; and for what surpluses provision has been made in the 1985 budget compared with 1983.

The Prime Minister: No Community budget has yet been adopted for 1985. Provision is not made in Community budgets for any specific level of surpluses, but some of the expenditure provided for relates to the disposal of surpluses. However, the quantities actually disposed of in any given year will depend upon many factors, including the detailed management of agricultural markets during the year.

Higher Education

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether it is the Government's policy that students in higher education should pursue their studies at an institution within travelling distance from their parents' home regardless of the circumstances.

The Prime Minister: This Government, like their predecessors, believe that there is merit in students studying from the parental home where that is practicable.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what proportion of the population aged 18 to 21 years receives higher education in the United Kingdom compared with Germany, Japan, France and the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: Information in the form requested is not readily available. Comparisons of participation rates in higher education between countries are influenced by the structure of higher education in each country, in particular by the age of entry and the length of course. In some countries students enter higher education later than in the United Kingdom and take longer to qualify.

A meaningful comparison can be obtained by showing all new entrants to higher education as a percentage of the age group within the typical age range for the country in question. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has published statistics on this basis. In the table column 1 shows the age range encompassing at least 70 per cent. of all entrants to full-time higher education in each country, the yearly average size of which forms the basis for the calculation of participation. For example for the United Kingdom the size of the typical year group is the total number of 18 and 19-year-olds divided by two. Column 2 shows new entrants to higher education in 1982 as a percentage of the age group in the typical age range.

Participation in Higher Education 1982

	1 *Age range covering 70 per cent. of entry to higher education*	*2* *Numbers entering Higher Education for the first time in 1982 as a percentage of the size of the average year group in Column 1*
France*	18-20	29·0
Germany (Federal Republic)	19-21	21·2
Japan†	18	34·2
United Kingdom‡‖	18-19	30·0
United States of America†‡¶	18	61·7

* Excluding new entrants to "Grandes Ecoles" and some non-university colleges.
† Includes new entrants to private colleges.
‡ Full-time and part time.
‖ Excludes post graduates and others known to have a higher education qualification, excludes overseas students.
¶ 1981.

Sources: OECD, "Education Statistics for the United Kingdom" 1984 edition.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what statistical information she has concerning the level of Government contribution to the cost of higher education in the United Kingdom and in other countries so far as the student's contribution is concerned; and if she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for the United Kingdom's principal overseas competitors how central and local government finance the places of students at universities, distinguishing tuition fees from maintenance.

The Prime Minister: In 1982-83 students' families were asked to contribute a sum equivalent to about 5·6 per cent. of the Government's total expenditure on higher education in the United Kingdom. Information on other countries is not available for the purpose of comparisons with the United Kingdom. The latest available information

on the financing of higher education overseas is contained within statistical bulletin 9/84 of the Department of Education and Science, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister what information she has about the extent to which university students in Germany, France and Italy are required to pay the whole of their tuition fees; and if she will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the extent of any derogations from this rule.

The Prime Minister: I understand that university students are not required to pay tuition fees in the Federal Republic of Germany or in France, but that they are required to do so in Italy. I have no information about any derogations from those practices.

Industry (Financial Aid)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Prime Minister if she will set out systematically the financial aids available from Government to industry, British and foreign; and if she will indicate how Her Majesty's Government intend to exercise their discretionary powers of aid in those areas where these exist.

The Prime Minister: The broad programmes of assistance offered by a number of Departments are set out in the annual public expenditure White Papers. Details are contained in the annual Estimates. Assistance is available to industry in the United Kingdom irrespective of the nationality of ownership or of controlling interests. A major criterion for aid will continue to be value for money. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry announced on 28 November the conclusions of the review on regional policy to increase cost effectiveness. My hon. Friend the Minister for Information Technology announced on 12 November a review of support for innovation to the same end.

Social Security Commissioners

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Prime Minister if she will list the functions which will be transferred from the Secretary of State for Social Services to the Lord Chancellor in relation to social security commissioners and their office in January 1985.

The Prime Minister: From 1 January 1985, the Lord Chancellor will have administrative responsibility for the work of the Social Security Commissioners in addition to his current responsibility for their appointment. This change involves a transfer of three sets of functions from the Secretary of State for Social Services to the Lord Chancellor:

(a) the remuneration, expenses and pensions of the Commissioners;

(b) the administration of their offices in England and Wales (the Secretary of State for Scotland will exercise these responsibilities for the office in Scotland), and

(c) the making of regulations with respect to proceedings before them.

EC (Grain Stores)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Prime Minister what steps she intends to take to press for the release of grain stores from the European Community to ease the degree of famine in Ethiopia.

The Prime Minister: The European Council in Dublin agreed on 4 December that the Community and the member states should provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain before the next harvest for countries in Africa affected by drought, including Ethiopia.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Exchequer Subvention

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the amount of the direct subvention by the British Exchequer to Northern Ireland in each financial year since 1968; and what are the amounts budgeted for in future financial years.

Dr. Boyson: The information is as follows:

	£ million
1968-69	74
1969-70	74
1970-71	88
1971-72	126
1972-73	181
1973-74	312
1974-75	389
1975-76	565
1976-77	620
1977-78	*688
1978-79	848
1979-80	944
1980-81	1,090
1981-82	1,064
1982-83	1,149
1983-84	1,305
1984-85†	1,397

* Excludes a once for all payment of £250 million to cover redemption of the Northern Ireland Electricity Service borrowing.

† Provisional.

Figures are not available for future years.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve are currently estimated to be Catholics; and what proportion this represents of the manpower of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve separately.

Mr. Scott: Although details are not kept of the religious denomination of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its Reserve, I understand that about one tenth of the regular force comes from the Catholic community.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the number of private firearms certificates currently issued in Northern Ireland, together with details of the division of such certificates between the Protestant and Catholic communities; and how many certificates are held by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and its Reserve and the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its Reserve.

Mr. Scott: At 30 November 1984, 85,880 firearms certificates were on issue to persons in Northern Ireland. Of these, 866 were held by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and 212 by members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its Reserve. Information is not kept on the religious denomination of firearm certificate holders.

TRANSPORT

Motorway Lighting

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of the M1 motorway are lit; in which county areas the lit sections are; and what further plans he has to light sections of *(a)* the M1 motorway and *(b)* other motorways.

Mrs. Chalker: Sixty-eight miles of the M1 motorway are lit.

The other information that my hon. Friend seeks is not readily available, so I shall write to him shortly.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much of the M25 is presently unlit; if he will list the sections presently unlit; and if he will estimate the cost of lighting the stretches so far unlit.

Mrs. Chalker: The following sections of the M25, totalling approximately 29 miles, are open to traffic and unlit: junctions 2 to 3, junctions 5 to 6, junctions 6 to 7, junctions 7 to 8, junctions 10 to 11, junctions 11 to 12, junctions 12 to 13—partially lit—junctions 17 to 18 and junctions 18 to 19.

The estimated cost, at 1982-83 prices, of lighting these sections of motorway is very approximately £2·7 million, but the final cost could be more depending on the lighting system used.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if in the light of the accident on 11 December on the M25, he will make it his policy to light all stretches of that motorway so far unlit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 12 December 1984, at column *528*. It would be premature to reach any conclusions until the examination of all the data is completed.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether any arrangements have been made for the policing of the docklands light railway.

Mrs. Chalker: Arrangements for the policing of this railway, which is due to come into operation in mid-1987, are still under consideration.

Travel Concessions

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that travel concessions affected by any legislation concerning buses will be available for all buses, all taxis and all minibuses.

Mr. David Mitchell: We are still considering, in the light of the responses to our consultation paper, the availability of concessionary fares on taxi and minibus services. An announcement will be made before the Bill is introduced.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce a countrywide scheme of travel concessions or public transport.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for local authorities to decide what arrangements to make for concessionary travel in their areas, and how to help elderly people most effectively within the resources available to them.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the Bill concerning buses will guarantee the value of travel concessions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: under our proposals local authorities will retain the power to decide what level of travel concessions to provide.

Driving Test

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people during the past year have had to re-take the driving test because they have acquired a physical disability.

Mr. Ridley: In the 12 months from 1 December 1983 to 30 November 1984, 236 such people were required to take a driving test.

British Airways

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with the preparations and the arrangements for the public flotation of British Airways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Yes.

Drinking and Driving

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will withdraw his Department's "Keep Low" campaign regarding drinking and driving.

Mrs. Chalker: No. I believe that the campaign has an important part to play in making young people more aware of the dangers of drinking and driving and in encouraging responsible attitudes.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend his Department's current advertising campaign concerning drinking and driving so that it does not encourage anyone to partake of alcoholic drinks and then to drive.

Mrs. Chalker: The aim of the campaign is to make young people more aware of the dangers of drinking and driving in a way to which they will respond. The campaign does not offer any encouragement for the view that it is safe to drink before driving, and I believe that the audience at whom it is aimed will understand its message quite clearly.

Oxford Circus Station (Fire)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will provide extra revenue support for London Regional Transport to compensate it for any losses caused by the Oxford Circus station fire.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans to do so. London Regional Transport is currently discussing with the assessors the basis of an insurance claim following the station fire at Oxford Circus.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has asked the Railways Inspectorate for a report on the Oxford Circus station fire on 23 November.

Mrs. Chalker: The Railway Inspectorate is receiving detailed reports on the fire from London Regional Transport and the London fire brigade. It will study these in the light of its investigation of previous fires at Finsbury Park (1976) and Goodge Street (1981) and will then report on any measures that should be taken to prevent a recurrence, or to improve the handling of emergencies of that kind.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the expected cost of reopening Oxford Circus Victoria line platforms to the public.

Mrs. Chalker: London Regional Transport is not yet able to make a firm estimate, but preliminary indications are that the cost of reopening the Victoria and Bakerloo line platforms at Oxford Circus could be in the region of £1 million to £2 million. Further expenditure will be needed to refubish the station to current standards.

London and Metropolitan Counties

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether, in addition to the studies described in his Department's press notices of 20 November, any further contracts are going to be commissioned to study urban movement and assess problems in London or in other metropolitan counties.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no present plans for similar studies.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present rate of value added tax on children's footwear in each of the 10 member nations of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Lawson: Young children's footwear is zero rated in the United Kingdom. On the latest available information, the position in other EC countries is understood to be as follows:

	Percentage
Belgium	17
Denmark	22
France	18·6
Germany	14
Ireland	0
Italy	18
Luxembourg	12
Netherlands	19

VAT has not yet been introduced in Greece.

Mr. Grylls asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will take steps to exclude the Post Office's datapost courier service and Argonaut freight forwarding service from the exemption to the Value Added Tax (General) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1984.

Mr. Hayhoe: Amending legislation to exclude the Post Office's datapost service from the exemption will be brought before Parliament early in the new year. The Argonaut freight forwarding service, as it is understood to be currently operating, does not benefit from the exemption.

Mr. Grylls asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the bodies entitled to take advantage of the provisions of regulation 33 of the Value Added Tax (General) Regulations 1980, as substituted by article 6 of the Value Added Tax (General) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1984.

Mr. Hayhoe: The provisions of regulation 6 of the Value-Added Tax (General) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1984 are available to any importer who is registered for VAT.

Mr. Sayeed asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of tax raised by increasing value added tax to 20 per cent. for *(a)* all items which currently have 15 per cent. value added tax imposed and *(b)* all items which currently have 15 per cent. value added tax imposed on them, except those associated with the building trade.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984, c. *569*]: The estimates of net additional revenue in a full-year are *(a)* about £4 billion and *(b)* about £3·8 billion. Estimate *(b)* assumes that professional building work or repair, maintenance or alteration continues to be taxed at 15 per cent., but that the purchase of DIY materials is taxed at 20 per cent.

Mr. Sayeed asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the expected amount of value added tax raised in a full year on those areas of the building trade liable to value added tax at 15 per cent.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984, c. *569*]: A little over £600 million.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the price elasticity for tobacco products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The price elasticity of demand used for tobacco products is minus 0·5.

"Official Report"

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the *Official Report* in bound form is now one year behind in publication; and if he will indicate what steps he proposes to take in order to rectify this situation.

Mr. Hayhoe: The delay in publication of bound volumes of the *Official Report* is attributable to delay in the supply of indexes. HMSO is in close touch with the Editor and Librarian with the aim of overcoming its present difficulties.

DEFENCE

Crown Proceedings Act 1974

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to seek repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot yet add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 31 October, at column *1121*.

HMS Vernon

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he contemplates the release of any land associated with HMS Vernon within the next 18 months.

Mr. Lee: HMS Vernon is to be home to both Army and Royal Navy diving training establishments from 1985. A general study, including HMS Vernon into naval requirements in the Portsmouth area is under way. No disposal of land relating to HMS Vernon is envisaged in the next 18 months.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what intention his Department has for the future use of HMS Vernon.

Mr. Lee: The Army and Royal Navy diving training establishments are to be collocated at HMS Vernon from 1985. HMS Vernon is included in a current study of the navy's requirements for shore establishments in the Portsmouth area. It is unlikely that this will result in any change of function in the immediate future.

Warships

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the total space available in each type and class of Her Majesty's warships has been taken by accommodation and recreational space over the past 30 years; and how current Royal Navy warships compare in this way with those of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Lee: The figures requested are not readily available for all classes. However, data for major classes of surface warships currently in service, together with the NATO average and Soviet Krivak class for comparison purposes are as follows:

Class	*Percentage of ship by volume for recreation and accommodation*	*Allocation of space per man (Sq. M)*
Sheffield Class	26.7	3·43
Broadsword Class	23·8	4·25
Leander*	32·0	3·59
NATO Average	25·0	4·32
Krivak†	27·0	4·26

Notes:

* The Leander, being a steam ship, carries a larger crew for her size than other classes. Hence the higher proportion of the ship dedicated to accommodation, but lower allocation per man.

† What we know of other modern Soviet warship classes confirms these figures.

NATO (Improved Capability)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Defence Ministers at their recent meeting discussed a move by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation towards the acquisition of improved capability for deep conventional counter-attack.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot add to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 11 December, at column *411*.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the turnover log of the radio operator on HMS Conqueror is now in the possession of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: HMS Conqueror's radio operator's turnover notes are in the possession of my Department.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he is satisfied that all signals recorded as having been transmitted *(a)* from HMS Conqueror to Flag Officer Submarines and *(b)* from Flag Officer Submarines to HMS Conqueror were properly authorised during the period 1 to 4 May 1982;

(2) if, from the records now available to him, there is any evidence of unauthorised signals being sent *(a)* from HMS Conqueror to Flag Officer Submarines or *(b)* from Flag Officer Submarines to HMS Conqueror during the period 1 to 4 May 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 December 1984, c. *100*]: No signal may be sent without the signature of a releasing officer. We are not aware of any signal sent without this authorisation.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a permanent record of the movements of HMS Conqueror is made by the ship's internal navigation system.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 November 1984, c. *410*]: A record of HMS Conqueror's position would have been maintained by taking readings from the ship's inertial navigation system. The record is not normally retained permanently but a portion of HMS Conqueror's record has been kept for analysis.

Mr. Brian Moss

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current posting in the Navy of Mr. Brian Moss, formerly coxswain of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Stanley: Chief Petty Officer Moss is a coxswain in the submarine service.

Lieutenant Sethia (Diary)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Lieutenant Sethia's diary was entered in HMS Conqueror's register of classified books.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department became aware of Lieutenant Sethia's diary.

Mr. Heseltine: Extracts, apparently from a diary of a member of HMS Conqueror's crew, were published on a number of occasions from 16 April 1984 onwards. The Ministry of Defence conducted an internal inquiry at the time to try to identify the diarist but failed to do so. It was only on 7 November 1984 that a copy of a diary came into the possession of the Department. I understand that inquiries into the matter are still continuing, and it would not be right for me to say any more about it at this stage.

Falkland Islands

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the number, average gross registered tonnage, type and countries of origin of fishing vessels operating in 1984 on fishing grounds within 150 miles of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Stanley: During 1984 the daily average number of fishing vessels detected within the Falkland Islands protection zone has usually varied between 40 and 60. Vessels entering the zone have been registered in the Soviet Union, Poland, Japan, Taiwan, German Democratic Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Liberia, Norway, Philippines and Panama. We do not record the precise type or gross tonnage of such fishing vessels generally.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Defence if there has been an increase in the number of fishing vessels operating within 150 miles of the Falkland Islands since July 1982.

Mr. Stanley: Information is available only from December 1982. The number of vessels fishing within the 150-mile Falkland Islands protection zone has remained of the same order of magnitude over the past two years.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the procedure for making a change in the rules of engagement during the Falklands campaign.

Mr. Heseltine: The higher management of the Falklands crisis was conducted by a small group of Ministers chaired by the Prime Minister. Changes in the rules of engagement were normally made by this body, in the light of military and other advice.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions during the Falklands campaign the rules of engagement were altered.

Mr. Heseltine: Often. I am preparing advice for the Foreign Affairs Committee on this subject.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the right hon. Sir John Nott, since 1 July 1983, has had access to documents relating to changes in the rules of engagement for the Falklands campaign to which he would have had ready access when he was a member of the War Cabinet.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand that Sir John Nott explained the extent of his knowledge of events when he gave evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 5 December. I have nothing to add to what he said then.

Argentina (Skyhawk Aircraft)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for British force levels in the south Atlantic of the acquisition by Argentina of Skyhawk naval aircraft.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to the answer of my hon. Friend the then Minister for Defence Procurement on 23 July 1984 at column *535*.

Chile (Military Facilities)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Royal Navy ships and *(b)* British military aircraft have made use of Chilean facilities at (i) Punta Arenas and (ii) Teniente Marsh on King George Island in the last 12 months.

Mr. Lee: No Royal Navy ships or British military aircraft have visited Punta Arenas during the last 12 months. An RAF Hercules used the Chilean antarctic base at Tiniente Ridolfo March Martin on 23 February 1984 to evacuate a casualty from HMS Endurance, and HMS Endurance herself paid a routine call at the base on 29 February.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence at what time Admiral Woodward learned of the visual contact which HMS Conqueror had established with the General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *433*]: HMS Conqueror's signal reporting the sighting of the General Belgrano was relayed to Admiral Woodward on the afternoon of 1 May 1982.

Wessex Helicopter

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the airworthiness of the Wessex helicopter.

Mr. Butler: Yes.

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Defence what aircraft will replace the Wessex helicopter; and when it will commence active service.

Mr. Butler: No decisions have yet been taken about the aircraft type or in-service date of a replacement for the Wessex helicopter.

RAF Trainer

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make the placing of specific orders with United Kingdom firms by those countries which may supply the new Royal Air Force trainer his only criterion for judging potential offsets, to the exclusion of potential orders from the countries concerned.

Mr. Lee: The decision on a new RAF trainer will take account not only of performance and costs but also of the industrial proposals submitted by the contending firms. In this regard it is important to note that the tenders for the three foreign-designed aircraft all propose that substantial amounts of work would be undertaken in the United Kingdom. However, the wider aspects of potential benefit to British industry will also be taken into consideration.

Conventional Forces (Central Europe)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the relative balance of conventional forces in central Europe has changed in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's favour since 1980.

Mr. Lee: In numercial terms, the relative balance of conventional forces on the central front has remained broadly unchanged since 1980. Over that period the Warsaw pact has maintained its substantial numerical superiority in tanks, artillery pieces and fixed-wing tactical aircraft.

SCOTLAND

Mortality Rates

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current infant mortality rates for each social class in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The information for 1983 is contained in table D1.6 of the annual report of the Registrar General for Scotland for that year, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current standardised mortality rates for each social class in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: Occupational mortality studies are restricted to years close to census years because of the use which is made of census information. As I said in answer to a previous question from the hon. Member on 30 November, at column *610*, information for 1979-83 will be published in due course.

Youth Training Projects (Accidents)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the number of deaths and serious accidents sustained on youth training scheme propects in Dundee and Tayside to date.

Mr. Allan Stewart: For the period 1 April 1983 to 30 September 1984 there were no deaths and one major injury, which was sustained in Dundee.

Note: MSC accident figures for YTS are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed persons. Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1980.

Teachers (Pay)

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will shortly be making a statement on the request by Scottish teachers' unions for an independent pay review body.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend on 11 December 1984, at columns *399-400*, to my hon. Friend, the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth).

Sexual Assaults

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when the guidelines for the police on the investigation of sexual assaults are to be issued to the police authorities.

Mr. Ancram: The Scottish Home and Health Department will shortly seek the views of women's organisations on a draft of revised guidance to the police on the investigation of complaints of sexual assault. The final version of the guidance, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House, will be issued to the police when the consultation process has been completed.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy, when announcing the sales of Forestry Commission land in the *Official Report*, to indicate the location of such sales more precisely and to include the species composition of each wood.

Mr. John MacKay: Lists of properties sold by the Forestry Commission have been published in the *Official Report* from time to time. The latest list, showing the position to 21 October 1984, was contained in my reply to a question from the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 4 December 1984, at columns *140-50*. In order to meet the hon. Member's request, any lists published in the *Official Report* of properties sold since that date will include in the case of a woodland an Ordnance Survey grid reference and an indication of whether it consists mainly of broadleaves or of conifers.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps the Forestry Commission takes to seek to ensure that broadleaved woodlands under its care are not converted to conifer plantations after sales into private hands;

(2) what steps the Forestry Commission takes to ensure that broadleaved woodlands under its care are not sold to agricultural interests for clear-felling.

Mr. John MacKay: The Forestry Commission does not place constraints of this nature on the sale of broadleaved woodlands. However, apart from a number of statutory exceptions, the clear-felling of trees of more than 8 centimetres (3 in) in diameter requires a licence from the commission, whose policy rests on a general presumption in favour of broadleaved woodland normally being replanted with broadleaved trees after felling.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Forestry Commission's policy regarding public access to woods which are consequently sold into private ownership.

Mr. John MacKay: When a wood is sold by the Forestry Commission the question of public access is one for the new owner. Public rights of way are not affected by changes in ownership.

Police Operation, Blindwells, East Lothian

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Lothian and Borders police on the number of police officers and vehicles which were deployed at Blindwells, East Lothian, on the morning of 10 December; what was the cost of this police operation; and what was the purpose of the blocking of traffic on the Tranent-Meadowmill road on that occasion.

Mr. Ancram: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Rural Bus Services

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete the details of the scheme for the allocation of funds for transitional difficulties in rural areas arising from the White Paper, "Buses".

Mr. Ancram: In due course.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the range of fines imposed upon

persons convicted of offences related to activities during the miners' dispute for *(a)* breach of the peace where it is a first offence, *(b)* vandalism and *(c)* reckless conduct.

Mr. Ancram: I understand that in the period to 16 November 1984 fines have been imposed for charges of breach of the peace related to the miners' dispute ranging from £1 to £750 — no information is available on whether these charges were first offences — and that fines for charges of vandalism related to the miners' dispute have ranged from £20 — for vandalism and breach of the peace—to £100. I also understand that no fines were imposed for reckless conduct related to the miners' dispute in this period.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications for legal aid have been made by persons charged with offences related to picketing during the miners' dispute; how many have been accepted; and if he will list the figures for each area.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not available.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints have been made against the police in relation to activities during the course of the miners' dispute; and how many complaints have been upheld.

Mr. Ancram: I understand that 23 such complaints have been received by the police. Of these, 10 are currently being investigated by the procurator fiscal or the police force concerned. No criminal or disciplinary charges have been brought following investigation of the others.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miners charged with offences related to picketing during the miners' dispute have *(a)* been refused bail and *(b)* had bail conditions imposed upon them which prevent them from visiting any premises or place for the purpose of picketing or demonstrating in connection with the current trade dispute other than peacefully to picket or demonstrate at their usual place of employment.

Mr. Ancram: For the first part of his question, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 5 December, at columns *346-47*, by my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General for Scotland to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang). For the second part, information on the imposition of any special conditions of bail is not available centrally.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the cost of policing during the miners' dispute; and what is his estimate of the cost for each police authority area.

Mr. Ancram: The information is set out in the following table:

Police authority area	*Estimated cost to mid-November 1984 (£'000)*
Central	144
Dumfries and Galloway	Nil
Fife	350
Grampian	Nil
Lothian and Borders	1,350
Northern	Nil
Strathclyde	1,910
Tayside	65
Total	3,819

Note: These figures represent the extra costs incurred during the miners' dispute.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps have been taken by chief constables to enable pickets to communicate information to drivers of vehicles.

Mr. Ancram: I understand that, although practice varies in the light of particular circumstances, the police normally seek to allow a limited number of pickets the opportunity to indicate to drivers their wish to communicate information to them. This accords with the code of practice on picketing. There is no obligation on drivers to receive such information if they do not wish to do so, and pickets have no right under the law to stop drivers, or have them stopped, for this purpose.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the cumulative numbers of police officers who have been involved in activities associated with the current miners' strike; and if he will list the figure as a proportion of the total police force.

Mr. Ancram: The information needed for any meaningful estimate of the kind requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police (Riot Training)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of police officers who have undergone riot training.

Mr. Ancram: I estimate, on the basis of information provided by chief constables, that about 6,000 police officers in Scotland have undergone basic or further training in the use of protective equipment or other aspects of handling public disorder.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Aerial Crop Spraying

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list his current powers to control aerial crop spraying.

Mrs. Fenner: We have no powers currently to control aerial spraying, but under the Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS), which is jointly administered by my Department, the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of the Environment, the Health and Safety Executive and responsible Departments for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Ministers consider the suitability of chemicals for aerial application. Only certain less toxic pesticides are cleared for application from the air. However, controls over aerial crop spraying are exercised by the Civil Aviation Authority under article 40 of the Air Navigation Order 1980. In addition, the Government are seeking powers in the Food and Environment Protection Bill to control the supply and use

of pesticides. These powers would be sufficiently broad to allow the imposition of environmental safety conditions on aerial application. They would thus complement current controls.

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the area of land newly afforested since 1980 to the latest available date in England, making a distinction between coniferous plantations and other forestry schemes.

Mrs. Fenner: Planting statistics are published by the Forestry Commission in its annual reports. During the period 1 April 1980 to 31 March 1984, a total of 6,548 hectares of new planting—4,927 hectares of conifers and 1,621 hectares of broadleaves—was carried out in England by the Forestry Commission and by the private sector with the aid of grants from the commission.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the area of land newly afforested since January 1980 to the latest available date in England; and if he will indicate the proportions planted by the Forestry Commission and private landowners, respectively.

Mrs. Fenner: Planting figures are compiled centrally on the basis of financial years beginning 1 April. During the period 1 April 1980 to 31 March 1984, a total of 6,548 hectares of new planting was undertaken in England, of which 1,854 hectares were planted by the Forestry Commission and 4,694 hectares by the private sector with the aid of grants from the commission.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why it is the policy of the Forestry Commission not to inform county councils of sales of woodlands in their own counties.

Mrs. Fenner: This information is already available to county councils and other bodies through the regular notices of possible woodland sales that the Forestry Commission places in the *Estates Gazette*. These notices, which are given in advance of general advertising, cover woodlands of five hectares and over and those smaller woodlands in respect of which there is a known conservation or amenity interest.

Wheat

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average on-farm selling price of wheat in the United Kingdom for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984 to date.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

Weighted average ex-farm price of wheat in the United Kingdom (£/tonne)

Year	
1979	95·92
1980	99·30
1981	108·92
1982	113·74
1983	124·81

The average for January to September 1984, the latest period for which detailed data are available, is £119·60. For the year as a whole, I expect the average price to be lower as a result of low prices since the 1984 harvest. The weighted average ex-farm price of wheat for the week ending 6 December was £109·03 per tonne.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Winnick asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *295*, where the other intervention stores for surplus EEC agriculture produce are sited; and what is the amount of food stored, broken down into each class of produce.

Mr. Jopling: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Agriculture and Horticulture (Grants)

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the grants, by category, which are available to the agricultural and horticultural industries from Government funds, and the total sums paid by category in 1983.

Mr. Jopling: The information cannot readily be provided on a calendar year basis, but the grants available to the agriculture and horticulture industries and the total sums paid under each scheme in 1983-84 are set out in the Appropriation Accounts for

Class III Vote 2
(Volume 3: HC614-III published on 29 October 1984, covering England and Northern Ireland)
Class XV Vote 1
(Volume 10: HC614-X published on 30 October 1984, covering Scotland)
Class XVI Vote 2
(Volume 11: HC614-XI published on 30 October 1984, covering Wales)

This information was summarised on a United Kingdom basis in the reply given on 6 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter).

Fish Farms

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has of ecological damage to rivers caused by discharges from fish farms.

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of a report by the Wessex water authority which suggests that fish farm discharges are responsible for changes in the population of invertebrate animals in rivers for a relatively short distance downstream of fish farms. I am not, however, aware of any evidence that these changes have caused significant ecological damage to the rivers concerned, nor of any evidence of such damage being caused by fish farms elsewhere.

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the existing pollution controls for fish farms.

Mr. MacGregor: I am satisfied that water authorities have sufficient statutory powers to control fish farm discharges.

Mr. Soames asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the grants available to fish farmers.

Mr. MacGregor: Fish farmers may be eligible for grants under the following schemes, of which the first two are specifically designed to assist fish farmers:

Scheme	*Rate of Grant*
Council Regulation (EEC) 2908/83: Construction, equipment or modernisation of fish farming installations	25 per cent.
Fish Farming (Financial Assistance) Scheme 1984	Up to 5 per cent.*
Council Regulation (EEC) 355/77: Processing and marketing of agricultural and fishery products	25 per cent.
UK Agricultural Products Processing and Marketing (Improvement Grant) Regulations 1977 and 1983	Up to 8 per cent.†
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Scheme	5 per cent. Standard Area 10 per cent. Less Favoured Area
Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation Scheme	Up to 33⅓ per cent. formation costs Up to 75 per cent. surveys
Industrial Development Act 1982	Negotiable according to circumstances

* This scheme provides the necessary back-up grant for projects approved under Council Regulation (EEC) 2908/83.
† This scheme provides the necessary back-up grant for projects approved under Council Regulation (EEC) 355/77.

Beef and Lamb

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what change has taken place in consumer demand for beef and lamb, respectively, since 1979.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *436*]: Information from the national food survey indicates that between the first three quarters of 1979 and the first three quarters of 1984 household consumption of beef and sheepmeat fell by 26 per cent. and 21 per cent., respectively.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the percentage change in the retail price of beef and lamb, respectively, since 1979.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *436*]: Data collected for inclusion in the retail price index indicate that, between October 1979 and October 1984, the average retail price of beef and sheepmeat increased by 37 per cent. and 25 per cent., respectively. Over the same period the retail price index increased by 52 per cent.

Food and Environment Protection Bill

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many meetings either he or members of his Department have had with representatives of the British Agriculture Association to discuss the Food and Environment Protection Bill *[Lords]*.

Mrs. Fenner: Officials of my Department have met representatives of the British Agrochemicals Association three times.

Research

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will give figures for public expenditure on research into *(a)* integrated pest management, *(b)* electrostatic spraying, *(c)* controlled droplet application and *(d)* pesticide toxicology, chemistry and efficacy, in each case for each year since 1970, and the estimated expenditure in each case for the future.

Mrs. Fenner: The information for 1983-84 is as follows:

	£ million
Estimated expenditure on research into	
(a) Integrated pest management*	†2·20
(b) Electrostatic spraying‡	1·05
(c) Controlled droplet application‡	
(d) Pesticide toxicology, chemistry and efficacy	4·90
Totals	8·15

* The figures for integrated pest management include work on the development of non-chemical methods of control, such as favouring populations of natural predators of pests. They also include work on forecasting disease and pest development and the identification of thresholds of development at which it is economic to apply chemical treatments in an attempt to reduce the number of times pesticides might be applied.

† The figure may be an underestimate. Other work done within commodity commissions cannot easily be extracted from general crop protection studies.

‡ MAFF, in its classification of research, does not differentiate between electrostatic sprayers and controlled droplet applicators. both employ controlled droplet techniques.

Information for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Work in future years will be determined by the needs of the Ministry and the agriculture and horticulture industries.

Herring Quotas (North Sea)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers of the European Community held on 10 and 11 December in relation to the herring quotas in the North sea and other fisheries matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The Council of Fisheries Ministers did not meet on 10 or 11 December, but it is now expected to meet on 19 December.

EC (Expenditure Totals)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how planned expenditure totals in the common agricultural policy in 1984-85 and 1985-86 differ; and what are the reasons for the change in expenditure plans.

Mr. Jopling: The Community budget is operated on a calendar year basis. The provision for expenditure under the common agricultural policy in 1984 is 19,146 million ecu. The 1985 budget has not yet been adopted.

Mr. Renton: We are aware of the concern about the depletion of fishing stocks in the area. We are actively considering the possibility of establishing an exclusive fisheries limit around the Falkland Islands, in which conservation would be an important element. But as the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs recognise in its report, this raises a number of complex issues. No decisions have yet been taken.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* the tonnage, value and species of fish harvested in the Falkland Islands waters in 1983.

Mr. Renton: The specific information requested is not available. Fisheries statistics covering the entire south Atlantic area will not be available for some time.

British Antartic Base, Adelaide Island

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the transfer to Chile of the British Antartic base at Adelaide Island.

Mr. Renton: Adelaide station is an abandoned Antarctic base whose facilities were owned by the Natural Environmental Research Council and for which it had no further use. We therefore agreed to a proposal from the Chilean Antarctic Institute that Chile might use and assume responsibility for these facilities, within the framework of article IV of the Antarctic treaty.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the Government of Chile about the implications of the transfer of the Adelaide Island base to Chile on territorial claims for the neighbouring area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Chile has accepted that its assumption of responsibility for the facilities at Adelaide station is within the framework of the provisions of the Antarctic Treaty and, in particular, of article IV. We do not consider that British sovereignty over the British Antarctic territory is in any way prejudiced by this arrangement.

GCHQ, Cheltenham

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff of Government Communications Headquarters are being considered for transfer to other posts on the grounds of their refusal to give up union membership; how many staff have been transferred to other posts; by what date he expects there to be no union members employed at the headquarters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Transfers are being sought for 71 staff at GCHQ who have so far not accepted the revised terms and conditions of service introduced there on 25 January 1984. Ten staff have already been transferred to other posts in the Civil Service.

The decision of the House of Lords on 22 November confirms that the revised conditions of service at GCHQ are valid. It is our intention that these should be fully implemented. GCHQ will endeavour to find alternative posts within the Civil Service for those who do not wish to remain at GCHQ under the new conditions. There may be some for whom suitable positions cannot be found and they will be offered premature retirement on redundancy terms. This process may take some time and it is not possible to predict when it will be completed.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the accession of Spain to the EEC does not reduce the wage rates or standards of living of people in Gibraltar.

Mr. Renton: We have given full consideration to the impact on Gibraltar of Spanish accession to the European Community. We believe that the re-establishment of closer economic relations following the opening of the frontier and Spanish accession will be beneficial to the people of Gibraltar.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 December 1984

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Photocopying

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Lord Privy Seal (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the regulations governing the use by research assistants of the photocopier in the Upper Committee Corridor are observed;

(2) if he is satisfied that the present provision of photocopying facilities is adequate to meet the needs of right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the matter is to be considered in the near future by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

I am sure that the Sub-Committee will take account of any representations made to it.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Research Expenditure

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the total projected Government expenditure for 1985 for research into *(a)* contraceptive, *(b)* abortion and *(c)* sterilisation techniques;

(2) what has been the total Government expenditure on research into *(a)* contraceptive, *(b)* abortion and *(c)* sterilisation techniques in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid through the Department, is the main Government agency for the promotion of medical research in the United Kingdom. The council's total expenditure on research projects which have areas of relevance to contraceptive, abortion and sterilisation techniques in each of the past four years is as follows:

	£
1980-81	979,320
1981-82	1,103,992
1982-83	1,279,409
1983-84	1,529,178

The figures include the total cost of each project that involves work in the areas concerned, not only that part of each project which is directly relevant to the techniques.

I understand that the council does not have comparable figures for the years prior to 1980-81, neither can it produce an estimate of its expenditure in this field in 1985-86. The latter will depend on the research grant applications received by the council and on its decisions about whether to support them. The council is always ready to consider soundly based proposals for new research.

Research work relevant to these techniques is also carried out in universities and medical schools, financed from the block grant to universities allocated for teaching and research on advice from the University Grants Committee and from other sources. Details are not available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mrs. Norah McCabe

Mr. Hume asked the Attorney-General whether, in the light of the inquest findings in the case of Mrs. Norah McCabe and the new evidence which has come to light, he will ask the Director of Public Prosecutions to reopen investigations into the case.

The Attorney-General: No. After the inquest, the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland reconsidered this case in the light of the evidence given at the inquest and the inquest findings and of all the other evidence now available, as described in the answer which my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 7 December. As a result of that reconsideration, the Director reaffirmed his earlier conclusion that the evidence available did not warrant the institution of proceedings against any person in respect of Mrs. McCabe's death. He has discussed the case with me and I am satisfied that that decision is correct.

NUM Sequestrators (Costs)

Mr. John Morris asked the Attorney-General what statutory authority he proposes to seek for the indemnity granted to Price Waterhouse in respect of costs incurred in its role as sequestrators of the assets of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Attorney-General: The Crown has granted the indemnity under its common law power, but Parliament is being asked to make token provision in the Consolidated Fund Bill in respect of the contingent liability assumed under the indemnity. Any payments under the indemnity would require further provision in a subsequent Consolidated Fund Act.

Coal Industry Dispute (Legal Aid)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Attorney-General how many applications have been made by persons charged with offences related to picketing during the miners' dispute for legal aid; and how many have been accepted; and if he will list the figures in each area.

The Attorney-General: The statistics collected do not relate applications for legal aid to alleged offences. The information requested could not be obtained, except at disproportionate cost.

WALES

School Meals

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the amount of subsidy paid per annum to provide school meals in Wales; and what proportion is paid to subsidise the cost of midday meals to boarding pupils.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The net recurrent cost of the school meals service for maintained schools in Wales is provisionally estimated to have been £27·6

Industrial Training Boards and Skillcentres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what research has been *(a)* commissioned, *(b)* completed and *(c)* published at the instigation of himself or the Manpower Services Commission since 1979 into the role of industrial training boards, including the effectiveness of voluntary arrangements to replace the functions of former statutory industrial training boards; and if he will give a progress report of all such research not yet published and a list of all such research;

(2) how many proposals for new courses and projects have been *(a)* made and *(b)* approved in the last two years in respect of the skillcentres that have been proposed for closure;

(3) what information he has about the profitability of the skillcentres that have been proposed for closure.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Average Earnings

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list his Department's latest estimates of average gross weekly earnings of full-time workers in Wales, England, Scotland, and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest figures on the average earnings of full-time adult employees working a full week relate to April 1984. Separate details for Wales, for England, for Scotland and for Great Britain are given in tables 12 and 13 of New Earnings Survey 1984, part A, a copy of which is in the Library. Comparable 1984 figures for the United Kingdom are not yet available.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the following age categories are unemployed in Liverpool: 16 to 17, 17 to 18, 18 to 19, 19 to 20, 20 to 21, 21 to 22, 22 to 23, 23 to 24 and 24 to 25 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on unemployment in the 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 to 24 years age groups for the old Liverpool travel-to-work area is available in the House of Commons Library. Corresponding information for the new travel-to-work areas will become available next year.

Work Force (Statistics)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase or decrease in the work force from 1979 to 1984 in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States of America, *(c)* West Germany, *(d)* France and *(e)* Japan.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest available information is in respect of total civilian employment, and is shown in the following table.

Change in civilian employment, 1979 quarter 2 to 1984 quarter 2

	'000
United Kingdom	−1,352
United States	+6,734
West Germany	−896
France*	−341
Japan†	+2,803

* 1978 quarter 4 to 1983 quarter 4. Includes persons in professional training.

† Includes armed forces.

Source: OECD 'Quarterly Labour Force Statistics'; except United Kingdom, *Employment Gazette*.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what are the latest available figures for the number of persons charged with offences related to picketing during the miners' dispute, the numbers of persons against whom proceedings have been taken, the numbers of persons convicted, and in each case, the offences with which persons have been charged.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The most readily available information on the number of persons arrested, proceeded against by procurators fiscal and convicted in respect of offences arising out of the present miners' dispute is as follows.

In the period to 7 December1984, 1,406 persons have been arrested in connection with such offences; in the period to 28 November 1984, 827 persons have been proceeded against by procurators fiscal and 208 persons have been convicted in respect of such offences. Information on the nature of offences in respect of which charges have been brought by procurators fiscal and persons have been convicted is contained in my replies given to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 4 December 1984 at columns *102-103*.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he has issued any guidance to chief constables about the use of their powers which enable them to seek to limit the number of people picketing at any particular entry to a place of work.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Neither my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate nor I have issued any such guidance to chief constables.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the actual remand population of each remand centre for young prisoners aged *(a)* 15 to 16 years and *(b)* 17 to 21 years, on the last day of November 1983, May 1984, August 1984, September 1984 and October 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The information is given in the following table:

*Untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners *aged 15 and under 21 in remand centres in England and Wales at month end: by age and remand centre*

Estimated number

Remand Centre	*November 1983*		*May 1984*		*August 1984*		*September 1984*		*October 1984*	
	15-16	*17-20*	*15-16*	*17-20*	*15-16*	*17-20*	*15-16*	*17-20*	*15-16*	*17-20*
Ashford	4	296	—	290	2	305	1	276	2	319
Brockhill	11	212	19	220	16	222	18	234	19	213
Cardiff	2	32	4	54	—	28	2	39	3	31
Chelmsford	—	95	—	122	2	156	—	147	1	167
Exeter	1	32	2	31	2	62	1	53	2	46
Glen Parva	6	126	13	152	11	141	11	146	8	145
Latchmere House	19	76	15	76	19	72	27	71	21	83
Low Newton	8	176	15	196	18	191	7	222	9	220
Manchester	5	175	5	148	7	186	4	158	9	171
Norwich	3	51	1	68	5	46	2	46	1	45
Pucklechurch	2	73	—	87	1	80	2	85	2	89
Risley	9	236	12	320	14	251	12	300	7	277
Swansea	3	27	1	31	—	21	1	31	—	34
Thorp Arch	8	215	17	212	11	217	9	213	15	214
Winchester	3	64	—	51	1	57	—	56	1	72
TOTAL	84	1,886	104	2,058	109	2,035	97	2,077	100	2,126

* The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disprportionate cost.

Young Persons (Remand)

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young persons, male and female, aged *(a)* 15 to 16 years and *(b)* 17 to 21 years have been held on remand in adult establishments so far during 1984.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current certifiable normal accommodation for all male and female youth custody establishments in England and Wales.

Mr. Mellor: The certified normal accommodation (CNA) for youth custody centres is as follows:

	Number
Male	
Aylesbury	294
Castington	180
Deerbolt	300
Dover	232
Erlestoke	120
Everthorpe	304
Exeter	45
Feltham	256
Finnamore Wood	79
Glen Parva	480
Grendon	69
Guys Marsh	227
Hatfield	176
Hewell Grange	136
Hindley	323
Hollesley Bay Colony	425
Hunterscombe	188
Lowdham Grange	304
Northallerton	127
Onley	420
Portland	520
Rochester	367
Stoke Heath	360
Swinfen Hall	182
Usk	120
Wellingborough	344
Wetherby	226
Total	6,804

	Number
Female	
Bullwood Hall	77
Drake Hall	72
East Sutton Park	42
Styal	83
Total	274

Youth custody trainees are also held in the young offenders prison at Chelmsford (CNA for sentenced inmates 173) and in smaller units, for which CNA is not available separately, in other adult prisons and remand centres.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the actual population of all youth custody establishments in England and Wales on the last day of November 1983, May 1984, August 1984, September 1984 and November 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information is given in the following table:

Sentenced population of youth custody centres in England and Wales and Chelmsford prison at month end*

Estimated number†

	Youth custody centres	*Chelmsford prison‡*
November 1983	6,860	300
May 1984	7,060	260
August 1984	6,800	180
September 1984	6,650	170

* Including fine defaulters.

† Rounded.

‡ Chelmsford prison takes youth custody trainees.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many young males and females aged between 15 and 21 years were being held in young prisoner wings of adult prisons on the last day of November 1983, May 1984, August 1984, September 1984 and November 1984;

(2) how many young males and females aged between 15 and 21 were being held in other adult prisons on the last day of November 1983, May 1984, August 1984, September 1984 and November 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is given in the following table:

Untried, convicted unsentenced and sentenced prisoners aged 15 and under 21 in adult prisons in England and Wales at month end: by sex and type of prison

*Number**

	November 1983		*May 1984*		*August 1984*		*September 1984*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Adult prisons with remand units/wings for prisoners aged under 21†	487	—	500	—	408	—	390	—
Remand centres taking remand prisoners of all ages‡	1,026	51	1,096	55	1,074	49	1,098	48
Other adult prisons	1,004	74	1,045	112	929	76	1,005	87

* The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate; detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.
† Cardiff, Dorchester, Exeter, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, Swansea and Winchester.
‡ Ashford, Low Newton, Manchester, Pucklechurch and Risley.

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of sentence for young males and females sentenced to periods of youth custody aged between *(a)* 15 and 16 years, *(b)* 16 and 17 years and *(c)* 17 to 21 years during the 12 months following the implementation of part I, sections 1 to 10 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is given in the following table. Some information was also published in paragraph 7.22 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1983" (Cmnd. 9349). Corresponding information for 1984 is not yet available.

Average length of sentence of youth custody given to persons aged 15 and under 21 years sentenced at all courts in England and Wales, 2 May—31 December 1983

Months

Age	*Males*	*Females*
15	6	5
16	6	5
17 and under 21	10	5

Detention Centres (Statistics)

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many young males aged between 14 and 21 years were sentenced to periods in detention centres in the year following the implementation of part I, sections 1 to 10, of the Criminal Justice Act 1982;

(2) how many young males and females aged between 15 and 21 years were sentenced to periods of youth custody in the year following the implementation of part I, sections 1 to 10, of the Criminal Justice Act 1982;

(3) if he will produce comparative statistical tables outlining the number of youths sentenced to periods of detention centre and imprisonment for the last two years.

Mr. Mellor: The available information on sentencing in 1982 and 1983 is published in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (table S1.1(A) of Vol. 1 for magistrates' courts and table S2.1(A) for the Crown court) and for indictable offences is summarised in table 7A of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1983" (Cmnd. 9349). My right hon. and learned Friend plans to publish soon a statistical bulletin giving information on the use of the new sentencing structure for young offenders in the first half of 1984.

Entry Certificates

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the event of introduction of fees for entry certificates, he will instruct immigration officers in cases where prior entry clearance is optional, to decide whether to admit notwithstanding any absence of prior entry clearance.

Mr. Waddington: The introduction of a fee for entry certificates will not affect the examination of passengers by immigration officers in accordance with the immigration rules.

Police and Fire Services

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to encourage the extension of privatisation of services within the police and fire services.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes that police and fire authorities will consider the scope for contracting out support services in connection with the theme of value for money contained in his speech on 7 November to the Association of County Councils, copies of which have been deposited with the Library of the House.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses to approve capital projects such as centralised vehicle repair workshops within the police services.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The basic criterion applied is that of operational need. Thereafter, detailed project cost control procedures are applied to the actual design proposals.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses when considering whether or not to approve capital projects, such as centralised command and control systems, within the police forces.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In considering proposals for major equipment by the Metropolitan police, my right hon. and learned Friend, as police authority, expects to see an investment appraisal which sets out the objectives; the options which have been considered; the costs and benefits of each option; an assessment of the effect on police and civilian manpower; purchasing and financing proposals; and other relevant considerations.

As for such purchases by other forces in England and Wales, the Department has asked to be informed of major police computer projects and provides guidance to chief officers and police authorities as appropriate. Further guidance will shortly be issued on the considerations to be taken into account in order to ensure that value for money is obtained.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent deployments of the Metropolitan police in connection with the miners' strike.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief officers of the aided forces are responsible for the deployment of officers provided under the mutual aid arrangements.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the cumulative numbers of police officers who have been involved in activities associated with the current miners' strike; and if he will list the figure as a proportion of the total police force.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not available centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest available figures for the numbers of persons charged with offences relating to picketing during the miners' dispute, the numbers of persons against whom proceedings have been taken, the numbers of persons convicted, and, in each case, the offences with which persons have been charged.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In the period from 13 March to 11 December inclusive, 7,314 people were charged with offences in connection with the miners' dispute. Of those, 3,903 cases were dealt with by the courts during the same period, 3,040 of which resulted in convictions. The information available centrally about the offences for which charges were brought during this period is as follows:

Offence	*Number of charges*
Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936 (conduct conducive to a breach of the peace)	3,801
Obstructing a police constable	1,616
Obstruction of the highway	619
Criminal damage	906
Criminal damage with intent to endanger life	4
Arson	15
Assaulting a police constable	312
Assault occasioning actual bodily harm	348
Assault occasioning grievous bodily harm	37
Theft	197
Resisting arrest	18
Offensive weapons	47
Section 7 of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875 (intimidation)	270
Burglary	29
Handling stolen property	1
Drug offence	1
Breach of the peace	168
Breach of bail conditions	30
Attempt (various offences)	18
Drunkenness	59
Unlawful assembly	509
Railway offences	18
Affray	21
Riot	137
Incitement	1
Reckless driving	15
Threats/conspiracy to cause damage	12
Explosives offence	3
Threats to kill	3
Unlawful imprisonment	2
Other offences	205
Total	9,422

The number of charges is higher than the number of people charged because some people were charged with more than one offence.

Information about the offences of which persons were convicted is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the range of fines imposed upon persons convicted of offences related to activities during the miners' dispute for *(a)* breach of the peace, *(b)* vandalism and *(c)* reckless conduct in all cases where these have been first offences.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Between 13 March and 11 December inclusive, a total of 1,937 fines were imposed following convictions for offences committed in connection with the miners' dispute. The range of fines was as follows:

	Number
Under £10	6
£10-£24	151
£25-£49	292
£50-£74	360
£75-£99	483
£100-£149	391
£150-£199	88
£200 and above	166

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been made against the police in relation to activities during the course of the miners's dispute; and how many complaints have been upheld.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many miners, charged with offences related to picketing during the miners' dispute, have *(a)* been refused bail and *(b)* had bail conditions imposed upon them which prevent them from visiting any premises or place for the purpose of picketing or demonstrating in connection with the current trade dispute other than peacefully to picket or demonstrate at their usual place of employment.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of the cost of policing during the miners' dispute; and what is his estimate of the cost for each police authority area.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will give the actual or estimated cost to date of policing the dispute between the National Coal Board and the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are not keeping a running total of the costs. For the purpose of the winter Supplementary Estimate for Class IX Vote 6, presented to the House on 20 November, we have estimated that the additional expenditure up to the end of October would be about £140 million. We have made no estimate of the costs in each police area. The Home Office has so far paid to police authorities in England and Wales advances of police grant and of the special payment which my right hon. and learned Friend is making available on expenditure totalling £103 million.

Isle of Man (Fisheries Meeting)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department by which Department the interests of the Northern Ireland fishing industry were represented at the meeting of the joint standing committee on common interests of the Isle of Man and the United Kingdom in the Isle of Man of 5 December.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Fishery issues were not on the agenda; there was therefore no requirement for any such representation.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what fisheries matters were discussed at the recent joint standing committee in the Isle of Man.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None.

Police (Establishment)

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for which police authorities in the six metropolitan county areas the actual manpower numbers are *(a)* below established and *(b)* above established levels.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The position on 31 October 1984 was as follows:

Police authority	*Authorised police establishment*	*Actual strength*
(a) Below authorised establishment		
Greater Manchester	6,943	6,810
Northumbria	3,357	3,354
South Yorkshire	2,872	2,844
West Midlands	6,684	6,569
West Yorkshire	5,154	5,060
(b) Above authorised establishment		
Merseyside	*4,607	4,620

* 26 posts supernumary to the authorised police establishment have been approved, bringing the total number of authorised posts to 4,633.

Prevention of Terrorism (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) why the statistics on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974, 1976 and 1984, published after 30 April, no longer include in table 3 (persons detained under the Acts by police force area), the numbers of persons detained in individual police districts except for the Metropolitan and Merseyside area in England and for Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland; why he has ceased to publish any details of the extensions of detention granted in any police districts; and whether he will ensure resumption of publication of this information in the future and provide it for the two intervening quarters for which information has not been published;

(2) if he will make a statement as to why his Department, in the two most recent editions of statistics on the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts, has ceased to provide the information hitherto included under table 4 (persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts and charged with offences under these Acts by section under which charged and outcome), and under table 5 (persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts and charged only with criminal offences other than under the Acts *(a)* by principal offence and *(b)* where charged and outcome of charge); and if he will ensure that publication of these tables is resumed in the fourth quarter of 1984 and that the tables giving relevant information for the operation of the Act in the intervening quarters for which information has not been published will be made available;

(3) if he will again commence publication of statistics of extensions of detention granted under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: Information on extensions of detention continues to be published in tables 1 and 2 of the quarterly statistical bulletin on the operation of the prevention of terrorism legislation. The more detailed information referred to is no longer published regularly each quarter because of the small numbers involved. As stated in note 8 to the latest statistical bulletin, issued on 25 October 1984 (No. 25/84), it is planned to publish the details of offences and sentencing of persons detained under the Acts and subsequently charged with offences in the fourth quarter bulletin in January 1985. This bulletin will also contain details on the geographical distribution of detentions and extensions of detention.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the reasons for the appearance in the two most recent statistical bulletins on the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts of a category of persons examined for up to 12 hours which are not included in persons detained under the Acts; when persons were first so examined but not detained; if he will make available the figures for persons examined but not detained under the Acts for prior periods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: This information was included in statistical bulletins Nos. 17/84 and 25/84 in response to the recommendation in paragraph 145 of Earl Jellicoe's report "Review of the Operation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976" (Cmnd. 8803). Information on persons examined for more than an hour but not detained is not available before 27 March 1984, when the supplemental provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 came into force.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the

ratio between the number of persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts from 29 November 1974 to 31 December 1983 to the number of such persons being subject to applications for extensions of detention for each police force area; what conclusions he draws between differences in these ratios for different police force areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: The proportion of detentions for which an extension was granted in the period 29 November 1974 to 31 December 1983 can be calculated, by police force area, from table 2 of Home Office statistical bulletin issue 2/84. Such percentages vary widely from one police force area to another because the type of cases involved may vary widely. All extensions of detention have to be approved by the Secretary of State and applications from all police force areas are dealt with on the same basis.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the operation of schedule 3 and articles 6 and 8 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Supplementary Provisions) Order 1984, with particular reference to the number of custodial sentences imposed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: Information about the sentences of those convicted of offences under the prevention of terrorism legislation during 1984 will be included in a statistical bulletin to be published in January.

Public Order Act 1936

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to complete his review of the Public Order Act 1936.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to complete his review of the Public Order Act 1936 and related legislation by the end of this year.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which aspects of activities during the course of the present miners' dispute are now the subject of investigation associated with his review of the Public Order Act 1936.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In my right hon. and learned Friend's review, and in his consideration of the Law Commission's report on offences against public order, he is naturally taking account of the disorder and violence which has occurred during the miners' dispute.

Picketing

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has issued any guidance to chief constables about the use of their powers enabling them to seek to limit the number of people picketing at any particular entry to a place of work.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. I am satisfied that chief officers of police are aware of the relevant law and police powers, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred in his statement on picketing at collieries on 15 March, at columns 512-21, and of which my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General gave a full account in his reply on 26 March, at columns 21-22, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen).

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken by chief constables to enable pickets to communicate information to drivers of vehicles.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that the practice of the police has varied according to local circumstances. But in any event there is no obligation on drivers to stop to receive such information if they do not wish to do so.

Police (Riot Training)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of police officers who have undergone riot training.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to the hon. Member.

A360 (Road Block)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the appropriate chief constable as to the purpose of the road block on the A360 by the Westdown camp on the Tilshead to West Lanington road on 11 December; how many cars were stopped; whey they were stopped; on whose authority; with what result; and why cars of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament members were not allowed to proceed along the road.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The chief constable of Wiltshire tells me that no police road blocks were operated on that stretch of road on that day.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Norris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to introduce the Bill to deal with interception of communications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: After Christmas; the Bill will be preceded by a White Paper setting out in detail its scope and content.

Lion Intoximeter 3000

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the percentage take-up of blood and urine tests by persons also tested with the Lion Intoximeter 3000; if he is satisfied with the take-up; what steps he is taking to increase the take-up; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: In the period 6 May to 31 December 1983 57 per cent. of those tested on the Lion Intoximeter who had readings in the range 40-50 microgrammes of alcohol to 100 millitres of breath went on to request a blood or urine test. We estimate, on the basis of available information, that around 60 per cent. of those tested on the intoximeter during the period 1 January 1984 to 15 April 1984 who had readings in this range requested a blood or urine test. In the period 15 April to 15 October a blood or urine test requested by 69 per cent. of those given evidential breath tests who had readings in the 40-50 microgrammes range, and by 37 per cent. of those given such tests who had readings over 50 microgrammes. The figures for this period include persons tested on both the Lion Intoximeter and the Camic Breath Analyser.

We will be examining these statistics in more detail, as well as other matters relating to evidential breath testing,

when the full report of the six-month monitoring of evidential breath testing is available, and will then consider whether changes to present procedures would be desirable.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the final report on the accuracy of the Lion Intoximeter 3000 to be available; and when it is expected to be published.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We expect the report on the six-month monitoring of the operation of the Lion Intoximeter and the Camic Breath Analyser to be completed early in the new year and to be published shortly afterwards.

ENVIRONMENT

Greater Manchester

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage of total local government net current expenditure in the Greater Manchester local authority area represented by expenditure by district councils on education, housing and social services.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The metropolitan district councils' 1984-85 budgeted net current expenditure on education—including school meals and milk—housing—non-housing revenue account—and social services—including personal social services and housing benefit—represented about 61 per cent. of all district and county council net current expenditure in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the actual amount of total local government net current expenditure in the Greater Manchester local authority area represented by expenditure by district councils on education, housing and social services.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The metropolitan district councils in Greater Manchester have budgeted in 1984-85 to spend about £772 million of net current expenditure on education—including school meals and milk—housing—non-housing revenue account—and social services—including personal social services and housing benefit.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage of total local government net current expenditure in the Greater Manchester local authority area incurred by metropolitan district councils after deducting expenditure on education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The metropolitan district councils' 1984-85 budgeted net current expenditure on services other than education — that is education expenditure including school meals and milk — represented about 25 per cent. of all district and county council net current expenditure in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the actual amount of total local government net current expenditure in the Greater Manchester local authority area incurred by the metropolitan district councils after deducting expenditure on education.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The metropolitan district councils in Greater Manchester have budgeted in 1984-85 to spend about £319 million of net current expenditure on services other than education—that is expenditure on education including school meals and milk.

Council House Sales

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by district, within English and Welsh county areas, details of sales of local authority dwellings to sitting tenants up to the latest convenient date; and if he will indicate the local authority housing stock in 1979-80 and the sales for each district as a percentage of that stock.

Mr. Gow: For details of the position in Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. The following figures of English authorities' sales to sitting tenants from April 1979 to June 1984 include other council house sales up to March 1980. Since 1979 there have been other changes to the stock through new building and acquisitions and some transfers between authorities. An additional column shows the latest stock figures reported by authorities for 1 April 1984.

Statistics on sales to sitting tenants and council dwelling stock provided by local authorities
(Completed sales include sales of vacant dwellings from 1 April 1979 to 31 March 1980 excluding built for sale)

Local authority	*All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984*	*Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979*	*Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984*	*All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979*
Region 1				
NORTH EXC. CUMBRIA				
Hartlepool	*2,082	13,193	11,515	*15·8
Langbaurgh	1,125	18,050	17,687	6·2
Middlesbrough	1,738	19,771	18,231	8·8
Stockton-on-Tees	2,567	21,451	19,119	12·0
Chester-le-Street	935	8,549	7,611	10·9
Darlington	771	8,457	8,228	9·1
Derwentside	2,055	14,107	12,624	14·6
Durham	1,338	12,949	11,623	10·3
Easington	2,868	22,022	19,440	13·0
Sedgefield	*1,957	19,905	16,021	*9·8
Teesdale	154	1,434	1,331	10·7
Wear Valley	630	8,792	8,305	7·2
Alnwick	371	3,276	3,213	11·3

Local authority	All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984	All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979
Berwick-upon-Tweed	351	4,076	3,839	8·6
Blyth Valley	1,236	11,206	10,130	11·0
Castle Morpeth	686	4,518	4,173	15·2
Tynedale	572	5,169	4,676	11·1
Wansbeck	730	10,240	9,641	7·1
Gateshead	2,879	38,568	36,703	7·5
Newcastle upon Tyne	*3,305	50,215	47,548	*6·6
North Tyneside	*2,923	32,075	29,532	*9·1
South Tyneside	*3,456	34,357	31,412	*10·1
Sunderland	4,741	50,997	46,611	9·3
Region 2				
YORKS & HUMBERSIDE				
Beverley	962	6,071	5,554	15·8
Boothferry	1,108	5,809	4,918	19·1
Cleethorpes	653	3,938	3,552	16·6
East Yorkshire	*614	5,343	5,039	*11·5
Glanford	805	4,468	3,939	18·0
Great Grimsby	708	8,652	8,446	8·2
Holderness	453	2,749	2,602	16·5
Kingston upon Hull	2,598	46,400	46,900	5·6
Scunthorpe	1,411	10,393	9,427	13·6
Craven	333	2,552	2,373	13·0
Hambleton	*628	5,317	4,995	*11·8
Harrogate	1,130	7,174	6,279	15·8
Richmondshire	411	3,118	2,882	13·2
Ryedale	485	4,187	3,815	11·6
Scarborough	*422	8,172	7,567	*5·2
Selby	938	5,868	5,700	16·0
York	1,291	11,679	10,862	11·1
Barnsley	3,888	35,094	32,059	11·1
Doncaster	5,897	33,478	34,901	17·6
Rotherham	5,706	40,208	35,285	14·2
Sheffield	*3,803	93,186	91,924	*4·1
Bradford	3,648	40,258	37,362	9·1
Calderdale	2,104	17,883	16,258	11·8
Kirklees	*2,489	37,571	36,113	*6·6
Leeds	*4,778	97,724	94,957	*4·9
Wakefield	3,485	47,025	45,432	7·4
Region 3				
EAST MIDLANDS				
Amber Valley	1,189	8,639	7,819	13·8
Bolsover	1,770	10,326	8,693	17·1
Chesterfield	1,780	15,265	13,938	11·7
Derby	3,965	23,737	21,424	16·7
Erewash	1,461	9,652	8,748	15·1
High Peak	570	5,546	6,381	10·3
North East Derbyshire	964	11,788	11,281	8·2
South Derbyshire	847	5,506	4,826	15·4
West Derbyshire	*814	4,746	4,229	*17·2
Blaby	444	3,597	3,375	12·3
Charnwood	1,063	9,016	8,544	11·8
Harborough	509	3,604	3,402	14·1
Hinckley and Bosworth	*775	5,805	5,355	*13·4
Leicester	3,771	35,945	34,655	10·5
Melton	551	3,276	2,862	16·8
North West Leicestershire	467	6,523	6,213	7·2
Oadby and Wigston	341	2,152	1,931	15·8
Rutland	375	2,293	1,980	16·4
Boston	492	6,038	5,954	8·1
East Lindsey	668	6,504	6,129	10·3
Lincoln	980	11,263	10,622	8·7
North Kesteven	471	5,417	5,327	8·7
South Holland	634	6,223	5,712	10·2
South Kesteven	*1,245	10,257	9,409	*12·1
West Lindsey	657	5,658	5,083	11·6
Corby	2,476	13,748	10,679	18·0
Daventry	1,092	6,190	5,289	17·6
East Northamptonshire	764	5,970	5,478	12·8
Kettering	613	6,528	6,250	9·4
Northampton	1,332	13,070	12,285	10·2
South Northamptonshire	1,141	5,813	4,802	19·6
Wellingborough	1,051	7,767	7,214	13·5

Local authority	All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984	All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979
Ashfield	2,144	13,141	11,264	16·3
Bassetlaw	2,380	11,723	10,229	20·3
Broxtowe	1,317	8,169	7,090	16·1
Gedling	1,415	7,034	6,030	20·1
Mansfield	*2,106	12,067	10,617	*17·5
Newark	1,318	9,389	8,432	14·0
Nottingham	6,579	53,166	47,884	12·4
Rushcliffe	1,063	5,342	4,729	19·9
Region 4				
EASTERN				
Luton	1,830	13,550	12,387	13·5
Mid Bedfordshire	*1,261	9,277	8,600	*13·6
North Bedfordshire	*1,282	9,515	8,576	*13·5
South Bedfordshire	*1463	9,426	8,587	*15·5
Aylesbury Vale	2,000	12,979	11,798	15·4
Chiltern	676	5,715	5,416	11·8
Milton Keynes	1,644	9,031	7,436	18·2
South Bucks	792	4,349	3,797	18·2
Wycombe	2,418	12,643	10,860	19·1
Cambridge	1,161	11,413	10,736	10·2
East Cambridgeshire	785	5,601	5,092	14·0
Fenland	1,658	7,080	5,590	23·4
Huntingdon	1,977	10,701	9,216	18·5
Peterborough	*1,232	11,325	10,173	*10·9
South Cambridgeshire	1,408	8,784	8,008	16·0
Basildon	1,129	6,027	5,937	18·7
Braintree	2,259	13,747	12,205	16·4
Brentwood	*665	4,032	3,884	*16·5
Castle Point	*469	3,146	2,543	*14·9
Chelmsford	1,852	11,534	10,124	16·1
Colchester	1,284	10,273	9,446	12·5
Epping Forest	2,368	7,611	10,028	31·1
Harlow	3,275	20,714	18,378	15·8
Maldon	507	2,950	2,619	17·2
Rochford	548	2,670	2,570	20·5
Southend-on-Sea	874	8,728	8,473	10·0
Tendring	927	4,996	4,467	18·6
Thurrock	*3,571	15,206	15,966	*23·5
Uttlesford	541	4,532	4,246	11·9
Broxbourne	802	5,024	5,312	16·0
Dacorum	2,978	18,829	17,116	15·8
East Hertfordshire	1,582	9,792	9,021	16·2
Hertsmere	*1,008	5,641	8,165	*17·9
North Hertfordshire	1,333	13,221	12,320	10·1
St. Albans	1,144	8,895	8,241	12·9
Stevenage	2,619	15,892	14,556	16·5
Three Rivers	807	4,230	6,438	19·1
Watford	1,150	7,449	6,567	15·4
Welwyn Hatfield	2,530	17,388	15,611	14·6
Breckland	1,884	9,583	7,939	19·7
Broadland	*240	3,930	4,061	*6·1
Great Yarmouth	597	8,159	8,008	7·3
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	1,932	11,753	9,971	16·4
North Norfolk	603	6,376	6,325	9·5
Norwich	1,830	24,125	23,846	7·6
South Norfolk	928	6,822	6,143	13·6
Babergh	*756	5,960	5,429	*12·7
Forest Heath	814	5,338	4,893	15·2
Ipswich	995	12,539	12,281	7·9
Mid Suffolk	*693	5,506	4,951	*12·6
St. Edmundsbury	*1,213	10,647	9,395	*11·4
Suffolk Coastal	803	6,579	6,230	12·2
Waveney	1,222	7,384	6,602	16·5
Region 5				
GREATER LONDON				
Barking and Dagenham	4,433	25,652	33,720	17·3
Barnet	2,114	17,265	18,664	12·2
Bexley	1,620	12,530	11,471	12·9
Brent	896	20,500	21,685	4·4
Bromley	2,751	14,594	17,991	18·9
Camden	333	28,031	33,750	1·2
City of London	518	2,317	2,305	22·4

Local authority	All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984	All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979
Croydon	3,056	21,800	20,637	14·0
Ealing	*3,007	20,339	20,735	*14·8
Enfield	2,371	22,400	21,908	10·6
Greater London Council	10,692	230,232	43,995	4·6
Greenwich	1,695	26,479	37,116	6·4
Hackney	*315	27,300	45,571	*1·2
Hammersmith and Fulham	763	15,624	19,152	4·9
Haringey	1,253	23,073	25,544	5·4
Harrow	1,160	8,258	8,744	14·0
Havering	4,019	16,100	17,236	25·0
Hillingdon	*2,434	24,622	20,360	*9·9
Hounslow	1,773	20,548	19,530	8·6
Islington	452	31,649	40,672	1·4
Kensington and Chelsea	254	7,261	8,862	3·5
Kingston upon Thames	925	7,737	6,898	12·0
Lambeth	*787	31,620	48,650	*2·5
Lewisham	*1,470	30,000	42,186	*4·9
Merton	1,802	12,644	13,989	14·3
Newham	*1,880	32,739	32,418	*5·7
Redbridge	1,957	10,860	11,686	18·0
Richmond upon Thames	984	10,353	10,332	9·5
Southwark	832	36,716	62,459	2·3
Sutton	1,147	8,745	12,382	13·1
Tower Hamlets	*228	18,194	19,044	*1·3
Waltham Forest	*1,296	19,558	20,773	*6·6
Wandsworth	*2,711	28,863	37,165	*9·4
Westminster	*777	18,430	23,320	*4·2
Region 6				
SOUTH EASTERN				
Bracknell	2,936	12,154	10,969	24·2
Newbury	1,259	8,840	8,053	14·2
Reading	1,196	10,476	10,108	11·4
Slough	*1,534	8,559	10,897	*17·9
Windsor and Maidenhead	1,070	8,834	7,942	12·1
Wokingham	565	3,757	3,646	15·0
Brighton	*743	12,653	11,521	*5·9
Eastbourne	961	5,517	5,204	17·4
Hastings	608	5,312	5,040	11·4
Hove	*489	4,889	4,569	*10·0
Lewes	822	5,054	4,588	16·3
Rother	580	4,589	4,240	12·6
Wealden	928	5,003	4,491	18·5
Basingstoke and Deane	*2,751	15,601	12,649	*17·6
East Hampshire	905	5,364	5,176	16·9
Eastleigh	1,261	6,453	5,469	19·5
Fareham	868	4,209	3,629	20·6
Gosport	797	6,259	5,936	12·7
Hart	385	2,921	2,776	13·2
Havant	1,199	4,829	4,222	24·8
New Forest	1,517	8,101	7,497	18·7
Portsmouth	4,219	27,740	23,999	15·2
Rushmoor	1,144	6,596	6,609	17·3
Southampton	2,607	23,868	22,147	10·9
Test Valley	1,549	8,691	7,788	17·8
Winchester	*996	7,531	6,971	*13·2
Medina	399	3,383	3,334	11·8
South Wight	*198	2,399	2,418	*8·3
Ashford	*974	9,632	8,957	*10·1
Canterbury	1,054	8,056	7,452	13·1
Dartford	1,344	7,942	6,959	16·9
Dover	1,324	8,984	8,083	14·7
Gillingham	793	5,178	4,603	15·3
Gravesham	1,333	9,432	8,491	14·1
Maidstone	1,402	10,219	9,209	13·7
Rochester upon Medway	*2,289	13,879	11,576	*16·5
Sevenoaks	1,038	7,925	7,842	13·1
Shepway	732	4,988	4,763	14·7
Swale	1,405	10,029	8,918	14·0
Thanet	1,038	8,304	7,619	12·5
Tonbridge and Malling	970	7,739	7,048	12·5
Tunbridge Wells	834	7,329	6,713	11·4
Cherwell	*1,460	9,832	8,774	*14·8
Oxford	865	10,542	10,292	8·2

Local authority	All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984	All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979
South Oxfordshire	1,413	8,659	8,002	16·3
Vale of White Horse	972	7,282	6,692	13·3
West Oxfordshire	1,026	5,910	5,359	17·4
Elmbridge	*656	6,418	6,061	*10·2
Epsom and Ewell	*247	2,943	2,514	*8·4
Guildford	*1,093	8,505	7,774	*12·9
Mole Valley	*604	5,196	4,997	*11·6
Reigate and Banstead	963	7,036	7,532	13·7
Runnymede	802	5,002	4,550	16·0
Spelthorne	939	5,161	4,796	18·2
Surrey Heath	845	4,491	3,863	18·8
Tandridge	768	4,872	4,361	15·8
Waverley	1,018	8,091	8,201	12·6
Woking	1,021	4,595	5,021	22·2
Adur	*651	4,608	4,110	*14·1
Arun	1,418	6,557	5,594	21·6
Chichester	1,021	7,527	7,502	13·6
Crawley	3,211	14,856	13,348	21·6
Horsham	860	6,603	6,441	13·0
Mid Sussex	846	5,315	5,115	15·9
Worthing	*524	3,681	3,277	*14·2
Region 7				
SOUTH WEST				
Bath	1,000	8,501	7,710	11·8
Bristol	5,280	47,095	43,456	11·2
Kingswood	1,295	6,207	5,309	20·9
Northavon	1,247	7,045	6,174	17·7
Wansdyke	*1,226	6,811	5,612	*18·0
Woodspring	*1,623	10,517	9,556	*15·4
Caradon	449	4,447	4,634	10·1
Carrick	642	5,934	5,381	10·8
Isles of Scilly	*6	132	143	*4·5
Kerrier	496	4,409	4,144	11·2
North Cornwall	589	4,855	4,615	12·1
Penwith	*444	4,222	4,050	*10·5
Restormel	634	4,914	4,533	12·9
East Devon	917	6,710	6,114	13·7
Exeter	875	9,063	8,369	9·7
Mid Devon	730	5,280	5,000	13·8
North Devon	623	4,881	4,497	12·8
Plymouth	*2,912	24,394	22,815	*11·9
South Hams	674	4,638	4,130	14·5
Teignbridge	753	5,959	5,525	12·6
Torbay	552	4,965	4,700	11·1
Torridge	442	2,909	2,597	15·2
West Devon	405	2,211	1,979	18·3
Bournemouth	1,236	7,522	6,882	16·4
Christchurch	*301	2,092	1,820	*14·4
North Dorset	551	3,729	3,515	14·8
Poole	1,204	7,448	6,911	16·2
Purbeck	406	2,355	2,265	17·2
West Dorset	816	6,639	6,360	12·3
Weymouth and Portland	1,053	4,473	4,182	23·5
Wimborne	*370	2,474	2,561	*15·0
Cheltenham	*1,141	7,997	7,111	*14·3
Cotswold	822	5,904	5,416	13·9
Forest of Dean	700	5,806	5,586	12·1
Gloucester	1,076	7,499	6,661	14·3
Stroud	1,170	8,574	7,781	13·6
Tewkesbury	851	4,932	4,337	17·3
Mendip	1,182	7,510	6,778	15·7
Sedgemoor	1,351	7,960	6,899	17·0
Taunton Deane	980	9,243	8,747	10·6
West Somerset	453	2,358	2,175	19·2
Yeovil	1,503	13,127	12,236	11·4
Kennet	646	6,340	5,968	10·2
North Wiltshire	1,109	8,785	7,826	12·6
Salisbury	735	8,755	8,581	8·4
Thamesdown	*2,219	15,790	14,682	*14·1
West Wiltshire	*1,135	8,434	7,265	*13·5
Region 8				
WEST MIDLANDS				
Bromsgrove	977	5,430	4,632	18·0

Local authority	All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984	All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979
Hereford	829	5,793	5,221	14·3
Leominster	418	2,468	2,163	16·9
Malvern Hills	*1,015	6,130	5,679	*16·6
Redditch	689	4,224	3,733	16·3
South Herefordshire	598	2,857	2,370	20·9
Worcester	691	7,035	6,626	9·8
Wychavon	1,925	9,709	8,390	19·8
Wyre Forest	903	8,599	7,992	10·5
Bridgnorth	368	4,004	3,810	9·2
North Shropshire	*566	4,094	3,690	*13·8
Oswestry	388	3,125	2,878	12·4
Shrewsbury and Atcham	737	7,564	7,151	9·7
South Shropshire	*349	2,203	1,964	*15·8
The Wrekin	1,365	12,345	11,543	11·1
Cannock Chase	*1,567	10,114	8,830	*15·5
East Staffordshire	986	7,839	7,270	12·6
Lichfield	*194	7,434	6,636	*2·6
Newcastle-under-Lyme	1,503	13,472	12,444	11·2
South Staffordshire	1,140	7,517	6,777	15·2
Stafford	1,130	9,351	8,609	12·1
Staffordshire Moorlands	635	4,838	4,318	13·1
Stoke-on-Trent	*3,964	32,318	29,390	*12·3
Tamworth	1,009	8,493	8,269	11·9
North Warwickshire	774	5,647	5,009	13·7
Nuneaton and Bedworth	1,503	10,838	9,677	13·9
Rugby	898	6,549	5,769	13·7
Stratford-on-Avon	1,482	8,660	7,662	17·1
Warwick	1,236	8,969	8,170	13·8
Birmingham	16,848	151,208	125,745	11·1
Coventry	1,882	26,963	25,828	7·0
Dudley	*3,973	40,660	37,485	*9·8
Sandwell	3,332	57,775	56,571	5·8
Solihull	1,803	6,115	17,157	29·5
Walsall	3,973	41,772	39,206	9·5
Wolverhampton	*4,461	43,422	41,000	*10·3
Region 9				
NORTH WEST INC. CUMBRIA				
Chester	1,091	9,675	8,817	11·3
Congleton	886	5,952	5,272	14·9
Crewe and Nantwich	1,038	9,449	8,726	11·0
Ellesmere Port and Neston	1,628	10,667	9,144	15·3
Halton	2,011	11,385	9,919	17·7
Macclesfield	1,260	9,735	8,839	12·9
Vale Royal	1,688	11,858	10,216	14·2
Warrington	1,846	14,158	13,345	13·0
Allerdale	533	6,528	6,673	8·2
Barrow-in-Furness	*305	5,139	4,955	*5·9
Carlisle	1,586	13,727	12,639	11·6
Copeland	1,291	7,791	6,764	16·6
Eden	513	3,028	2,637	16·9
South Lakeland	913	6,773	6,122	13·5
Blackburn	719	14,631	14,238	4·9
Blackpool	696	7,497	7,502	9·3
Burnley	906	7,955	7,411	11·4
Chorley	619	4,876	4,350	12·7
Fylde	540	3,026	2,642	17·8
Hyndburn	493	4,924	4,641	10·0
Lancaster	1,082	6,382	5,607	17·0
Pendle	*713	5,716	5,374	*12·5
Preston	*499	11,941	11,696	*4·2
Ribble Valley	*366	2,219	1,924	*16·5
Rossendale	*955	7,077	6,132	*13·5
South Ribble	806	4,783	4,328	16·9
West Lancashire	938	4,559	3,797	20·6
Wyre	619	4,585	4,141	13·5
Bolton	1,945	26,218	26,281	7·4
Bury	1,511	13,213	11,828	11·4
Manchester	*5,175	106,000	100,379	*4·9
Oldham	1,100	27,028	26,639	4·1
Rochdale	1,303	22,033	22,296	5·9
Salford	2,206	42,040	43,050	5·2
Stockport	*1,641	18,415	16,874	*8·9
Tameside	1,830	22,266	21,362	8·2

EC (Budget Discipline)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at which meetings of the European Economic Community Council of Agriculture Ministers in 1984 the financial guidelines on budget discipline have been discussed; and what was the result of each discussion.

Mr. Jopling: The principles of Community budgetary discipline, including specific controls on the growth of agricultural expenditure, were laid down by Heads of Government in the European Council. The detailed arrangements on how the agreement should be given effect through the Community's budget procedures were not discussed by the Council of Agriculture Ministers as they were mainly a matter for the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers. The resultant conclusions have been adopted in the name of the Council as a whole.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Entry Certificates

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made to inform applicants for entry clearance of any charge for entry certificates; if charges will be levied on grant or on application; what extra staff time and other costs are estimated to be required in collection of fees; if people waiting in queues will be charged retrospectively; if charges will apply to minor children; and if where joint applications occur there will be one charge or two.

Mr. Renton: British missions overseas have been asked to give appropriate publicity to the introduction of the fee for an entry certificate. Charges will be levied on application. Extra staff time and other costs are expected to be negligible. Retrospective charges will not be levied. A charge will apply to a minor when travelling on a separate passport. Where dependants are included in the passport of a husband or parent and are travelling together, one fee will be charged.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if unsuccessful applicants for entry clearance will receive a refund of fees.

Mr. Renton: Yes.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if British overseas citizens and British dependent territories citizens will be charged fees for entry clearance.

Mr. Renton: Entry certificates issued to British overseas citizens and British Dependent Tegritories citizens will attract a fee.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when fees for entry certificates are to be introduced; what consultation he has undertaken with interested organisations; what consultation he has undertaken with the Governments of Commonwealth countries; what information has been issued; and to whom it has been issued.

Mr. Renton: Fees for entry certificates will be introduced from 1 January 1985. There was no consultation with outside bodies before the announcement to Parliament. Commonwealth Governments have been informed.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the introduction of fees for entry certificates will cause any delay for women and children applying for certificates of entitlement or passports.

Mr. Renton: No.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been received opposing his proposals to introduce fees for entry certificates.

Mr. Renton: Representations on the matter have been made in the House. My Department has received letters from two Members of Parliament and from one immigrant organisation.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the appeal procedure he proposes, if fees are charged for entry certificates, for applicants who are refused clearance on the sole ground of failure to pay the fee.

Mr. Renton: Payment of the fee will be part of the process for applying for entry certificates. An appeal lies to an adjudicator against the refusal of an entry certificate only where an application has been duly made—section 13(2) of the Immigration Act 1971. No right of appeal exists in respect of any fee at present levied under the provisions of the consular fees order and it is not intended to introduce any additional appeal provisions.

Ethiopia

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government have made representations to the Ethiopian Government about the denial of human rights in Ethiopia.

Mr. Rifkind: We have made continued representations to the Ethiopian authorities about human rights. I raised the issue both with Ethiopian Ministers during my visit to Addis Ababa in July and more recently with the Ethiopian ambassador in London. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development also raised the matter during his visit to Addis Ababa last month.

Treaty Obligations

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government take to ensure that treaty obligations entered into by Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom under the treaty of Lausanne and more particularly the convention respecting the Thracian frontier and article 1(2) thereof, are observed.

Mr. Renton: We have no reason to believe that we are not adequately discharging any obligation imposed upon us by the treaty of Lausanne. The convention respecting the Thracian frontier was superseded by an agreement signed at Salonika on 31 July 1938, to which we are not a party.

Lemnos

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to those Greek forces now present on, or attached to, the island of Lemnos.

Mr. Renton: The information we have on Greek military dispositions comes to us in confidence as a NATO ally.

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Greece following the militarisation of the island of Lemnos by Greece.

Mr. Renton: None.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Telecom

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost to public funds of returning money to applicants for shares in British Telecom whose desired allocation was not met in full or not met at all.

Mr. Butcher: There is no net cost to public funds.

Computer Software (Export)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Computer Services Association on 14 December to discuss the impact of the new COCOM regulation on the export of software.

Mr. Channon: Officials of my Department met representatives of the Computer Services Association on 14 November and 14 December to discuss the details of the agreement reached in COCOM on future controls on exports of computer software of strategic importance and the arrangements for implementation. The views of industry representatives will be taken into account in drawing up the new licensing arrangements.

Brother Corporation

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions have taken place between his Department, the Brother Corporation and various regional development authorities, about the siting of a Brother factory in the United Kingdom for the manufacture of typewriters; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many jobs would be directly or indirectly lost or threatened in Britain if the Brother Corporation were to abandon its plans to open up a new typewriter factory in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: My Department frequently holds discussions with Japanese companies which may be considering establishing United Kingdom manufacturing facilities, but such discussions remain confidential between the Department and the companies concerned.

Japanese Typewriters

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the Government's policy on current moves being considered by the EEC to take anti-dumping moves against Japanese typewriters.

Mr. Channon: The European Commission opened an anti-dumping investigation into imports of electronic typewriters from Japan on 24 March 1984 following a complaint by the Committee of European Typewriter Manufacturers. The investigation is now nearing completion: both producer and consumer interests have been consulted. It is understood that provisional remedies are to be announced shortly, and these will be studied carefully by my Department. At this stage, any proposals are confidential.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry precisely what share of the European regional development fund the Government anticipate the United Kingdom will receive from January 1985 in order to make financial provisions for public expenditure; and if any receipts over and above this level will be available for additional spending by local authorities.

Mr. Trippier: Anticipated United Kingdom receipts from the ERDF from 1985 will be shown in the public expenditure White Paper to be published early in the new year.

These receipts are related to commitments entered into by the Commission previously and can thus be estimated with reasonable accuracy. The question of unexpected receipts does not therefore arise.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will change the presentation of classes of employment in the *Employment Gazette* in order to show the number of people employed in tourism;

(2) if he will collect and publish accurate statistics on an annual basis, showing the number of people employed in the tourism industry in England.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimates of the numbers of employees working in the industries which are most clearly related to tourism in Great Britain were given in the article on "Overseas travel and tourism" published in *British Business* on 9 November 1984 and will be updated quarterly. The figures are also regularly published in *Employment Gazette* and relate to total employment in the hotel and catering trades; in libraries, museums, art galleries and so on; and in sports and other recreational services. There are also many other industries which serve tourists, such as retail distribution, transport, banking and so on. Few of these industries are wholly devoted to tourism. It is not possible to distinguish that part of employment in these industries which is generated by tourism from other employment because businesses do not keep detailed records of the type of their customers. Nor would it be feasible to collect on a regular basis from tourists a detailed breakdown of their expenditure in these industries. It is therefore not possible to collect and publish accurate statistics of employment in tourism on an annual basis. However, the most reliable indication of trends is provided by the statistics now published in *British Business* which shows quarterly employment in the industries most heavily dependent on tourism.

Separate figures for England for the industries which are most clearly related to tourism are available only when the detailed census of employment is carried out. Figures for September 1981 were published in the supplement to the December 1983 issue of *Employment Gazette*. figures for September 1984 will be published in due course.

dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom since *(a)* 1970 and *(b)* 1980, has been due to changes in emissions from Central Electricity Generating Board power stations.

Mr. Waldegrave: Reductions in emissions from CEGB power stations from 1970 to date account for 11 per cent. of the total fall in emissions in that period

For reductions since 1980, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) on 12 December at column *503*.

SOCIAL SERVICES

City Roads Detoxification Unit

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department will continue the funding in 1985-86 of City Roads detoxification unit for young drug addicts.

Mr. John Patten: The general scheme for grants to voluntary organisations under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 is used for two main purposes: one is to help with national organisations' general costs; the other is to support specific projects for a specific period, usually limited to three years—this includes experimental or innovative local schemes of wider significance. The Department's grant to City Roads, which falls into the latter category, has already been extended exceptionally to six years, of which 1984-85 is the last. We are, however, considering an application from City Roads for a substantial capital grant towards the purchase and renovation of the building next to its existing premises. We await the views of the local statutory authorities on this application.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the composition of family practitioner committees from April 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: From 1 April 1985 family practitioner committees will normally comprise a chairman and 30 members.

The membership will include 15 members of the professions providing family practitioner services appointed from nominations received from local representative committees. There will be seven general medical and one ophthalmic medical practitioner, three dentists, two pharmacists and an ophthalmic and a dispensing optician. Four members will be appointed from nominations received from district health authorities, four from local authorities, and seven from nominations from other sources.

Each committee will include among its membership a nurse with community experience.

Grant Entitlement

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provisions his Department has made for the effective diaribution of his Department's leaflet NI 49/August 79 to those categories of people entitled to grant.

Mr. Whitney: The Department's leaflet NI 49 "Death Grant" is distributed via the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the General Register Office for Scotland to registrars who are instructed to provide one copy to every private person who acts as informant at the registration of a death. The leaflet is also freely available from our local offices and from the Leaflets Unit, Government Buildings, Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex HA17 1AY.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what expert advice he took on the level of patient compliance to be expected from the use of the British Pharmacopoeia formulations listed as prescribable under the National Health Service in his illustrative list;

(2) what estimate he has made of National Health Service resources likely to be wasted annually from 1 April 1985 through the prescribing of basic medicines which have a low record of patient compliance.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no reason to believe that there will be any significant change in the pattern of patient compliance from 1 April 1985.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assistance he proposes to give to retail pharmacists in explaining to their customers why, from 1 April 1985, they will not be able to obtain on National Health Service prescriptions the medicines they have been accustomed to receiving.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am discussing with the pharmaceutical profession how best patients should be informed and reassured that all essential medicines will continue to be available on the National Health Service.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he has initiated with the principals of the British hospice movement regarding his proposed limited list of drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government will welcome any suggestions made separately about specialised needs, and we have already received correspondence on this issue from individuals working in hospices. We also expect consultation with the medical profession generally to reflect views of the hospice movement.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his speech to the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators on 11 December, he will list the drugs outside the scope of his proposed limited list which the pharmaceutical industry has claimed will no longer be available under the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The final list of drugs to remain available on the National Health Service in each of the groups covered by the limited list proposals will not be determined until our consultation with the professions and industry is complete. I welcome this opportunity to make it clear that, contrary to statements made elsewhere, our proposals do not affect NHS provision of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen and so on); the more powerful analgesics like pentazocine (Fortral) and dihydrocodeine tartrate (DF118); the high dose vitamins required to treat vitamin deficiency; or folic acid. These drugs will still be available for prescription under the National Health Service after 1 April 1985. We attach importance to consultation with the professions and the industry to ensure that no essential drug is omitted from the list.

Policy Studies Institute (Working Paper C)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why he considers that his comments on the Policy Studies Institute working paper C would not be appropriate for publishing.

Mr. Newton: It has never been the practice to publish confidential comments passed to researchers.

NHS (Health Hazards)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration his Department has given to the GMBATU'S recent report on health hazards in the National Health Service; what action he is taking with regard to each of the report's findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Prescriptions

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors' prescriptions were inaccurately dispensed in the past year due to the inability of pharmacists to read the handwriting on them; and if his Department is considering any recommendations to reduce the number of incorrectly dispensed prescriptions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is a breach of his National Health Service terms of service for a pharmacist to dispense a prescription incorrectly. Where a pharmacist is not certain of a prescriber's intentions—for example, where the handwriting is not legible—he must check with the prescribing general practitioner. While I welcome any steps individual GPs can take to avoid the risk of confusion, I do not believe that, except perhaps in very isolated and wholly exceptional cases, prescriptions are incorrectly dispensed.

Regional Health Authorities (Rates of Pay)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance his Department has given to regional health authorities regarding the stipulation of rates of pay in contracts with contracting firms to which wages council agreements apply.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have told health authorities not to specify rates of pay in contract documents.

Nurses (Back Pain)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many working days were lost to the National Health Service due to back pain among nurses in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this sort of detailed information centrally.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the estimated numbers of supplementary benefit claimants living *(a)* in hostels or common lodging houses and *(b)* as boarders in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: Information for 1979 to 1983—using provisional data for 1983—is given in the table. Data for 1984 have not yet been collected.

(Thousands) Great Britain

	Hostels and common lodging houses	*Boarders*
1979	24	25
1980	24	31
1981	31	38
1982	31	54
*1983	35	75

* Provisional
Source: Annual Statistical Inquiries

Contraceptive, Abortion and Sterilisation Services

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the projected National Health Service expenditure for 1985 on *(a)* contraceptive, *(b)* abortion and *(c)* sterilisation services;

(2) what has been the total National Health Service expenditure on the provision of *(a)* contraceptive, *(b)* abortion and *(c)* sterilisation services in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Precise details of the costs of contraceptive services provided through the National Health Service are not available though it is possible to identify the fees paid to general medical practitioners for the provision of these services, and to estimate the basic ingredient cost of the medicines and devices prescribed, and the costs of family planning clinics. Total expenditure on these is estimated to have been:

England

	£ millions cash
1975-76	19
1976-77	30
1977-78	32
1978-79	34
1979-80	40
1980-81	49
1981-82	55
1982-83	61
1983-84	67

Figures for earlier years are not available.
Our Department's costing returns do not identify expenditure on abortions and sterilisation services.
We do not allocate centrally funds for future years for any of these services. No projections are therefore possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by contraceptive technique of the numbers of patients in receipt of contraceptive services under the National Health Service for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information is given in the table. We do not collect detailed statistics about the contraceptive techniques used by the patients of general medical practitioners.

England

Number of patients: Thousands

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Patients of family planning clinics and domicilliary services—birth control method*					
Oral contraceptives	809·2	806·8	826·6	839·9	853·7
Intrauterine device	321·0	312·0	270·2	248·5	238·3
Cap/diaphragm	117·6	122·2	120·1	114·2	112·4
Sheath	143·3	145·0	146·5	148·8	156·1
Chemicals	12·5	10·2	9·3	8·6	7·7
Rhythm	0·2	0·2	0·6	0·3	0·3
Female sterilisation	2·0	1·4	1·7	2·3	2·4
Vasectomy	16·0	16·0	15·0	14·3	13·1
Other	10·7	10·2	11·5	10·3	10·9
Total	1,432·5	1,424·0	1,401·5	1,387·2	1,394·9
Patients of general medical practitioners—contraceptive service provided†					
Fitting an intrauterine device	110·0	106·9	102·9	107·4	107·6
Other contraceptive services	1,811·8	1,917·0	1,988·6	2,083·2	2,250·6
Total	1,921·8	2,023·9	2,091·5	2,190·6	2,358·2

* Primary birth control method recommended, chosen, or already in use at time of first visit in the year.
† Patients in respect of whom a payment was due at the end of the year.

Family Income

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list, using the latest information available to his Department, the number of families per 1,000 families not on supplementary benefit and having an income less than 100 per cent. of supplementary benefit in Wales, England, Scotland and in the various regions within England, and in the United Kingdom as a whole;

(2) if he will list the numbers of families per 1,000 families having an income less than *(a)* 110 per cent., *(b)* 120 per cent., *(c)* 130 per cent. and *(d)* 140 per cent. of supplementary benefit, including those receiving supplementary benefit, in Wales, England, Scotland and the various regions within England and in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Whitney: I regret not all the information is available. Estimates of numbers of low income families are available only for Great Britain. Separate figures for individual regions of England are not readily available nor are estimates of the number of families with an income of more than 120 per cent. but less than 130 per cent. of supplementary benefit level. The latest available information, which relates to 1981, is shown in the table.

Estimated number of families per thousand families with incomes at specific levels

Level of income	*Wales*	*England*	*Scotland*	*Great Britain*
Below supplementary benefit	[80]	70	[50]	60
Receiving supplementary benefit	110	110	120	110
Above supplementary benefit but less than 10 per cent. above	[40]	30	[50]	30
Above supplementary benefit but less than 20 per cent. above	[80]	70	90	70
Above supplementary benefit but less than 40 per cent. above	140	130	160	130

Notes:
1. All figures are subject to sampling error. Those in square brackets are subject to considerable sampling error.
2. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Estimates of those with incomes above supplementary benefit level are cumulative.

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is his latest estimate of total social security expenditure in England, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole;

(2) what are the latest estimates of per capita expenditure in England, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole on the following social security benefits: *(a)* retirement pensions, *(b)* invalidity benefits, *(c)* industrial disablement benefit, *(d)* widows' pensions, *(e)* dependants' allowance, *(f)* lump sums to pensioners and *(g)* supplementary benefit, divided into supplementary pensions and supplementary allowances, unemployment benefit, sickness and injury benefit and maternity allowance.

Mr. Whitney: It is estimated that in 1984-85 total social security benefit expenditure in the United Kingdom will amount to £38,800 million. Separate estimates for England, Scotland and Wales are not available. however, some indications of social security expenditure in these countries are given in "Regional Trends", published annually by HMSO.

Dundee (Special Needs)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he is taking to improve the areas of special needs in the Dundee, West parliamentary constituency, as outlined in his Department's central research unit paper of October 1984.

Mr. Ancram: I have been asked to reply.

Such action is for local authorities (and other local agencies) in the first place. Projects in such areas can qualify for grant under my Department's urban programme.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people have died each year since 1974 to 1984 due to smoking-related diseases.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to the reply*, 20 November 1984, c. *127*]: It is not possible to be precise. Most deaths associated with cigarette smoking arise from three diseases: lung cancer, chronic bronchitis and "heart attacks" due to obstruction of the arteries of the heart. However, the proportion of deaths attributable to smoking from each of these diseases varies. Furthermore, smoking is also implicated in certain other conditions where no estimate of the numbers of the deaths caused by smoking is available—for example, obstruction of the arteries of the lower limbs.

In 1983 the Royal College of Physicians in its Report "Health or Smoking?" estimated that at least 90 per cent. of deaths from lung cancer, chronic bronchitis and obstructive lung disease are attributable to smoking. The total number of deaths from the main conditions involved is given in the table.

England and Wales

Year	*Malignant Neoplasm of Trachea bronchus and lung (ICD* 162)*	*Bronchitis and emphysema (ICD 490-492)*
1974	33,057	25,512
1975	32,886	24,898
1976	33,524	24,684
1977	33,979	22,125
1978	34,348	22,665
1979	34,760	21,627
1980	35,168	19,255
1981	34,727	17,530
1982	34,832	17,297
1983†	35,572	15,410

* ICD—International Classification of Diseases.
† Figures for 1983 are provisional.

In the same report the Royal College of Physicians also estimated that perhaps 20 per cent. of deaths due to obstruction of the arteries of the heart were related to smoking. The medical term for this condition is "Ischaemic Heart Disease", but it is nowadays very often referred to as "Coronary Heart Disease". The total number of deaths from this condition between 1974 and 1983 in England and Wales is as follows, but the proportion of these directly attributable to smoking is less certain as this is only one of a number of causes that give rise to obstruction of the arteries of the heart.

Year	*Ischaemic Heart Disease (ICD 410-414)*
1974	153,250
1975	154,412
1976	157,016
1977	155,813
1978	160,458
1979	155,647
1980	154,371
1981	155,196
1982	154,605
1983*	156,550

* Figures for 1983 are provisional.

The Royal College of Physicians estimate of at least 100,000 smoking-related deaths in 1981 is based upon a total of 70,000 deaths from lung cancer, bronchitis and obstructive lung disease and 180,000 from coronary heart disease; that is, it encompasses conditions not included in the ICD categories, such as various other cancers, other vascular diseases, myocardial degeneration and so on.

Tuberculosis

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps he is going to take to ensure that the incidence of tuberculosis amongst hospital medical staff is fully documented;

(2) what plans he has for making sure that hospital staff exposed to risks of contracting tuberculosis receive regular chest radiographs; and what provisions he will make for the purpose of setting up screening programmes for professional foreign visitors attached to National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 28 November 1984, c. *532*]: Guidance on the control of tuberculosis in National Health Service employees was issued to health authorities in 1978 on the advice of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee and the working party on the prevention of infection in clinical laboratories. This recommends that staff should have an X-ray and tuberculin test on entry into the NHS and for those at higher risk of exposure to tuberculosis an annual chest X-ray thereafter.

In 1982, we issued guidance on the provision of occupational health services for staff. I would expect these services to have established health records for each member of staff and for those records to record any incidence of tuberculosis, together with a note of chest X-rays, tuberculin testing and BCG vaccination.

Newcastle Computer Dispute

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much the Post Office measures to counteract the effects of his Department's strike at Newcastle is expected to cost up to the end of 1984.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 December 1984, c. *271*]: The scale of payments to the Post Office is still a matter of commercial negotiation and full accounting for its additional work will not be available until after the dispute. However, it is estimated that the cost up to the end of December 1984 will be of the order of £65 million to £70 million.

NHS (Charges)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the estimated losses of revenue to the National Health Service in the 10 worst cases of undercharging or failure to charge revealed by his recent survey of health authorities' charging arrangements.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *475*]: Although some estimates have been made by auditors, they have yet to be substantiated. Final figures for any losses requiring to be written off will not be available until health authorities have had the opportunity of considering and replying to the audit reports and identifying the sums involved.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the gross income for National Health Service hospitals from charges to road accident victims, private patients and overseas visitors, respectively, and what is the net income in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *475*]: Gross income from these three sources in 1983-84 was £6·95 million, £55·455 million and £1·589 million, respectively. It is not practical to try to estimate net figures.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the gross income for National Health Service hospitals from charges to road accident victims, private patients and overseas visitors, respectively, if all such charges had been fully levied.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *475*]: Any estimate would be entirely speculative, but I am very concerned about the substantial evidence that not all the income is being collected. I have therefore written recently to health authority chairmen asking them to ensure that arrangements for collecting income due to the NHS are operating effectively. The NHS scrutiny report on the collection of income was published at the same time. I am arranging for copies of both documents to be placed in the Library.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speakers rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading 'Speaker'.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of the volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

Abortion
Medical research 601-2w
NHS 271w

Abse, Mr Leo
Questions
Unemployment, Wales 729

Access to buildings
Scotland 40w

Access to Parliament
Speakers rulings & Statements (03.12.84) 25

Accidents
Agricultural machinery 257w

Accommodation agencies
Scotland 207w

Accommodation Agencies Act 1953 207w, 345-6

Accountants
National Coal Board 721

Accounting
Housing associations 120w
National Coal Board 495, 906-7

Acid rain 70w
Inland waterways 445w
Power stations 445-6w, 508w
Research 444-5w

"Acid Rain Government Reply" 70w

Action on Smoking & Health 466w
Government grants 466

Acute beds 268-9w

Adams, Mr Allen
Questions
Childrens hospitals, Expenditure 209w
Leisure facilities, Paisley 340

Adelaide Islands 99w

Adjournment debates
Speakers rulings & statements (11.12.84) 1033, (13.12.84) 1219

Asley, Mr. Robert
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 394, 405, 433-5
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 297-8
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 924
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 738
China, Arms trade 428-9w
China, COCOM 1042
China, Overseas trade 345w, 557w
Hattersley, Roy, Television programmes 170-2
Middle East 513-4w
M25, Road accidents 909
Overseas students, Tuition fees 188w, 200w
Paymaster-General, Pensions 728
Prime Minister visits abroad, China 330-1w
Publishers Association 1203
Shoplifting 564w
VAT, Books 1195

Administrative costs
Social security benefits 266-7w
Student grants 594w

Administrative delays
Driving tests 251w
Legal aid 330w
Official Report 614w

Admission charges
Museums & galleries 734

Adult education
Civil defence 92-3w

Adult training strategy 58w, 447-8w

Advanced manufacturing industry 500w

Advertising
Dept of Health & Social Security 375w
Social security claims 77w
Trains 32w

"Advice to the Farmer" 288w

Advisory Board For The Research Councils 188w

Advisory Committee on Pesticides 104w

Advisory Committee on the Supply & Education of Teachers 451w

Aerial photography 38w

Africa
Diplomatic relations 198-9w
EC aid 493-4w
Ministers visits abroad 1039
Overseas aid 196w
World Bank 196w

Age
Cervical cancer 471w

Age concern 171w

Agricultural Development & Advisory Service 288w

Agricultural land 284-5w

Agricultural machinery
Accidents 257w

Agricultural policy 484
Environment 529w, 583w

Agricultural research
Pest control 625-6w

Agricultural subsidies 290-3w, 485, 907-8
Sheep 285w

Agricultural surpluses 484-5

Agricultural Training Board 289w

Agricultural
Government grants 624w
Scotland 150w

AIDS 71-2w, 160-1w, 451w, 470-2w
Blood donors 160-1w
NHS 471w
Research 471w

Aids for handicapped
Trafford Borough Council 1206

Air accidents
Bristol Airport 576-7w
Stornoway Airport 509w

Air courier services 455w
VAT 455w

Air force 428w

Air force bases 427w

Air pollution
Electricity tariffs 409w
Plants 446w
Trees 658w

Air pollution control
Asbestos 12-3w
EC action (04.12.84) 302-22

Air routes
Gibraltar 523w

Air traffic
Defence land 578-9w

Aircraft
Electromagnetic interference 33w
Export credit guarantees 1194
Leeward Islands 137w

Aircraft noise
Helicopters 895
Northern Ireland 895-6

Airland battle 272w

Airports 904
Brazil 408w
London docklands 301w

Aitken, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 22-3
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 681-4

Alarm missiles
Export promotion 429w

Alcoholic drinks
Pregnant women 325-6w

Alcoholism
Liver diseases 324-5w

All party groups 552-3w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc
Housing improvement, Liverpool (03.12.84) 146-50
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 367
Questions
Disaster relief 15w
Overseas aid 17
Secondary education, Liverpool 165-6
Youth unemployment, Liverpool 631w

Ambulance services 170w
Assault 541w
Newcastle under Lyme 77w
Sick pay 541w

Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 354

Amess, Mr David
Questions
Driving tests, Basildon 408w

Ammunition
Royal ordnance factories 410w

Analgesics
Limited list prescribing 465w

Ancient woodlands 658w

Ancram, Mr Michael, Parliamentary Under-Secretary Scottish Office
Questions
Access to buildings, Scotland 40w
Accommodation agencies, Scotland 207w
Areas of special need, Dundee 665w
Bail, Scotland 621w
Building regulations, Scotland 211-2w
Bus services, Scotland 620w
Capital investment, Scotland 333
Caravan sites, Scotland 209w
Coal mining, Indstrial disputes 43w
Coal mining, Scotland 139-40w
Complaints against police, Scotland 621w
Crime prevention panels, Scotland 206w
Crimes of violence, Strathclyde 513-4w
Fires, Scotland 620-w
Homelessness, Scotland 400-1w
Housing support grants, Dundee 401-2w
Housing support grants, Scotland 207w
Island councils, Scotland 41w
Legal aid, Scotland 43w, 621w
Licensing laws, Scotland 151w
Local government expenditure, Dundee 402w, 511w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 332-3
Local government finance, Scotland 208w
Peterhead Prison 349-50w
Picketing, Scotland 622w
Police, Blindwells 620w
Police housing, Scotland 513w
Police training, Scotland 622w
Public order policing, Scotland 621-2w
Public support grants, Tayside 208w
Rate support grants, Scotland 217w, 619w
Sexual offences, Scotland 217w, 619w
Thermal insulation, Scotland 402w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 746
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1062-3
Questions
British Rail, Investment 38w
Bus services, Privatisation 3
Central America 1036
Chile 525w
Enterprise zones, Wales 718

International Garden Festival 1992, Wales 355w
Railway electrification 7
South Africa 1041
South Africa, Durban three 1045

Animal experiments
Defence research 892, 902-3
Medical research 593w
Pesticides 290w
Porton Down 47w

Animal feed
Prices 486-7

Animal welfare
Codes of practice 288-9w
Horses 289w

Animals
Mawnan Smith 28-9w

Anthrax
Gruinard Island 420w

Antidumping
Typewriters 629-30w

Antiseptic lozenges & sprays
Prescriptions 169w

Antiship missiles 50w

Appeals
Dentistry 587w

Apprentices
Engineering industries 58w, 558w

Archbishop of Canterbury 127-8w

Ards
Local government revenue 43w

Ards Hospital 203w
Nurses training 203w

Areas of deprivation 243-4w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty 506w

Areas of special need 665w
Dundee 665w

Argentina 527w
Shyhawk aircraft 617w

Argonaut Freight Forwarding Service 613-4w

Arif, Hassan Zafir 25-6w

Armagh Prison 297w
Body searches 297w

Armed conflict 432w, 450w

Armed forces
Postal services 181w, 431w
Prisoners 411w

Armed forces casualties
Ketterick, Martin 426w

Armed forces deployment
Falkland Islands 274w
Greece 450w, 628-9w
Hong Kong 426w
Northern Ireland 409w, 428w
Nuclear weapons tests 182w
Ulster Defence Regiment 415w
West Germany 273w

Armed forces pay
Falkland Islands 49w

Armed forces recruitment
Ulster Defence Regiment 415-7w

Armed forces strength
Falkland Islands 432w
Ulster Defence Regiment 415-6w

Armed forces training 426w
Scotland 181w

Arms control 517w
Chemical weapons 199-200w, 254w
Satellite killers 520w

Arms control treaties 525w, 1043
British strategic nuclear force 1043-4
Chemical weapons 514w
Nuclear weapons 1037-8
Satellite killers 1037-8
UK contributions 545-6w

Arms exports
Brazil 429w

Arms trade 892
China 428-9w

Army
Military discipline 411-2w
Tidworth 411w

Army in Northern Ireland 409w, 896
Gransha Hospital 896
Plastic bullets 298w

Arnold, Mr Tom
Questions
Acid rain, Research 444-5w
Arts Council grants 354w
Business expansion scheme 370w
Higher education, Expenditure 487w
Manchester Airport 32w, 336w
NHS administration, Public appointments 466w

Arpley House 74-6w

Art works
Exports 733-4

Arts
Local government reform 353w

Arts Council grants 354w, 732-3

Arts finance 353w, 732
Greater Manchester 733
Local government reform 733
Theatres 18w

Arts sponsorship 731-2
Tobacco industry 732

Asbestos
Air pollution control 12-3w
Building repairs 61w
Construction 61w
Death 267w
Farm buildings 529w
Licensing 358w

Ashby, Mr David
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1169-72
Questions
Farmers, Civil defence 286w

Ashdown, Mr Paddy
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 453-7, 461, 470
Questions
Brother Corporation 629w
Computer software, Exports 629w
Defence 431w
Electronics industry, Research 498w
Employers statutory sick pay scheme 168w
Government assistance to industry 609w
Japan, typewriters, 629-30w
Military balance, Conventional weapons 46w
Milk, Production quotas 492
National insurance contributions, Sick pay 168w
Sick pay 167w
USA, Conferences 308w
Youth training scheme 447w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 419-21
Questions
Assisted areas 243-4w
Back pain, Medical research 589w
British Telecom, Privatisation 6-7w
British Telecom, Telephone exchanges 7w
Employment, Manufacturing industries 502w
Health service staff, Back pain 589w
Health service staff, Industrial accidents 590w
Health & Safety Inspectorate, Hospitals 561-2w
Hospital closures 474-5w
Hospital consultants, Ear nose & throat 473-4w
Hospital waiting lists, Ear nose & throat 474w
Improvement notices, Hospitals 562w
Ketterick, Martin, Armed forces casualties 426w
NHS, Privatisation 590w
NHS, Redundancy 589w
NHS finance, Teaching hospitals 475w
Prescriptions, Antiseptic lozenges & sprays 169w
Unemployment 502-3w
Unemployment, Travel-to-work areas 503w

Ashton, Mr Joseph
Questions
Kelsey, Mr, Unemployment benefits 360-1w
National insurance, Employees contributions 585w
Trident, Costs 422w

Aspinwall, Mr Jack
Questions
Gibraltar 234w

Assault
Ambulance service 541w

Assaults on police 485-6w

Assisted areas 243-4w
Wales 724-6

Assisted places scheme 170
Scotland 263-4w

Associated Octel (07.12.84) 647-8

Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry 538w

Association of Chief Police Officers 132w

Association of London Authorities 69w

Association of Metropolitan Authorities 69w

Atkins, Rt Hon Sir Humphrey
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (07.12.84) 647
Oral question time intervention (11.12.84) 896

Atkins, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Local Government (Interim Provisons) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 873
Oral question time points of order (13.12.84) 1208
Questions
European fighter aircraft 429w
Export credit quarantees, Aircraft 1194
Military aircraft, European fighter aircraft 891-2

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 30w
Oil revenues, North Sea oil 454w

Atkinson, Mr Norman
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 34
Oral question time points of order (12.12.84) 1053-4
Questions
Arms control treaties, Nuclear weapons 1037-8
Cyprus 515w
Military aircraft, Defence procurement 427-8w
Pay, Employment opportunities 1196

Attendance allowance
Social security appeals 83-4w

Attorney-General
UK membership of EC 180-1w

Auctions 554w
Furniture 245-6w

Audit
Forestry Commission 354w

Aujeszkys disease 483-4

Auld Committee see Shops Act 1950 Committee of Inquiry

Automobile Association 250-1w

"Autumn statement, 1984" 285w, 504w, (06.12.84) 519-602

Average earnings 359w, 631w

Avon
Structure plans 118-9w

A1 250w, 531w
Construction materials 250w
Road works 531w

A3 336w
Road accidents 336w
Roads 336w

A300 Airbus 576-7w

A360
Road blocks 642w

A465 355w
Road construction 355w

A2016 530-1w

B Specials 415w

Baby care units 476w

Back pain
Health service staff 589w
Medical research 589w
Nurses 661w

Bacteria
EC action 117w

Bagier, Mr Gordon A T
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 5

Bagnall, Nigel 273w

Bail
Scotland 346, 621w

Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth, Minister for Local Government
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 37, (04.12.84) 244, 256-63
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1144-49, (13.12.84) 1144-49, (13.12.84) 1305
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 876-8
Questions
Block grant 234-5w, 237w
Development plans 657w
Housing, Block grant 581w
Local government, Council of Europe 394w
Local Government Bill 1984/85, Orders & regulations 179w
Local government expenditure, Greater Manchester 643-4w
Local government reform 444w
Local government reform, Block grant 236w
Local government reform, Housing finance 235w
Rate limitation, Leicester City Council 656w

Baker, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Ethiopia, Cereals 594w
Planning permission 655w
Soil Survey of England & Wales, Finance 288w
Teacher training, Dyslexia 487-8w

Baldernock
Prime Minister domestic visits 546w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 24
Local Government Bill 2R (03.12.84) 113-4
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 930
Questions
Arms control 517w
Bus services, Privatisation 2
EC Development Council 15w
Europe, Defence 427w
Technical & vocational education initiative 85-6w
Way Forward 484

Band Aid 404-5w

Bank notes (12.12.84) 1185-90

Bank of England
Commercial bills 457-8w

Bankruptcy
Scotland 498w
Stocks & shares 10-1w

Banks, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 922
Questions
Advice to the Farmer 288w
Arms control treaties, Satellite killers 1037
East Germany, Trailers 341-2w
Employees suggestion schemes, Dept of Transport 252w
Science budget 188w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 24
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 28, 56, 100, 102-7 (04.12.84) 212, 254
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1081, 1101-3, 1112, 1114-6, 1120, 1135, 1143-4, 1147-8, 1166-7, 1175 (13.12.84) 1240, 1242, 1277-9, 1286, 1295-6
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 842-3, 857, 860, 872-3
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 933, 935
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 913, 924
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 831
Questions
Adult training strategy 58w
Animal experiments, Pesticides 290w
Apprentices, Engineering industries 58w
Arts, Local government reform 353w
Belize 519w
Block grant 234-5w, 237w
Cars, Greater London 253w
Council house sales, Greater London Council 67-8w
Council house waiting lists, Greater London 238w
Council housing, Greater London 68w
Cycling, Greater London 37w
Graduates, Information technology 241w
Greater London transport survey 252w
Housing associations, Greater London 67w
Housing investment programmes 69w
Housing revenue accounts 67w
Housing subsidies 65-6w
Housing subsidies, Brighton 64-5w
Housing & elderly, London boroughs 68w
Identification parades, Metropolitan Police 281w
Industrial training 57-9w, 157-9w
Industrial training, Expenditure 59w
Industrial training, Footwear industry 54-5w
Industrial training, Handicapped 59w
Industrial training, Paper industry 55w
Industrial training, Research 56w
Industrial training, Rubber industry 54w
Local government expenditure 68-9w
Local government expenditure, Greater London 71w
Local government mortgages, Greater London Council 238w
Local government reform, Block grant 236w
Local government reform, Housing finance 235w
Local government reform, Housing & elderly 68w
Local government reform, Joint boards 235w
Local government reform, Local government mortgages 235w
Local government reform, Seaside & country homes scheme 235w
Local government services, Capital investment 70w
London docklands, Employment opportunities 656w
London Docklands Development Corporation, Land 657w
London Regional Transport, Capital investment 36w
London Regional Transport, Public appointments 37w
Metropolitan Police, Stop & search 2w
Oxford Circus Station, Fires 612-3w
Parking, Greater London 37w
Planning permission 67w
Planning permission, Greater London 237w
Race Relations Act 1976 3w
Rate support grants, Brighton 65w
Rate support grants, Greater London 66-7w
Road accidents, Greater London 35-6w
Road construction, Greater London 36w
Road works, Greater London 36w
Roads, Public inquiries 252w
Sheltered housing, Greater London 236w
Skillcentres 52w
Streamlining the Cities Consultation Papers 69w
Tax yields, Income tax 456w
Transport, Greater London 36w
Transport police, Identification parades 253w
Urban development grants 657w
Urban traffic control system, Greater London 37w
Urban transport 613w
Voluntary organisations, Greater London 120w
Women only courses, Greater London 57-8w
Women only courses, Manpower Services Commission 55-7w
Women only courses, Youth training scheme 51w

BAOR
Guided weapons 46w

Barclay, Peter 272w

Barnett, Mr Guy
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 115-8
Rate limitation, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1322
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 920
Questions
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 14-5w
Grammar schools, School population 22-3w
Mental health services, Greenwich 83w
Overseas aid, Generic prescribing 15w
Social security benefits, Councillors 266w

Barnsley
Community programme 53w

Barnsley Trades Council 53w

Barnstaple
Employment opportunities 343w
European Regional Development Fund 392w
Government assistance to industry 342-4w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 523
Energy Select Committee (05.12.84) 350
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 289
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (10.12.84) 751, (11.12.84) 927, 930, 934-5
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 923
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 810-2
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 369
Questions
Coal mine closures 907
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 895
Diplomatic immunity 521-2w
Flexible response 430w
Maltby Common 63w
Teachers, Pay 163-4

Basildon
Driving tests 408w

Bathgate
British Leyland 215-6w

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 931
Questions
Student grants 299w
University finance, Science education 333w

Baton rounds
Northern Ireland 330w
Police 306-7w, 332w

BBC
Television advertising 1205
Television licences 302-3w

BBC external services 518w
Government grants 517-8w

Beaumont-Dark, Mr Anthony
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 744
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 372
Questions
Falkland Islands, Postal services 431w
National Union of Mineworkers 17w

Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Questions
Butter, Food stocks 28w
Furniture grants 79w
Housing benefits 79w
Housing benefits, High rent schemes 79w, 541-2w
Social Security Policy Inspectorate 80w
Supplementary benefits, Board & lodging charges 226-7w

Bed & breakfast accommodation (14.12.84) 1323-81
Greater London 538-9w
London boroughs 440-1w

Beef premiums (12.12.84) 1067-74

Beef & veal 436w
Consumption 625w
Retail prices 625w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland Bill), Rem stages (06.12.84) 611
Questions
Cereals, Prices 487
China, Overseas trade 1042
Intervention stocks, Northern Ireland 504w
Urban development grants, Northern Ireland 348w

Beith, Mr A J
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1320
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1177
Representation of the People Bill, Procedure for Committee stage (10.12.84) 749-50
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 781, 792-9
Questions
Blind, House of Commons staff 229w
Buses White Paper 30w
Business statement 1209-10
House of Commons select committees 551-2w
House of Commons select committees, Costs 361w
Prime Minister official engagements 127w
Student grants 91w

Belfast City Hospital
Costs 45-6w

Belize 519w

Bell, Mr Stuart
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 614-5, 628-9

Bell Report 288w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 446, 451-3
Questions
Cereals, Intervention stocks 492
Farm capital grant scheme 433-6w
Student grants, Parental contributions 156-7w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 847-51
Questions
Nuclear safeguards, Plutonium 25w
Nuclear safeguards, Prototype fast reactors 24w
USA, Plutonium 24w

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1010
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 52-5
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1114, 1117 (13.12.84) 1245-9, 1251, 1263
Local Government Bill, Standing Committee composition (13.12.84) 1237
Questions
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Stockport 74-6w
Educational publications, Cost per pupil 240-2w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 14w, 135-8w
HMS Conqueror 425w
Local education authorities, VAT 187w
Local Government Bill 1984/85, Orders & regulations 179w
Local government expenditure, Greater Manchester 643w
National Heritage Memorial Fund 128w
Ordnance Survey, Financial targets 116w
Ordnance Survey Review Committee 117w
"Parental Influence at School Consultation Paper" 163
Personal income 193w
Special education 452w
Sports Council 387-92w
Student grants 90w, 403w
Student grants, Administrative costs 594w
Student grants, Costs 19-20w
Student grants, Parental contributions 19w
Student numbers 450-1w
Supplementary benefits 126w
Youth training scheme, Stockport 254-6w

Benzene (04.12.84) 302-22

Benzodiazepine
Drug side effects 173-4w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1268-9, 1284, 1303
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 932
Water Authorities (Meetings) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 385
Questions
Day fines 280w
Drug side effects, Benzodiazepine 173-4w
Drug side effects, Tranquilisers 172w
Parole 280w
Pre-trial procedures, Northern Ireland 229w
Prostitution, Fine defaulters 280-1w
Trident, Costs 422w

Best, Mr Keith
Debates etc
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1009, 1021-2
Law of the sea (06.12.84) 640-1
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 304, 307, 313, 318-20
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1060-1
Questions
Child benefit 378w
Crown prosecution service 246w
Milk, Wales 724
Training aircraft, Defence procurement 618w
UN Development Programme, UK contributions 604w
VAT 371w
Welsh Development Agency 722-3

Bevan, Mr David Gilroy
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 657-62, 674

Bidwell, Mr Sydney
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 535
Entry clearances, Orders & regulations (11.12.84) 941
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 853
Questions
Business statement 1216
Housing construction, Ealing 62w
Motorways, Speed limits 9-10
M25, Road accidents 910
M25, Road construction 8

Biffen, Rt Hon John, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill 1984/85, Ministerial statements (10.12.84) 749-50
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 374
Questions
All party groups 552-3w
Assisted places scheme 170
British Telecom, Shares 167-8
Business statement 499-507, 1209-18
Community programme, Sex discrimination 168
Dept of Health & Social Security, Industrial disputes 170
Economic policy 169
Electricity generation, Oil consumption 170
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 169
Hattersley, Roy, Television programmes 170-2
House of Commons select committees 365-70w
House of Commons select committees, civil servants 367w
House of Commons select committees, Evidence 361-5w
House of Commons select committees, House of Commons staff 367-8w
House of Commons times of sittings 551w
Leeward Islands, HS748 aircraft 126-7w
Members facilities, Reprography 601w
National Union of Mineworkers 168
Nuclear power 125w
Prime Minister official engagements 127w
Regional aid, Wales 126w
Scargill, Arthur 168
Student grants, Parental contributions 167, 169-70
Supplementary benefits 126w
Teachers, Pay 168-9
Unemployment 167

Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 610-1
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Northern Ireland 428w
British Rail 39w
Civil servants, Northern Ireland 43w
Dartford tunnel 34w
Erne catchment area 458w
Ethiopia, Ministers visits abroad 521w
Helicopters, Cross border cooperation in Ireland 896
Juries, Oaths 329w
River Blackwater, Land drainage 204w
School transport 34-5w

Western European Union, Ministerial speeches 341w

Bilingual education
Tiryberth School 550w

Billingham 238w

Bingo
Gaming clubs (05.12.84) 388

Bioengineering
Government assistance to industry 499w

Birds
St Helena 340-2w

Birmingham Airport 338w

Bitumens
Road construction 309w

Bladder cancer 59-60w

Blair, Mr Tony
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 281-3
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 932-3
Questions
Oil revenues 1201

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 413-4
Questions
Arms control treaties, British strategic nuclear force 1043-4

Blind
Dept of Education & Science 21w
Dept of Energy 183w
Dept of the Environment 62w
Dept of Trade & Industry 243w
Dept of Transport 34w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 101w
Home Office 133w
House of Commons staff 229w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 103-4w
Ministry of Defence 99-100w
Northern Ireland Office 204-5w
Scotland 140w
Scottish Office 210w
Teachers 333w
Treasury 177w
Welsh Office 159w

Blindwells
Police 620w

Block grant 234-5w, 237w
Concessionary fares 579w
Housing 581w
Local government reform 236w

Blond McIndoe Centre 540w
Upper Waiting Hall 540w

Blood
Screening 71-2w, 160w

Blood donors
AIDS 160-1w

Blood tests 642-3w

Board & lodging charges 221-2w, 226-7w, 538-9w (14.12.84) 1323-81
Supplementary benefits 221-2w, 226-7w

Boarding schools
Education allowances 606w

Body, Mr Richard
Questions
Agricultural policy, Environment 529w
Agricultural research, Pest control 625-6w
Crop spraying 577w
Crop spraying, EC countries 577w
Food & Environment Protection Bill (HL) 1984/85 625w
Generic prescribing 463w
Pesticides 529w
Royal College of Surgeons, Medical research 483-4w

Body searches 297w
Armagh Prison 297w

Bolton
Civil defence 306w
Health services 84w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 398

Books 17w, 177-8w, 333-4w, 455-6w, 568-9w, 1194, 1203
Gays the Word 17w, 177-8w, 455-6w
Homosexuality 575-6w
Police raids 575-6w
VAT 17w, 333-4w, 568-9w, 1194-6, 1203

Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 193-7

Bophuthatswana 1041

Bottomley, Mr Peter Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Debates etc
Unemployment, job creation schemes (07.12.84) 712-6
Questions
Agricultural machinery, Accidents 257w
Asbestos, Licensing 358w
Average earnings 359w, 631w
Chemicals, Production 560w
Coal mining, Death 257-8w
Health & Safety Inspectorate, Hospitals 561-2w
Improvement notices, Hospitals 562w
Industrial accidents, Death 360w
Industrial health & safety, Carcinogens 60-1w
Industrial health & safety, Dyes 59-60w
Industrial health & safety, Fines 257w
Industrial health & safety, Prosecutions 257w
Industrial noise, Protective clothing 449w
Minimum wage, Underpayments 260w
Redundancy payments office, Glasgow 359w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Employment 192w
Wages councils 258-9w
Wages Inspectorate, Manpower 260-1w
Young people, Pay 191-2w

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Questions
Road accidents, A3 336w
Roads, A3 336w

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 368
Questions
British Airways, Privatisation 612w
Pelican crossings 8-9

Bowden, Mr Gerald
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 919
Questions
Adult education, Civil defence 92-3w
Electromagnetic interference, Ships 33w
Exercise Brave Defender 428w
Research 331w

Boxing
Unfair competition 584w

Boyes, Mr Roland
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 356
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1323-30, 1374
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 64-6
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1163-5 (13.12.84) 1247, 1252, 1253, 1261, 1269, 1271, 1297-1300
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 869-70
Questions
Arms control 517w
Buses White Paper 30w
Business statement 1218
Cruise missiles 46w
Defence research, Animal experiments 892
Educational maintenance allowance 86-90w
Guided weapons 46w, 47w
Guided weapons, BAOR 46w
Guided weapons, Defence procurement 46w
Nuclear weapons, Defence procurement 48w
Pigeon racing, Poultry diseases 287w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 47w
Prime Minister official engagements 546w
Royal ordnance factories 48-9w
Satellite killers 426-7w

Boyson, Dr Rhodes, Minister of State Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Ards Hospital, Nurses training 203w
Belfast City Hospital, Costs 45-6w
Blind, Northern Ireland Office 204-5w
Civil servants, Northern Ireland 43w
Civil service, Northern Ireland 97w
Dairy farming, Northern Ireland 595-6w
Erne catchment area 458w
Fair Employment Agency, Northern Ireland 458w
Housing benefits, Northern Ireland 44-5w
Intervention stocks, Northern Ireland 504w
Local government revenue, Ards 43w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 203w
Personal income, Northern Ireland 45w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 610w
Republic of Ireland, Nurses 203w
River Blackwater, Land Drainage 204w
Royal Victoria Hospital, Nurses training 203w
Slaughterhouses, Newtownards 43w
Social security, Expenditure 44w
Social security claims, Northern Ireland 44w
Social security recipients, Northern Ireland 45w

Bradford
Courts 1w

Bradwell School, Newcastle 96w

Braine, Sir Bernard
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 368

Brandon-Bravo, Mr Martin M
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 788
Questions
Civil service, Northern Ireland 97w

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 525, 551
Questions
Business statement 505
Capital investment, Scotland 333w

Brazil 520-1w
Airports 408w
Arms exports 429w
Military aircraft 432w

Brighton
Council house rents 64-5w
Housing subsidies 64-5w
Rate support grants 65w

Brighton Borough Council 65w

Bristol Airport 576-7w
Air accidents 576-7w

"Britain's Future: The Economy & Higher Education" 187w

British Agrochemicals Association 625w

British Airports Authority
Privatisation 11-2

British Airways
Privatisation 29w, 612w

British Antarctic Territory
Chile 599w

British citizenship 405w

Local authority	All completed sales to sitting tenants 1 April 1979 to 30 June 1984	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1979	Number of council dwellings at 1 April 1984	All sales as percentage of dwelling stock at 1 April 1979
Trafford	1,636	15,187	14,333	10·8
Wigan	3,189	36,731	34,556	8·7
Knowsley	6,140	38,653	26,902	15·9
Liverpool	*7,874	78,453	65,066	*10·0
Sefton	3,310	21,721	18,453	15·2
St. Helens	1,839	21,737	20,659	8·5
Wirral	3,656	28,967	25,190	12·6

* Incomplete.

Planning Permissions (Misuse)

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to alter the law to prevent misuse of planning permissions for dwellings granted on the basis of agricultural need where an agricultural occupancy condition has been imposed.

Mr. MacFarlane: No. Powers for enforcement available to local authorities under existing planning legislation are sufficient to deal with abuses.

GLC (Land)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sites and acreage of land at present held by the Greater London council which he proposes to transfer to the London borough of Brent.

Sir George Young: Under clause 92 of the Local Government Bill we intend to transfer to successor bodies all property currently owned by the GLC or MCCs which is needed by them to carry out new or enhanced functions conferred on them. Property which has not been transferred under clause 92, or other specific provisions of the Bill, will vest in the appropriate residuary body. Detailed information about the GLC's holdings of land in the London borough of Brent or any other London borough is not held centrally. In the first instance, it is for such authorities themselves to obtain such information as they require from the GLC.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report*, for each parliamentary constituency concerned, the land currently owned by the Greater London council in the county of Essex.

Mr. MacFarlane: This information is not available centrally.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when the report of the independent inquiry by Peat, Marwick and Mitchell into the competitive practices of the Ordnance Survey will be available to him; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the continuation of the publishing activities of the Ordnance Survey in the field of road atlases, town plans and guides;

(3) what net profit has accrued to the Ordnance Survey from the sales of new atlases, town plans and guide books;

(4) why the independent report into the competitive position of the Ordnance Survey joint publishing activities has been submitted to the Ordnance Survey management rather than to him direct.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Leicester (Rate Capping)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the specific reasons why he has rate-capped Leicester city council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend has selected Leicester city council for rate-capping in accordance with the principles stated in the "Rate Limitation Report 1984" (HC 589), laid before the House on 24 July 1984. Authorities were selected if it appeared to him at the date of making the report that their budgets for 1984-85 were more than 4 per cent. above their expenditure targets and more than 20 per cent. above their grant-related expenditure assessment — GREA. Leicester's budget of £24·6 million was 4·9 per cent. above its target and 27·7 per cent above GREA.

The rate limit which my right hon. Friend is now proposing for the council is 56·61 per cent. lower than its rate levied for 1984-85 and should be welcomed by Leicester's ratepayers. The council has until 15 January to comment on the rate limit proposed and to draw my right hon. Friend's attention to any relevant information of which he may not be currently aware.

Docklands

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the occupational categories, by socio-economic group, of the new jobs in London's docklands which are held by residents of the London boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Southwark created in docklands since 1981.

Sir George Young: This information is not collected.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown by category, manufacturing, office, distribution, mixed use development, of how many of the estimated 3,185 new jobs created in the London docklands urban development area, excluding Inner Urban Areas Act assistance, since July 1981 were in existing buildings or buildings commenced prior to July 1981.

Sir George Young: Of the 3,185 new jobs created in the LDDC area since July 1981, 2,236 are in existing buildings. By category, these number:

	Number
Industry	*70
Office	†1,010
Distribution	500
Mixed use	656

* Limehouse Studios
† Includes 280 in LDDC offices

The existing buildings in the first three categories required refurbishment before use.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of land in the London Docklands Development Corporation's ownership are awaiting development; and how long this land has been in the London Docklands Development Corporation's ownership.

Sir George Young: Land in the corporation's ownership available for development was purchased in the following years, and was at 31 March 1984 at the stages shown:

Year of purchase	*acres awaiting reclamation*	*acres being reclaimed*	*acres reclaimed and awaiting disposal/ development*
1981-82	187·17	78·47	151·5
1982-83	63·76	19·93	52·7
1983-84	227·91	—	2·0

In addition, the corporation has released—by sale or lease—land purchased in 1981-82, of which 126 acres is being developed and 124·56 acres is already in use.

Urban Development Grant Projects

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the following information for all urban development grant projects in each London borough that have received at least initial approval by his Department: the name of the project, the value of the urban development grant, the total cost of the project including private sector contributions and the urban development grant expenditure as at 1 October and expected expenditure by 31 March 1985.

Sir George Young: An up-to-date list of all schemes which have received offers of urban development grant, including the name of the sponsoring authority, the total project cost, the maximum estimated UDG, and the total estimated private sector investment, is already in the Library. Detailed information about expenditure incurred at 1 October and anticipated by 31 March 1985 is not at present available.

Local Government Bill

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has published any further guidance on the development plan provisions in the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Yes. I have circulated today to the local authority associations and other interested bodies a paper describing the new system of unitary development plans and the transitional arrangements. I am placing a copy in the Library of the House.

Broadleaved Woodlands

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the loss of ancient broadleaved woodlands over the last 30 years; and to what extent new plantings have compensated for this loss.

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no later information about losses of ancient broadleaved woodlands than was provided in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) on 20 February 1984 at column *365*.

Much new planting of woodlands has taken place over the past, 30 years. In the past 10 years alone, there have been 13,600 hectares of new broadleaved planting and re-stocking by the Forestry Commission and by the private sector with grant aid from the commission. This figure does not take account of compensation of losses by natural regeneration, nor of amenity tree planting grant-aided by the Countryside Commission.

Pollution

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many acres or hectares of trees are affected by the new form of damage reported in the Government reply to the report on acid rain from the Environment Committee, Cmnd. 9397, to have recently been observed in north and west Britain; which species are affected, and in what proportions; and when this new form of damage was *(a)* first detected and by whom, *(b)* first publicly recorded and *(c)* first known to the Government;

(2) if he has any evidence of tree damage associated with air pollution in the United Kingdom;

(3) in what ways the new form of damage to trees reported in the reply to the Environment Committee report on acid rain (Cmnd. 9397), as occurring in north and west Britain resembles that associated with air pollution in Germany; and whether the damage can be explained by the action of pathogenes, fungi, bacteria, stress, drought, climate or other causes not associated with *(a)* acid deposition and *(b)* other pollution.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum the Government are currently planning to spend on research into air pollution damage to trees or other plants in the United Kingdom in 1985.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) on 11 December at column *446*.

No figure for expenditure during the calendar year 1985 is available.

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Government are aware of any damage to vegetation by ozone in the United Kingdom over the last three years.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) on 11 December at column *446*.

Power Stations (Emissions)

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the fall in total sulphur

British Dyslexia Association 487-8w

British Gas Corporation
Privatisation 605w

British Leyland
Bathgate 215-6w
Government grants 553w

British Museum 494w

British National Formulary 463w

British Rail 39w
Investment 38w, 40w, 531w
Privatisation 35w
Public service obligation grant 253w
Safety standards 33w
West Midlands 1-2

British Rail Finances Independent Review Committee 337w

British Railways Order Confirmation Bill 1984-85 (05.12.84) 331
Order for consideration read (11.12.84) 891
Rep* (12.12.84) 1035
3R* (13.12.84) 1191

British residents abroad
Hong Kong 26w
Religious freedom 520w
Voting rights 305w

British Steel Corporation
Privatisation 554w

British strategic nuclear force
Arms control treaties 1043-4

British Technology Group
Loans 5w

British Telecom
European Regional Development Fund 437-8w
Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 19-24
Privatisation 6-7w, 341w, 553w, 629w
Shares (03.12.84) 19-24, 167-8
Telephone exchanges 7w

British Telecom Computer Centre (05.12.84) 473-80
Portsmouth (05.12.84) 473-80

British Telecommunications Act 1981 121w

British Transport Police 578w, (14.12.84) 1382-88

British Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre 420w
Defence contracts 420w

British Waterways Board
Freight transport 117w

Brittan, Rt Hon Leon, *Secretary of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 755-64, 768, 769, 777, 778-9
Questions
Blind, Home Office 133w
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 567w, 737, 738-40
Members, Surveillance 405-6w
Race relations, Home Office 305w
Terrorism 640-1w
Terrorism, Sentencing 641w
Terrorism, Statistics 639-40w
UK membership of EC, Home Office 185w

Broadmoor Hospital 228w
Riot control weapons 228w

Brooke, Mr Peter, *Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science*
Questions
Adult eduction, Civil defence 92-3w
AIDS, Research 451w
Council for National Academic Awards 21-2w
Educational finance, Workers Educational Association 161
Foreign students, EC countries 241w
Further education, Greater London 96w
Higher education 96w, 187w
Higher education, Ethnic groups 157w
Higher education, Expenditure 487w
Institute of Hearing Research 299-300w
Mandatory student grants 153-4w
Mandatory student grants, Parental contributions 154w
Medical research, Contraceptives 601-2w
Medical Research Council, Finance 89w
Open University, Finance 95w
Overseas students, Tuition fees 188w, 241-2w, 452-3w
Oxford University, Higher education admission 186w
Science & technology research 453w
St Martins School of Art 21w
Stirling University 167
Student grants 19w, 22w, 90-2w, 156w, 299w, 333w, 488w
Student grants, Administrative costs 594w
Student grants, Costs 18-20w
Student grants, Parental contributions 19w, 90-2w, 96w, 154-7w, 186-7w, 239-40w, 242w
Student grants, Travel grants 90w
Student loans 92w, 155-6w, 186w
Student numbers 450-1w
Student unions 594w
Student unions, Political doctrines 594w
Students, Travelling expenses 93w
Students, Tuition fees 452w
Universities, Scotland 166-7
University finance, Science education 333w
Youth Service Provision Review 451w

Brother Corporation 629w

Brown, Mr. Gordon
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 370-1
Questions
Bail, Scotland 621w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 638w
Coal mining, Scotland 632w
Complaints against police 638w
Complaints against police, Scotland 621w
Dockyards 430w
Fires, Scotland 620-1w
Homelessness, Scotland 400-1w
Invalidity benefits 72-3w
Legal aid, Picketing 602w
Legal aid, Scotland 346-7, 621w
Manufacturing industries, Scotland 206w
Oil revenues 1201
Picketing 642w
Picketing, Fines 638w
Picketing, Police powers 641w
Picketing, Prosecutions 637-8w
Picketing, Scotland 622w, 632w
Police training, Civil disorder 642w
Police training, Scotland 622w
Public Order Act 1936 641w
Public order policing 637-9w
Public order policing, Scotland 621-2w
Social Security Commissioners 609w
Social security reviews 80w

Brown, Mr Hugh
Debates etc
House of Commons Questions, coal mining (05.12.84) 351
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 343
Greater Glasgow Health Board 209w

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1158
Questions
EC Finance Council 573w

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 229-31
Questions
AIDS 160w
Asbestos, Licensing 358w
Industrial investment 574w
Magistrates, Newcastle upon Tyne 1w, 244-5w
Magistrates, Public appointments 1w, 245w
Magistrates courts 274w

Brown, Mr Robert C
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1088-9
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 842, 854-5, 861-2
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 368
Questions
Nuclear weapons deployment 897
Public sector borrowing requirement 1193
Shipping 408

Brown, Mr Ron
Questions
Bankruptcy, Scotland 498w
Coal mining, Scotland 341
Free school meals, Scotland 403w
NHS, Privatisation 512-3w
Nurses, Lothian 512w
Scottish Law Commission 201w

Browne, Mr John
Questions
Business statement 1214
Cruise Watch 893
EC Environment Council 394w
Employment level 1192

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 514
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 940
Teachers, Standing Order No 10 Applications (05.12.84) 383
Questions
Armed forces training 426w
Hill farming 287w
Primary education, Capitation allowances 162
Railway electrification 102w
Standard grade courses, Scotland 208w
Student grants, Parental contributions 159
Teachers, Pay 168-9
Teachers, Scotland 335-6

Bruinvels, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 613-4
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 105, 120
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 790, 816-8
Questions
British citizenship 405w
Bus lanes, Cycleways 531-2w
Business statement 1215
Centre 21, Hypermarkets 582w
Coal, Production 353w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 409-10w
Drinking & driving, Christmas 337w
Drinking & driving, Keep Low campaign 612w
Drug crimes, Young offenders 332w
Election offences, Prosecutions 567w
Enterprise zones, Employment opportunities 441-2w
Falkland Islands, Armed forces strength 432w
Independent prosecution service 565-6w
Industrial disputes, Injuries 332-3w
Lion Intoximeter 3000 405w, 642-3w
Motorways, Lighting 532w
Motorways, Speed limits 9
M1, Lighting 532w
M25, Lighting 611w
Nuclear weapons deployment, Transport of radioactive materials 902
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 504w
Rate limitation, Leicester City Council 656w
Road Accident Statistics English Regions 578w
Road traffic offences, Speed limits 485w
Safety belts, Driving offences 332w
Tax evasion, Road tax, 338w

Teachers, Leicestershire 595w
Television licences 487w

Bruton Knowles 245-6w

Bryan, Sir Paul
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 417, 464

Buchan, Mr Norman
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1070-1
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1231-2
Teachers, Scotland (12.12.84) 1075
Questions
Arts finance 732
Museums & galleries, Admission charges 734

Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick,
Minister of State for Energy
Questions
British Gas Corporation, Privatisation 605w

Buck, Sir Antony
Questions
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 893

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 534
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1072
EC budget (11.12.84) 944, 946, 947, 950, 951, 952, 955, 957, 995
Questions
Business statement 1213-4
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 1049
Student grants, Parental contributions 160
Television licences 1205

Budget 575w

Building industry
Gibraltar 523w
Unemployment 230w, 449w
VAT 569w, 614w

Building regulations
Energy conservation 180w
Scotland 211-2w
Thermal insulation 180w

Building repairs
Asbestos 61w

Building workers
Hackney 312w, 359w
Wales 230w

Buildings
Latent damage 13
Liability 13

Bulmer, Mr Esmond
Questions
Historic buildings 180w
Local government reform, Historic buildings 582w

Burt, Mr Alistair
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 235-8

Bus lanes
Cycleways 531-2w

Bus services 3, 310w
Competition 301-2w
Lancashire 6
Plymouth 3
Privatisation 2-7, 10-1, 30-1w
Scotland 620w
Wales 730-1
Yorkshire & Humberside 4

Buses 335w, 338w
Metropolitan counties 336w

Buses White Paper 4, 30-1w, 310w, 620w
Merseyside County Council 31w

Business expansion scheme 17w, 195-6w, 370w

Business statement 499-507, 1209-18
Speakers rulings & statements (10.12.84) 749

Butcher, Mr John, *Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 658, 704-8
Questions
Advanced manufacturing industry 500w
Bioengineering, Government assistance to industry 499w
Blind, Dept of Trade & Industry 243w
British Leyland, Government grants 553w
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 554w
British Technology Group, Loans 5w
British Telecom, Privatisation 6-7w, 341w, 553w, 629w
British Telecom, Telephone exchanges 7w
European Regional Development Fund, British Telecom 437-8w
Falmouth Shiprepair, Privatisation 7w
Government assistance to industry 555-6w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Dept of Trade & Industry 5w
Micros in schools, Expenditure 553-4w
Motor vehicles 244w
Motor vehicles, Consumer information 347w
Restaurants, Food labelling 345-6w
Small firms technical enquiry service 344w
Tourism 498w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Trade & Industry 190w, 347w
Vosper Thornycroft 189-90w
Vosper Thornycroft, Pension funds 315w, 348w

Butler, Rt Hon Adam, *Minister of State for Defence Procurement*
Questions
Air force 428w
Alarm missiles, Export promotion 429w
Blind, Ministry of Defence 99-100w
Brazil, Arms exports 429w
Brazil, Military aircraft 432w
China, Arms trade 428-9w
Cruise missiles 46w
Defence contracts, British Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre 420w
Defence equipment 419w
Defence procurement 100w, 903-4
European fighter aircraft 429w
FH70 howitzers 430w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Ministry of Defence 99w
Guided weapons 46-7w
Guided weapons, BAOR 46w
Guided weapons, Defence procurement 46w, 426w
JP233 airfield attack weapon system 418-9w
Military aircraft, Defence procurement 427-8w
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 898-900
Ministry of Defence, Information 412w
NATO, Weapons 431w
Nimrod aircraft, Early warning systems 272w
Nimrod aircraft, Radar 421w
Nuclear weapons, Defence procurement 48w
Nuclear weapons tests, Armed forces deployment 182w
Royal ordnance factories 48-9w
Royal ordnance factories, Ammunition 410w
Royal ordnance factories, Redundancy 410w
Tornado aircraft, Compensation 421w
Tornado aircraft, Exports 421w
Training aircraft, Defence procurement 420-1w
Trident 422w
Trident, Defence contracts 422-4w
UK membership of EC, Ministry of Defence 181w
Wessex helicopters 618w

Butter
Food stocks 28w
Subsidies 104w
Surpluses 287w

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1361-2
Questions
Blind, Dept of Education & Science 21w
Blind, Dept of Energy 183w
Blind, Dept of the Environment 62w
Blind, Dept of Trade & Industry 243w
Blind, Dept of Transport 34w
Blind, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 101w
Blind, Home Office 133w
Blind, House of Commons staff 229w
Blind, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 103-4w
Blind, Ministry of Defence 99-100w
Blind, Northern Ireland 204-5w
Blind, Scottish Office 210w
Blind, Treasury 177w
Blind, Welsh Office 159w
Business statement 1211
Death grants, Departmental leaflets 659-60w

Bypasses
Compensation 335w

Caborn, Mr Richard
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 51
Questions
Cervical cancer 161-2w
Depo Provera 75w
EC budget, Council of Ministers 495-7w
Family practitioner committees 659w
Further education, School population 94w
Namibia, Peace negotiations 525w
NATO, Nuclear weapons 28w
Wheelchairs 221w

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Education Act 1981 92w

Calling of Members
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 6, (06.12.84) 519, (10.12.84) 736, 855, (11.12.84) 908, 926

Cambridge University 186w
Higher education admission 186w

Camic Breath Analyser 643w

Cammell Laird
Warships 903

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Surveillance 567w, 737-40
Telephone tapping 737-40

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 22
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 745
Energy Select Committee (05.12.84) 342, 349
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 287
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (10.12.84) 752, (11.12.84) 937
Railway accidents, Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 174
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 756, 762, 800, 813, 819-20
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 371
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 31w
Business statement 505
Educational finance, Workers Educational Association 161
National Bus Company, Privatisation 11
Pesticides 242w
Trident 900

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 431-3
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 515-6
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 1027, 1028, 1031-3
Questions
Arts finance 353w
Budget 575w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 409w, 605w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 14w, 18

Forestry Commission, Audit 354w
Forests, Land acquisition 140-50w
Hong Kong, Elections 529w
NHS, Privatisation 206w
Prosecutions, Scotland 16w
Teachers, Scotland 334, 351w
Unemployment 359w
Universities, Scotland 166-7

Cancer
Departmental coordination 12w

"Cancer of the Cervix: Occupational risks" 161-2w

Capital allowances
Shipping 567w

Capital investment
Local government services 70w
London Regional Transport 36w
New towns 301w
Police 636w
Public expenditure 1200-1, 1204
Scotland 333

Capital taxes
Scotland 496w

Capital transfer tax
Nature conservation 572w

Capitation allowances 162, 189w
Essex 189w
Primary education 162

Caravan sites
Rate rebates 209w
Scotland 209w

Carbon monoxide 77w, 140w
Medical treatments 140w
Poisoning 77w

Carcinogens
Dyes 59-60w
Industrial health & safety 60-1w

Cardiff
Free ports 356w

Cardiovascular diseases
Orthopaedics 269w

Carlisle, Mr Alex
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1060
Questions
Remand centres 484w
Remand centres, Prison population 632-4w
Young offenders, Parole 563w
Young offenders, Prison population 634-6w
Young offenders, Remand in custody 633-4w
Youth custody, 485w
Youth custody, Parole 485w
Youth custody, Prison accomodation 633w
Youth custody, Prison population 634w
Youth custody, Sentencing 635w

Carlisle, Mr. John
Debates etc
Sports Fields & Recreational Facilities Bill, 1R (05:12:84) 385

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc
EC Environmental Council (10.12.84) 745
Questions
Capital transfer tax, Nature conservation 572w

Carlisle, Rt Hon Mark
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 938
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 916
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 362
Questions
Level crossings, Miniature warning lights 250w
Student grants, Parental contributions 155-6

Cars
Greater London 253w
Spain 554w

Carter-Jones, Mr Lewis
Debates etc
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 298
Questions
Handicapped, Voluntary organisations 225w
Leeward Islands, Aircraft 137w
Leeward Islands, HS748 aircraft 126-7w, 439w, 501w
Multiple sclerosis 224-5w
Multiple sclerosis, Medical research 224-5w
Occupational therapists 170-1w
Procurement, European Commission 127w
Royal ordnance factories, Redundancy 410w
UNESCO 526w

Cartwright, Mr John
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1344-6
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 58-61
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1084-5, 1085-6, 1086-7, 1141-2, (13.12.84) 1243, 1271-4
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 852-3, 854-7
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 919
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 6-7
Defence equipment 419w
JP233 airfield attack weapon system 418-9w
Lorries, Weighing machines 31-2w
Poland 526w
Trident, Defence expenditure 891

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 537
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1321

Central America 1035-6
Peace negotiations 518w

Central School of Art 21w

Centre 21
Hypermarkets 582w

Cereals
China 436-8w
EC external trade 437w
Ethiopia 594w
Export credit guarantees 286w
Intervention stocks 492, 530w
Prices 486-7
Surpluses 285w
USSR 436-8w

Certificates of Unruly Character (Conditions) Order 1977 305w

Cervical cancer 161-2w
Age 471w
Death 218w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc
Amendments & new clauses (12.12.84) 1078, 1128, 1155 (13.12.84) 1238, 1295
Points of order (13.12.84) 1261
Procedure (13.12.84) 1241
Scope of debate (12.12.84) 1091, (13.12.84) 1274, 1279, 1281

Chalker, Mrs Lynda, Minister of State for Transport
Debates etc
Tachographs, EC action (03.12.84) 132-6
Questions
A1, Construction materials 250w
A1, Road works 531w
Bitumens, Road construction 309w
British Rail 39w
Bus lanes, Cycleways 531-2w
Bypasses, Compensation 335w
Cars, Greater London 253w
Cycleways, Inner city areas 4-5
Cycling 251w
Cycling, Greater London 37w
Cycling, Road accidents 251-2w
Dartford tunnel 34w, 250-1w, 310-1w, 340w
Dartford tunnel, Debts 310w
Drinking & driving, Christmas 337w
Drinking & driving, Keep low campaign 612w
Drinking & driving, Research 337w
Driving tests, Administrative delays 251w
Driving tests, Basildon 408w
Driving tests, Keighley 336w
Driving tests, Stoke-on-Trent 251w
East London river crossing 530-1w
Greater London transport survey 252w
London docklands railway 611w
London Regional Transport, Capital investment 36w
London Regional Transport, Employment policy 37w
London Regional Transport, Public appointments 37w
Lorries, Greater London 29-30w
Lorries, Road accidents 408w
Lorries, Weighing machines 31-2w
Motorcycles, Road safety 31-2w
Motorways, Lighting 532w
Motorways, Speed limits 9-10w
M1, Lighting 532w, 611w
M1, Road traffic control 37-8w
M25, Lighting 611w
M25, Road accidents 533w, 909-11
M25, Road construction 8, 33w
Orbital road, West Midlands 32w
Oxford Circus Station, Fires 612-3w
Parking, Greater London 37w
Pelican crossings 8-9
Rear seat belts 12
Road Accident Statistics English Regions 578w
Road accidents, A3 336w
Road accidents, Greater London 35-6w
Road accidents, Motorcycles 339w
Road construction, Greater London 36w
Road safety barriers 35w
Road traffic 253w
Road works, Greater London 33-4w, 36w
Roads, A3 336w
Roads, Construction materials 249w
Roads, Greater London 34w
Roads, Public inquiries 252w
School transport 34-5w
Severn Bridge 32w
Severn Crossing Feasibility Study 578w
Transport, Greater London 36w
Transport police, Identification parades 253w
Transport subsidies, Local government expenditure 39w
Tyres, Motor vehicle safety 338w
Urban traffic control system, Greater London 37w
Urban transport 613w

Channel crossing 35w

Channon, Rt Hon Paul, Minister of State for Trade
Questions
Cereals, EC external trade 437w
China, Overseas trade 345w, 557w
Computer software, Exports 629w
East Germany, Trailers 341-2w
EC external trade, Iron & steel 123-4w
Export credit guarantees 556-7w
Furs, Imports 555w
Government assistance to industry, EC countries 12w
Industrial production, UK companies abroad 341w
Israel, EC external trade 555w
Japan, Typewriters 629-30w
Leeward Islands, HS748 aircraft 5w, 439w, 501w
Manufactured exports, OECD countries 346w
Multifibre arrangement 556w
Polyurethane, Eastern Europe 315w
Polyurethane, International cooperation 347-8w
Spain, Cars 554w
UK trade with EC 346-7w
USA, EC external trade 122-3w
USSR, Cereals 436-8w

Chapman, Mr Sydney
Debates etc

EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 746
Questions
Adult training strategy 447-8w
Arms control treaties 525w
Disaster Relief Office 17
Land use, Countryside 284-5w
Liability, Buildings 13
Nuclear weapons deployment 896
Public expenditure, Capital investment 1200-1
Skillcentre training agency 448w

Charter trustees
Local government (05.12.84) 386

Charter Trustees Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 386

Chemical weapons
Arms control 199-200w, 254w
Arms control treaties 514w

Chemicals
Production 560w

Cheney School 89w

Child benefit 375-6w, 378w, 606w

Child care
Local government expenditure 395w

Child relief 375-6w

Childbirth 323w

Children
Cycling 251-2w
Dental health 170w
Housing benefits 164w
Poverty 79w

Children in care 322-3w

Childrens hospitals
Expenditure 209w

Chile 525w
British Antarctic Territory 599w
Debts 299w
International Monetary Fund 373-4w
Military aircraft 617-8w
Warships 617-8w

Chilele Jawara 1040

China
Arms trade 428-9w
Cereals 436-8w
COCOM 1042
Drugs 218w
Foreign relations 1041-2
Overseas trade 330-1w, 345w, 557w, 1042
Prime Minister visits abroad 330-1w
Treaties (05.12.84) 389-472

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 688-91
Questions
Laboratories 500-1w
Motor vehicles 244w
Motor vehicles, Consumer information 347w
Student loans 92w

Christmas
Drinking & driving 337w

Christmas bonus 171w, 223-4w, 906

Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970 378-9w, 1206

Churchill, Mr Winston
Debates etc
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 296-7
Railway accidents, Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 173
Questions
Arms control treaties, Chemical weapons 514w

Cigarettes 249w
Tax yields 249w

Citizens advice bureaux
Scotland 191w

Citizenship of the British Dependent Territories
Hong Kong 200-1w

City Roads detoxification unit 659w

Civic trust 395-6w
Government grants 395-6w

Civil Aviation Authority 532w
Corporate plans 533w

Civil defence 4w, 284w
Adult education 92-3w
Bolton 306w
Farm wardens 285w
Farmers 284w, 286-8w
Food 286w
Nuclear power stations 306w
Nuclear war 279-80w
Police 561-2w
Training 184w

Civil Defence College 275w

Civil Disorder
Police training 642w

Civil servants
House of Commons select committees 367w
Northern Ireland 43w

Civil service
Hong Kong 26-7w
Northern Ireland 97w
Pay incentives 192-3w

***Clark, Mr Alan,** Under-Secretary of State for Employment*
Questions
Building industry, Unemployment 449w
Building workers, Hackney 312w, 359w
Coal mining, Pay 558w
Community programme 558w
Disablement resettlement officers 158w
Dock labour scheme 448w
Dock labour scheme, Felixstowe 448-9w
Employment, Manufacturing industries 502w
Employment level 631-2w
Employment Opportunities, Ilfracombe 343w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Northamptonshire 52w
Kelsey, Mr, Unemployment benefits 360-1w
Labour market, Men 557-8w
Short Brothers, Manpower 360w
Theatres, Technicians 449w, 501w
Tourist industry, Manpower 630w
Unemployment 359w, 447w, 499w, 501-3w, 557w
Unemployment, Greater London 449w
Unemployment, House of Commons questions 259-60w
Unemployment, Travel-to-work areas 503w
Unemployment, West Midlands 312-3w
Wages councils 501w
Young workers scheme 311-2w
Youth unemployment, Liverpool 631w

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 741-2
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 306-9, 320
Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 384

Clark, Dr Michael
Questions
Dept of Health & Social Security, Industrial disputes 591w
Eggs, Food standards 285w
Israel, High technology 1038-9
Secondary education, School choice 89w

Clark, Sir William
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 364, 365
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 15
Taxation, Pension funds 176-7w
Taxation, Pensions 1198-9

***Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth,** Minister of State for Health*
Questions
Abortions, NHS 271w
AIDS 160w, 470-2w
AIDS, Blood donors 160-1w
AIDS, NHS 471w
Ambulance services 170w
Blond McIndoe Centre, Upper Waiting Hall 540w
Blood, Screening 71-2w
Broadmoor Hospital, Riot control weapons 228w
Cervical cancer 161-2w
Cervical cancer, Age 471w
Cervical cancer, Death 218w
China, Drugs 218w
Cleaning services, Trent Regional Health Authority 381w
Community dental service clinics 217-8w
Contraceptives 662w
Contraceptives, Expenditure 662w
Dental charges 589w
Dental Estimates Board, Computers 322w
Dental health, Children 170w
Dental health, Health education 588w
Dental health, Sugar 377-8w
Dental services, Fluoridation 377w
Dentistry 217w, 322w
Dentistry, Appeals 587w
Dentists, Complaints 378w
Dentists, Costs 161w
Dentists, Manpower 461-2w
Dentists, Medical equipment 78w
Dentists, Pay 161w, 271w, 377w
Depo Provera 75w
District health authorities, Planning 539w
Doctors, Prescriptions 540w
Drug abuse 269w
Drug abuse, Government grants 585-6w
Drug industry, Manpower 266w
Drug research, Costs 224w
Drug side effects, Benzodiazepine 173-4w
Drug side effects, Tranquillisers 172w
Drugs, Expenditure 162w
Drugs, Export controls 191w
Drugs, Imports 219w
Drugs, International cooperation 75w
Drugs, Parallel imports 165w
Drugs, Patents 169w
Family doctors, Knutton 164w
Family planning clinics 378w
Family planning clinics, Derbyshire 322w
Family planning clinics, Finance 322w
Family practitioner committees 77w, 659w
Family practitioner committees, Computers in NHS 163-4w
Family practitioner services 267w
Foetal tissue, Medical research 472-3w
Generic prescribing 75-6w, 463-5w
Generic prescribing, Information services 383-4w, 592w
Generic prescribing, Limited list prescribing 83w, 318-21w, 323w
Generic prescribing, Quality control 162-3w
Health service staff, Back pain 589w
Health service staff, Fringe benefits 381w
Health service staff, Industrial accidents 590w
Health services, Negligence 172w
Health services, Per capita costs 222w
Health visitors 476w
Heart diseases, Smoking 268w
Heroin, Death 270w
Hospital ancillary staff, Redundancy 321w
Hospital beds, Smoking related diseases 268-9w
Hospital closures 474-5w
Hospital consultants, Ear nose & throat 473-4w
Hospital staff, Tuberculosis 666w
Hospitals, Cleaning services 590-1w
H2 receptor blocking drugs 384w
Limited list prescribing 163w, 166-7w, 219-20w, 381-2w, 383-4w, 463-5w, 538w, 660w
Limited list prescribing, Analgesics 465w
Limited list prescribing, Drug industry 166-7w
Limited list prescribing, Rural areas 383w
Limited list prescribing, Tranquillisers 167w

Limited list prescribing, Vitamins 383w
Lorazepam, Drug side effects 270w
Lung cancer, Smoking 268w
Medical students, Developing countries 592w
Merrell-Dow Corporation 74w
MIND, Mental patients 218w
Multiple sclerosis, Medical research 224-5w
Myasthenia gravis 270-1w
NHS, 174w
NHS, Expenditure 78w
NHS, Fertility 465-6w
NHS, Managers 81-2w, 172w, 478w
NHS, Manpower 317w
NHS, Privatisation 222-3w, 590w
NHS, Redundancy 589w
NHS, Venereal diseases 468-70w
NHS administration, Public appointments 466w
NHS charges 475-6w, 667-8w
NHS finance, Teaching hospitals 475w
NHS finance, Trent Regional Health Authority 73w
Nurses, Back pain 661w
Nurses, Manpower 542w
Occupational therapists 170-1w, 591-2w
Opticians, Manpower 587-8w
Opticians, Training 588w
Opticians, Women 588w
Orthopaedics, Cardiovascular diseases 269w
Out-patients, Smoking related diseases 269w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 169w
Prescriptions 164w, 661w
Prescriptions, Antiseptic lozenges & sprays 169w
Prescriptions, Family doctors 315w
Prescriptions, Rural areas 162w
Prestwich Hospital 164w
Private patients, NHS charges 592w
Regional health authorities, Contracts 651w
Regional health authorities, Planning 539-40w
Smoking, Death 269w
Smoking related diseases, Costs 270w, 384w
Test tube babies, Medical research 74w
Tranquillisers, Merseyside 269-70w
Tuberculosis, Greater Manchester 225-6w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority, Managers 82-3w, 226w, 271w, 381w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 358
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 435-8
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 379-80
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 517
Questions
Student grants, Scotland 337

Clay, Mr Bob
Questions
Ministry of Defence, Information 412w
Theatres, Technicians 449w, 501w

Cleaning services
Hospitals 590-1w
Trent Regional Health Authority 381w

Cleddau Bridge 719

Clothes
Origin marking (05.12.84) 387

Clothing
Hospital patients 323w

Clwyd
Integrated operations 357w

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1327
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1064
Questions
Airland battle 272w
Armed forces deployment, West Germany 273w
Business statement 506
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 722
Employment level, Wales 729
NATO, 272-3w
NATO, Europe 273w
NATO, Follow on force attack 273w
NATO ministerial meetings 411w
Nursery schools 94w
Public order policing, costs 639w
Regional aid, Cynon Valley 342w
South Africa, Durban three 517w
Taxation, Day nurseries 569w

Coal
Production 353w
Railway freight transport 721

Coal fired power stations
Electricity generation 551w

Coal mine closures 904, 907
Costs 1207

Coal mining
Cooperatives 183w
Death 257-8w
EC countries 23w
Industrial accidents 257-8w
Industrial disputes 14, 15, 16w, 43w, 102-3w, 139-40w, 172w, 189w, 201-2w, 277w, 324w, 332-3w, 341-3, 346-7, 351-2w, 409-10w, 457w, 496, 510w, 605w, 620-2w, 632w, 637-9w, 720-2, 908 (11.12.84) 927-38, 1193-4
Industrial investment 722
Manpower 253-4w
Pay 358w
Privatisation 23w
Scotland 139-40w, 341-3, 632w
Sick pay 172w
Wales 189w, 720-2

Coal stocks 102w

Coastal shipping 39w, 408w
EC countries 39w

Cockeram, Mr Eric
Questions
Agricultural surpluses 484-5
Butter, Surpluses 287w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 215w
School closures 97w

Cockfield, Lord 493w
European Commission 493w

COCOM
China 1042

Codes of practice
Animal welfare 288-9w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 109
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 862-4
Questions
Arms control, Chemical weapons 199-200w, 254w
Dentists, Medical equipment 78w
Diet & disease 485-6
Dual capable weapons 410w
Iran-Iraq war 514w
Metropolitan Police, Computers 183-4w
NATO joint exercises, Nuclear weapons 431w

Coleman, Mr Donald
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 934
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1063
Questions
A465, Road construction 355w
Business statement 1216-7
Industrial development, Neath 719

College of Occupational Therapists 591-2w

Columbus space station 500w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Questions
Cereals, Surpluses 285w
Coastal shipping, EC countries 39w
Licensing laws 133w
Licensing laws, Scotland 151w
"Parental Influence at School Consultation Paper" 163
Polychlorinated biphenyl, Waste disposal 118w
Shipping, Inquiries 339-40w
Type 22 frigates 427w

COMECON
Polyurethane 315w

Command papers
Speakers rulings & statements (11.12.84) 942

Commercial bills 457-8w
Bank of England 457-8w

Commercial court 14

Committee of Vice-Chancellors & Principals 22w

Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy 321w, 485

Committee stage
Speakers rulings & statements (04.12.84) 275

Common agricultural policy 404w, 607w
Expenditure 626w

Common commercial policy 1052

Common land 440w

Community care 82w
Finance 477w

Community dental service clinics 217-8w

Community programme 53-4w, 243w, 260w, 312w, 501w, 558-9w, 559-60w
Barnsley 53w
Married women 446-7w
Sex discrimination 168

Companies political contributions (05.12.84) 387-8

Companies (Political Donations) Bill 1984/85 1R (05.12.84) 387-8

Companies (Share Premium Account) Regulations 1984 (03.12.84) 25

Company accounts
Forestry commission 151w

Company investigations
Stocks & shares 10w

Company liquidations 438w

Compensation
Bypasses 335w
Control orders 443w
McCormack, George 51w
Tornado aircraft 421w
Town & country planning (07.12.84) 648
Young offenders 275w

Competition
Bus services 301-2w

Complaints
Dentists 378w
Solicitors 15
Stocks & shares 9w
Wages Inspectorate 260w

Complaints against police 638w
Northern Ireland 298w
Scotland 16w, 621w

Composite classes 210w
Scotland 210w

Computer privacy 132w
Personal records 331w

Computer Services Association 629w

Computer software
Copyright (05.12.84) 385
Exports 629w

Computer staff
Dept of Health & Social Security 226w

Computer training
Skillcentres 448w

Computers
Dental Estimates Board 322w
Metropolitan Police 183-4w

Computers in NHS
Family practitioner committees 163-4w

Concessionary fares 611-2w
Block grant 579w

Concessionary television licences 128-9w, 276-7w
Residential care 276-7w

Conferences
USA 308w

Conspiracy & Protection of Property Act 1875 14

Construction
Asbestos 61w
Prisons 304-6w
Public expenditure 582w
VAT 455w

Construction costs
Conwy tunnel 232w

Construction materials
A1 250w
Roads 249w

"Consultancy Inspection & Review Services in Government Departments" 127w

Consumer information
Motor vehicles 347w

Consumption
Beef & veal 625w
Sheep meat 625w

Contraceptives 662w
Expenditure 662w
Medical research 601-2w

Contracts
Regional health authorities 661w

Control orders 443w
Compensation 443w
Housing 443w

Controlled Drugs (Penalties) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 386

Conventional war
Falkland Islands 617w

Conventional weapons
Defence expenditure 424w, 430-1w, 897-8
Military balance 46w, 618w
NATO 615w

Convictions
Scotland 102-3w
Ulster Defence Regiment 418w

Conway, Mr Derek
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 287-9
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 371
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 652-4
Questions
Farm wardens, Training 489
Short Brothers 595w

Conwy tunnel 232w, 399w
Construction costs 232w

Cook, Mr Frank
Questions
Defence expenditure, Conventional weapons 897-8
Radioactive waste disposal 238w

Cook, Mr Robin
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 943, 948, 954-63, 971
Questions
EC budget 1046-7
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 1049
Thermal insulation, Scotland 402w

Coombs, Mr Simon
Questions
Electorate 535-8w

Cooperatives
Coal mining 183w

Copyright
Computer software (05.12.84) 385

Copyright (Computer Software) Amendment Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 385

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 915, 921-2
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 769, 793, 805, 818-9
Questions
Christmas bonus 171w
Drugs, Prisons 331-2w
Farm wardens 489
Furs, Imports 555w
Holloway Prison, Prison employment 486w
Holloway Prison, Prison staff 486-7w
Parkhurst Prison, Sanitation 3w
Prisons, Safety equipment 3w
Prisons, Sanitation 3w
Steel leghold traps 486w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 177, 232, 247, 257
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 292
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1116-7, 1170 (13.12.84) 1240, 1303-4
Local Government Bill, Standing Committee composition (13.12.84) 1237
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 847, 860, 867-9
Private notice question points of order (10.12.84) 740
Questions
Business statement 1218
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 740
Central America, Peace negotiations 518w
Detection rates, Metropolitan Police 277w
Housing improvement areas, Greater London Council 62w
Local government expenditure, Greater London Council 71w
Local government reform, Greater London Council 62-3w
Police dogs, Greater London 405w
Police dogs, Metropolitan Police 479w
Racial conflict, Metropolitan Police 277-9w
Stop & search, Metropolitan Police 279w

Co-responsibility levy (12.12.84) 1067-74
Milk 203w, 482, 483, 487-8, 489-90, 1049

Cormack, Mr Patrick
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 29-30
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1158-60, 1168
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 913, 921
Questions
All party groups 552-3w
Student grants, Parental contributions 160
VAT, Books 1194

Corporal punishment
Scotland 205w

Corporate plans
Civil Aviation Authority 533w

Corrie, Mr John
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1228
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 263-4w
Regional planning & development, Scotland 340-1
Salmon, Scotland 338-9

Corruption
Property Services Agency 119w

Cosmetics
Licensing 438w

Cost per pupil
Educational equipment 240-2w
Educational publications 240-2w
Essex 189w
Primary education 161

Cot deaths 377w

Council for National Academic Awards 21-2w

Council house rents 65-6w
Brighton 64-5w

Council house sales 644-56w
Greater London council 67-8w
Local government revenue 505w, 585w

Council house waiting lists
Greater London 238w

Council housing
Greater London 68w

Council housing finance
Rhymney Valley District Council 231-2w

Council of Europe
Local government 394w

Council of Ministers
EC Budget 495-7w

Council tenants
Personal records 238w

Councillors
Social security benefits 266w

Countryside
Land use 284-5w

County Hall 61-2w

Courts
Bradford 1w

Cowans, Mr Harry
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 32, 86
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1092, 1120-2, 1164 (13.12.84) 1242, 1251, 1268-71
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 31w

Cox, Mr Tom
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1334-8
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1300-2
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 673
Questions
Armed forces, Prisoners 411w
Army, Military discipline 411-2w
Defence research, Animal experiments 902
Hospital patients, Clothing 323w
Magistrates courts, Fines 184w
Nicaragua 516w
VAT, Telephone charges 298w

Craigen, Mr Jim
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 549, 560-1
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1234-5
Questions
Bus services, Scotland 620w
Gibraltar, Air routes 523w
Gibraltar, Building industry 523w
Gibraltar, Dockyards 523w
Gibraltar, Family allowances 524w
Gibraltar, Ferries 523-4w
Gibraltar, Health services 524w
Gibraltar, Housing 523w
Gibraltar, Income tax 524w
Gibraltar, Landing rights 524w
Housing support grants, Scotland 207w
Island councils, Scotland 41w
Mortgages 178w
Post office closures 120-1w
Redundancy payments office, Glasgow 359w
Rural areas, Strathclyde 350w

Cranborne, Viscount
Questions
REME static workshops 397-8w

Crash helmets
Motorcycles (05.12.84) 386-7

Cream
Scotland (10.12.84) 883-8

Cream (Heat Treatment) (Scotland) Regulations 1983 (10.12.84) 883-8

Credit card frauds
Office of Fair Trading 313w

Crime prevention panels
Scotland 206w

Crimes of violence
Fire services 485-6w
Metropolitan Police 277w
Peterhead Prison 201w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 296w
Strathclyde 513-4w
Unemployment 275w

Criminal liability
Driving offences (05.12.84) 386-7

Criminal statistics
Scotland 42w

Critchley, Mr Julian
Questions
Falkland Islands, Postal services 181w
Retirement age 78w
Unemployment benefits, Expenditure 77w

Crop spraying 28w, 179w, 577-8w, 622-3w
EC countries 577w
Prosecutions 577-8w

Cross border cooperation in Ireland
Helicopters 896

Crouch, Mr David
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 356

Crown Appointments Commission 127-8w

Crown courts 274w

Crown Proceedings Act 1947 614-5w

Crown prosecution service 246w

Crowther, Mr Stan
Questions
Regional development grants, Yorkshire & Humberside 345w

Cruelty to Children
Sexual offences 591w

Cruise missile sites 894

Cruise missiles 46w
Military exercises 427w
Nuclear weapons deployment 892-5

Cruise Watch 893

Cumbria 729

Cunliffe, Mr Lawrence
Questions
Engineering industry training board 447w
Heating allowances 904
Police, Greater Manchester 483w
Syrian Arab Republic, Terrorism 515w

Cunningham, Dr John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Possible hybridity of (03.12.84) 26
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 36-44, 57 (04.12.84) 254, 261-2, 274-5
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1127-33, 1175, 1184
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 843-6
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 914-5
Questions
Probation & aftercare, Metropolitan counties 134-6w
Property Services Agency, Corruption 119w

Curriculum 95w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1356, 1372-7
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1018-20
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 913
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 368
Questions
Business statement 1212

Customer Group for Fisheries Research & Development 328-9w

Customs & Excise
Dogs 16w
Drug crimes 194w
Drug seizures 194w
Firearms 194w
Manpower 175-6w

Cycleways
Bus lanes 531-2w
Inner city areas 4-5

Cycling 251w
Children 251-2w
Greater London 37w
Road accidents 251-2w

Cynon Valley 342w
Regional aid 342w

Cyprus 515w

Dairy farming 283-4w, 487-8
EC action 283w
Italy 283w
Northern Ireland 490-1, 595-6w
Outgoers scheme 488
Production quotas 488-9
Wales 355w, 357w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 23
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1072
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1340, 1349-52, 1357
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1022
Prime Ministers question time points of order (06.12.84) 496
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 366
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 513
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 1031, 1034, (12.12.84) 1076-7
Questions
Adelaide Island 599w
Argentina, Skyhawk aircraft 617w
British Leyland, Bathgate 215-6w
Channel crossing 35w
Chile, British Antarctic Territory 599w
Chile, Military aircraft 617-8w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 17
Falkland Islands, Armed forces deployment 274w
Falkland Islands, Conventional war 617w
Falkland Islands, Expenditure 1194
Falkland Islands, Peace negotiations 519-20w
Falkland Islands, Postal services 272w
Falkland Islands, Rules of engagement 233w, 617w
Fungicides 327w
Government Communications Headquarters 600w
HMS Conqueror 274w
HMS Conqueror, Diaries 425w, 616w
HMS Conqueror, Log books 48w, 274w, 403w, 616w
Insecticides 327-8w
Land drainage, Government grants 104w
Medical Research Council, Finance 89w
Moss, Brian 616w
Pesticides 328w
Railway electrification, East Coast railway line 7
Sites of special scientific interest, Pesticides 393w
Student grants 22w
Submarines 273w

Dartford Tunnel 34w, 250-1w, 310-1w, 340w
Debts 310w

Data Protection Act 1984 132w, 331w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 893-4
Nuclear weapons deployment 897
Trident 901
Trident, Defence expenditure 892

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc
Oral question time intervention (10.12.84) 717
Oral question time points of order (13.12.84) 1208
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1065
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 756
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 721
Council housing finance, Rhymney Valley District Council 231-2w
European Regional Development Fund 630w
Forestry 623w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 619-20w, 623w
Forestry Commission, Rights of way 620w
Forestry Commission, Scotland 620w
Forests, Wales 548-9w
Integrated operations, Clwyd 357w
Integrated operations, Wales 357-8w
Local government, Council of Europe 394w
Members correspondence, Dept of Transport 1206
Paymaster-General 727-8
Regional aid 555w
Regional planning & development, Wales 724-5
Tax yields 573w
Teachers, Manpower 86w
Transport subsidies, Local government expenditure 39w
Tree planting 623w
Tree planting, Wales 549w
Trident 901
"Way Forward" 484

Davis, Mr Terry
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 579-86
Questions
Leigh Road School, Saltley 158w
NHS, Managers 172w
Prisoners on remand, Food 134w
Siddique, Mohammed 2w
Unemployment 1192
West Midlands Regional Health Authority, Managers 82-3w, 226w, 271w, 381w
Winson Green Prison, Dental services 282w
World Bank, Public appointments 137w

Day fines 280w

Day nurseries
Taxation 569w

Deaf
Special education 93w
Teacher training 93w, 451w
Teachers 333w

Deakins, Mr Eric
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 392, 410-2, 443
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1016-8
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 114
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1142-3
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 859
Questions
Butter, Subsidies 104w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 351-2w
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 626w

Defence expenditure 181w
EC Agricultural Council, EC budget 627w
EC budget 598w, 1046
EC budget, EC Agricultural Council 598w, 1047-8
Fats, Nutrition & health 321w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 490
NATO ministerial meetings 410w
Power stations, Information 101-2w
Supplementary benefits 163w
Young people, Pay 191-2w

Dearing, Ronald 737

Death
Asbestos 267w
Cervical cancer 218w
Coal mining 257-8w
Hares 69-70w
Heroin 270w
Hypothermia 461w
Industrial accidents 360w
McCabe, Norah 602w
Northern Ireland 295-6w, 298w
Railway accidents 309-10w
Smoking 269w
Smoking related diseases 665-6w
Ulster Defence Regiment 413-5w
Youth training scheme 51w, 619w

Death Grants 72w
Departmental leaflets 659-60w

Death rate
Scotland 619w

Debts
Chile 299w
Dartford Tunnel 310w
Developing countries 572w

Decriminalisation
Scotland 348

Defence 272-3w, 431w
Europe 427w
Greece 432w

Defence contracts
British Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre 420w
Trident 422-4w

Defence Equipment 419w
Ulster Defence Regiment 412-3w

Defence expenditure 181w, 430w
Conventional weapons 424w, 430-1w, 897-8
Trident 891-2

Defence land
Air traffic 578-9w

Defence procurement 100w, 903-4
Guided weapons 46w, 426w
Military aircraft 427-8w
Nuclear weapons 48w
Training aircraft 420-1w, 618w
West Germany 430w

Defence research
Animal experiments 892, 902-3

Defence research establishments
Shoeburyness 427w

Delyn
Enterprise zones 718-9

Demolition
Divis flats 348w

Denning, Rt Hon Lord 170-2w

Dental charges 589w

Dental Estimates Board 587w
Computers 322w

Dental health
Children 170w
Health education 588w
Sugar 377-8w

Dental services
Fluoridation 377w
Winson Green Prison 282w

Dentistry 217w, 322w
Appeals 587w

Dentists
Complaints 378w
Costs 161w
Manpower 461-2w
Medical equipment 78w
Pay 161w, 212-3w, 271w, 377w
Scotland 212-3w
Scottish health boards 350-2w

Departmental circulars
Police 129w

Departmental coordination
Cancer 12w
Regional aid 403w

Departmental leaflets
Death grants 659-60w

Depo Provera 75w

Deportation 479w

Dept of Education & Science
Blind 21w
UK membership of EC 187w

Dept of Employment
UK membership of EC 192w

Dept of Energy
Blind 183w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 23-4w
Overtime 23w
UK membership of EC 183w

Dept of Health & Social Security
Advertising 375w
Computer staff 226w
Expenditure 374-5w
Industrial disputes 77w, 170, 171w, 226w, 271w, 591w, 666w
Members correspondence 323w
Office of Chief Scientist 227w
UK membership of EC 226w

Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 467w
Stockport 74-6w

Dept of the Environment
Blind 62w
International Youth Year 61w
UK membership of EC 180w

Dept of Trade & Industry
Blind 243w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 5w
UK membership of EC 190w, 347w

Dept of Transport
Blind 34w
Employees suggestion schemes 252w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 34w
Local government reform 36w
Members correspondence 1206, (13.12.84) 1208
UK membership of EC 179w

Derbyshire
Family planning clinics 322w

Derbyshire County Council 495

Detection rates
Metropolitan Police 4w, 277-9w, 307-8w, 479-84w

Developing countries
Debts 572w
Medical students 592w

Development land tax 247w

Development plans 657w

Dewar, Mr Donald
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1223-5
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 373-4
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 508-9
Teachers, Scotland (12.12.84) 1077
Teachers, Standing Order No. 10 applications (12.12.84) 1075
Questions
Coal mining, Scotland 343
Fine defaulters, Scotland 262-3w
Housing associations, Scotland 211w
Housing associations, Strathclyde 211w
Housing construction, Scotland 211w
Housing revenue accounts, Scotland 261w
Housing support grants, Scotland 261w
Legal aid, Scotland 347
Local government functions, Scottish Office 217w
Prison population, Scotland 262-3w
Prisoners release, Scotland 263w
Rape, Scotland 216-7w
Sheltered housing, Scotland 210-1w
Teachers, Scotland 336
Unemployment, Scotland 262w
Unemployment benefits, Scotland 262w

Diabetes 76w

Diaries 425w, 616w
HMS Conqueror 425w, 616w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 875
£1 notes (12.12.84) 1185-6, 1188
Questions
Defence procurement 100w
National Union of Mineworkers 168

"Diet & Cardiovascular Disease" 485

Diet & disease 485-6
Fats 321w

Diets
Pregnant women 380w

Diplomatic immunity 521-2w
Road accidents 101w

Diplomatic relations
Africa 198-9w

Diplomatic service 521w
Honduras 518-9w
Nicaragua 340w, 518-9w

Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland 295-6w, 330w, 602w

DIR79/7/EEC 267w

Disablement resettlement officers 158w

Disaster relief 15w
Ethiopia 14-5w, 16-8, 135-8w, 169, 404-5w, 453w, 594w, 609-10w
Intervention stocks 609-10w

Disaster Relief Office 17

Disciplinary proceedings 349w

Disclosure of information
Local authorities (05.12.84) 384
Schools (05.12.84) 386

Discretionary student grants 153-4w

Dispensing Doctors Association 383w

Disposable income 193w
Scotland 454w

District health authorities
Planning 539w

Divis flats 348w
Demolition 348w

Divorced people 558-60w

Dixon, Mr Don
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Official Report (05.12.84) 350
Questions
Business statement 503, 1212-3
Warships, Shipbuilding 428w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 57, 111, 114 (04.12.84) 182, 214
Questions

Assisted places scheme 170
Control orders, Compensation 443w
Gays the Word, Books 17w, 177-8w, 455-6w
Generic prescribing 464-5w
Health service staff, Prosecutions 461w
Homelessness, Greater London 443w
Homicide, Metropolitan Police 307-8w
Housing starts, Greater London 443-4w
Limited list prescribing 464-5w
Limited list prescribing, Analgesics 465w
Metropolitan Police, Detection rates 4w, 479-84w
Multiple occupation, Fire prevention 443w
NHS charges 475-6w, 667-8w
Office of Chief Scientist, Dept of Health & Social Security 227w

Dock labour scheme 448w
Felixstowe 448-9w

Dockyards 430w
Gibraltar 523w

Doctors
Prescriptions 540w
Scottish health boards 350-2w

Dog licences 180w

Dogs
Customs & Excise 16w
Drugs 331-2w

Domestic electrical appliances
Imports 121-2w

Domestic gas appliances
Exceptional needs payments 538w

Dormand, Mr Jack
Questions
Crop spraying 179w
Cycleways, Inner city areas 4-5

Dorrell, Mr Stephen
Questions
Student grants, Costs 18-9w

Douglas, Mr Dick
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 364, 376
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 516
Questions
Coal mining, Scotland 342-3
Conventional weapons, Defence expenditure 424w
Law of the Sea Convention 519w
Legal aid, Scotland 202w
Regional planning & development, Scotland 207w
Trident, Costs 423w
Trident, Defence contracts 422w

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1229
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 512
Questions
Blind, Teachers 333w
Drug crimes, Lothian 202-4w
Student grants, Scotland 337

Dreyfus, Elizabeth 245-6w

Drinking & driving
Christmas 337w
Keep Low campaign 612w
Research 337w

Driving licences (05.12.84) 388

Driving offences (05.12.84) 388
Criminal liability (05.12.84) 386-7
Safety belts 332w

Driving tests
Administrative delays 251w
Basildon 408w
Handicapped drivers 612w
Keighley 336w
Stoke-on-Trent 251w

Drug abuse 269w, (05.12.84) 386, 564w
Government grants 385-6w, 585-6w
Merseyside 564w

Drug crimes (05.12.84) 386
Customs & Excise 194w
Lothian 202-4w
Scotland 202-4w
Young offenders 332w

Drug industry
Limited list prescribing 166-7w
Manpower 266w

Drug research
Costs 224w

Drug Seizures
Customs & Excise 194w

Drug side effects
Benzodiazepine 173-4w
Lorazepam 270w
Tranquillisers 172w

Drugs
China 218w
Dogs 331-2w
Expenditure 162w
Export controls 191w
Imports 219w
International cooperation 75w
Liverpool Prison 566w
Paediatrics 81w
Parallel imports 165w
Patents 169w
Prescriptions 463-5w, 538w, 660w
Prisons 331-2w, 566w
Smuggling 194w
Ulcers 384w
World Health Organisation 75w

du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Questions
Forestry Commission, Audit 354w

Dual capable weapons 410w

Dublin summit (05.12.84) 352-9

Dubs, Mr Alfred
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 23
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 826, 828, 830
Questions
Economic growth 454w
Energy conservation 510w
Helicopters, Northern Ireland 895
Housing construction, Greater London 61w
Isle of Man, Official visits 129w
Nicaragua 516w
Nicaragua, Overseas aid 15w
Prisons, Construction 304-6w
Road blocks, A360 642w
Solicitors, Complaints 15
Unemployment, Greater London 449w

Duffy, Mr A E P
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 921
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 896
Exercise Autumn Train, Helicopters 903
Student grants, Parental contributions 492-3

Dundee
Areas of special need 665w
Employment by sector 510w
Hospital waiting lists 40-1w, 512w
Housing support grants 401-2w
Local government expenditure 402w, 511w
Supplementary benefits 586w
Unemployment 511w
Youth training scheme 619w

Dundee District Council 401-2w

Dunn, Mr Bob, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science
Questions
Blind, Teachers 333w
Capitation Allowances, Essex 189w
Cheney School 89w
Cost per pupil, Essex 189w
Education, Essex 188w
Education, Local government expenditure 95w
Education, Metropolitan districts 20-1w
Education Act 1981 92w
Educational finance 162
Educational maintenance allowance 86-90w
Educational publications, Cost per pupil 240-2w
Free school meals 157-8
Grammar schools, School population 22-3w
Handicapped pupils 95w
Leigh Road School, Saltley 158w
Local education authorities, VAT 187w
Nursery schools 94w
Primary education, Capitation allowances 162
Primary education, Cost per pupil 161
Pupil-teacher ratios, Somerset 92w
Pupil-teacher ratios, West Midlands 153w
School closures 97w
School closures, Newcastle under Lyme 96w
School meals, Costs 487w
School population 93-4w
Secondary education, School choice 89w
Special education 452w
Special education, Deaf 93w
Special education, Statistics 595w
Swann Committee 153w
Teacher training, Deaf 451w
Teacher training, Dyslexia 487-8w
Teachers, Leicestershire 595w
Teachers, Manpower 86w, 157w
Teachers, Pay 451-2w
VAT, Books 333-4w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 181-9, 200
Oral question time points of order (13.12.84) 1208
Questions
Air traffic, Defence land 578-9w
Ambulance services, Assault 541w
Ambulance services, Sick pay 541w
Assaults on police 485-6w
Bus services, Plymouth 3
Bus services, Privatisation 7
Concessionary fares, Block grant 579w
Crimes of violence, Strathclyde 513-4w
Medical students, Developing countries 592w
M25, Road accidents 911
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 593w

Durban three 517w, 1045
South Africa 517w, 1045

Dyes
Carcinogens 59-60w
Industrial health & safety 59-60w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 22
EC budget (11.12.84) 995
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 76-7, (04.12.84) 214
Local Government bill, Com (12.12.84) 1097-1101, 1159, 1165-6, 1170-1, (13.12.84) 1275-8
Questions
Alarm missiles, Export promotion 429w
European Union 1051

Dyslexia
Teacher training 487-8w

Eadie, Mr Alexander
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 933
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 378
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 514
Questions
Coal mining, Scotland 341-2
School closures, Midlothian 207w

Ealing
housing construction 62w

Ear disorders
Radiophones 379w

Ear nose & throat 473-4w
Hospital consultants 473-4w
Hospital waiting lists 474w

Early warning systems
Nimrod aircraft 272w
Shackleton aircraft 296w, 425w

Earnings limits 78w, 167-8w
National insurance contributions 167-8w

Earnings rules
Unemployment benefits 78w

East Coast railway line
Railway electrification 7

East Dyfed Health Authority 160w

East Germany
Trailers 341-2w

East London river crossing 530-1w

East West relations 515-6w

Eastern Arts Association 732-3

Eastern Europe
Polyurethane 315w

Eastern National Bus company 310w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 447-50
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 238-40
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 299-300
Questions
Curriculum 95w
Industrial energy prices 24w
Tuberculosis, Greater Manchester 225-6w

EC accession
Spain 25w, 600w, 1052

EC action
Air pollution control (04.12.84) 302-22
Bacteria 117w
Dairy farming 283w
Footwear industry 121w
Industrial noise 449w
Iron & steel industry 244w
Lead free petrol 505-6w
Lorries 336-7w, 339w
Misleading advertising 124w
Tachographs (03.12.84) 132-45
Textile industry 121w
VAT 17w, 97-9w

EC Agricultural Council 482, 529-30w
EC budget 598w, 627w, 1047-8
Ministerial statements (12.12.84) 1067-74

EC aid 497w
Africa 493-4w

EC budget 127w, 177-8w, 370w, 568w, 571w, 598w, 607w, (11.12.84) 942-1001, 1045-7, 1049, 1050-1
Council of Ministers 495-7w
EC Agricultural Council 598w, 627w, 1047-8
UK contributions 1207-8

EC budget contributions (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC Budget Council 194-5w

EC Cons Doc 8322/84 (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC Cons Doc 8879/84 (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC Cons Doc 9613/84 (04.12.84) 302-22

EC Cons Doc 10222/84 (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC countries
Coal mining 23w
Coastal shipping 39w
Crop spraying 577w
Foreign students 241w
Government assistance to industry 12w
Milk 29-30w
VAT 1196

EC Development Council 15w

EC draft 5899/84 (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC draft 5937/84 (03.12.84) 132-45

EC draft 7805/84/1 (04.12.84) 302-22

EC draft 7805/84/2 (04.12.84) 302-22

EC draft 8445/84 (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC draft 8454/84 (11.12.84) 942-1001

EC Environment Council 394w
Ministerial statements (10.12.84) 741-6

EC external trade
Cereals 437w
Iron & steel 123-4w
Israel 555w
USA 122-3w

EC Finance Council 573w

EC Fisheries Council 289-90w, 626w

EC integration 1049-50

EC internal trade 1052

EC law
Social security 267w

EC staff 1047-8

EC Transport Council 339w

Economic growth 454w, 570w

Economic models
Unemployment 568w

Economic policy 169, 496, 1191, 1193

Economic situation (06.12.84) 519-602, 1197

"Economy & Higher Education" 166

Education
Essex 188w
Ethnic minorities 153w
Local government expenditure 95w
Metropolitan districts 20-1w
Non-metropolitan counties 188w
Per capita costs 20-1w
Wales 297w, 355w, 717
Welsh language 550w

Education Act 1944 234w
Members correspondence 234w

Education Act 1981 92w, 95w

Education allowances
Boarding schools 606w

Education & industry 159, 356w

Education Of Children From Ethnic Minority Groups Committee Of Inquiry 153w

Education Science & Arts Select Committee (14.12.84) 1381

Education support grants 488-94w

Education (School Budgets) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 386

Educational equipment
Cost per pupil 240-2w

Educational finance 162, (05.12.84) 386
Higher education 608-9w
Wales 231-2w, 355w, 717-8
Workers Educational Association 161

Educational Institute of Scotland (11.12.84) 1027-34

Educational maintenance allowance 86-90w
Further education 165

Educational publications
Cost per pupil 240-2w
Wales 296-7w

Edwards, Mr Bob
Questions
Passenger transport executives 1-2

Edwards, Rt Hon Nicholas, Secretary of State for Wales
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Ministerial statements (12.12.84) 1056-66
Questions
Building workers, Wales 230w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 721-2
Coal mining, Wales 720-2
Council housing finance, Rhymney Valley District Council 231-2w
Dairy farming, Wales 355w, 357w
Elderly, Wales 548w
Employment level, Wales 729
Factories, Wales 356-7w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 354-5w
Free ports, Cardiff 356w
High technology, Wales 356w
Integrated operations, Clwyd 357w
Integrated operations, Wales 357-8w
Job release scheme, Wales 230w
Laura Ashley, Wales 549-50w
Mid Wales Development Board, Finance 549w
Milk, Wales 723-4
National Coal Board 355w
National Coal Board, Accountants 721
Post Office, Wales 548w
Private education, Wales 549w
Redundancy, Wales 720-1
Regional aid, Wales 724-5
Regional planning & development, Wales 724-6
Self-employed, Wales 230w
Special development areas, Wales 725-6
Training loans 229-30w
Unemployment, Gwynedd 356w
Unemployment, Wales 726-7, 729
Welsh Development Agency 722-3

Effective Prescribing Informal Working Group 75-6w, 465w

Eggar, Mr Tim
Questions
Government departments, Inquiries 127w
Scargill, Arthur 168

Eggs
Food standards 285w

El Salvador 522w
Military aid 340w

Elderly
Wales 548w

Election offences
Prosecutions 567w

Elections (10.12.84) 754-838
Hong Kong 529w
Northern Ireland (06.12.84) 604-37

Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill 1984/85
Rem stages (06.12.84) 604-37

Electorate 535-8w

Electrical control equipment
Plugs & sockets 314w

Electrical Power Engineers Association 352-3w

Electrical safety 314w

Electricity generation
Coal fired power stations 551w
Oil consumption 170

Electricity tariffs
Air pollution 409w

Electromagnetic interference
Aircraft 33w
Ships 33w

Electronic surveillance 642w

Electronics industry
Government assistance to industry 499w
Research 498w

Employees contributions
National insurance 585w

Employees suggestion schemes
Dept of Transport 252w

Employers contributions
National insurance 1196

Employers statutory sick pay scheme 168w
Publicity 374w

Employment 574w
Manufacturing industries 502w
Personal taxation 573w
Scotland 150w
Service industries 502w
Small businesses 1192

Employment by sector
Dundee 510w
Scotland 510w

Employment level 571-2w, 574w, 631-2w, 1192
Scotland 509w
Wales 729

Employment opportunities 404w, 419w
Barnstaple 343w
Enterprise zones 238w, 441-2w
Ilfracombe 343w
London docklands 656w
Pay 1196-7
Scotland 208-9w
Skilled workers 1192
Wales 159w

Employment policy
London Regional Transport 37w

Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1984 (10.12.84) 754

Employment schemes 92w
Public expenditure 1205
Small businesses 256-7w

Energy conservation 510w
Building regulations 180w
Scotland 211w

Energy prices
VAT 904

Engineering industries
Apprentices 58w, 558w

Engineering Industry Training Board 447w, 558w

English National Opera 734-5

Enterprise agencies
Wales 230w

Enterprise allowance scheme
Northamptonshire 52w
Scotland 140w
Wales 231w

Enterprise zones
Delyn 718-9
Employment opportunities 238w, 441-2w
Powys 718
Trafford Park 441w
Wales 718-9

Entry clearances
Fees & charges 598w, 627-8w, 636w

Enveloping schemes 63-4w

Environment
Agricultural policy 529w, 583w

Environment protection
Forestry Commission 152w

Environment Select Committee 70w

Environmental impact assessment (10.12.84) 741-6

Environmental Pollution Royal Commission 584w

Epidural injections 323w
Midwives 323w

Equal opportunities 97w

"Equal Opportunities Policy Statement (Northern Ireland)" 97w

Eritrea 453 w

Erne catchment area 458w

Essex
Capitation allowances 189w
Cost per pupil 189w
Education 188w
Public transport 310w

Estates
Scotland 495w

Estimates days (13.12.84) 1237

Ethiopia 521w
Cereals 594w
Disaster relief 14-5w, 16-8, 135-8w, 169, 404-5w, 453w, 594w, 609-10w
Food aid 492
Human rights 628w
Ministers visits abroad 16, 521w

Ethnic groups
Higher education 157w

Ethnic minorities
Education 153w
Foster care 477-8w

Europe
Defence 427w
NATO 273w

European Assembly budgetary powers 495w

European Assembly elections
Harmonisation of legislation 331w

European Assembly members
Pay 3w

European Charter of Local Self-Government 394w

European Commision
Cockfield, Lord 493w
Procurement 127w
Public appointments 1048

European Communities (Definition of treaties) (Undertaking on Supplementary Finance) Order 1984 177-8w

European Council, Dublin
Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 352-9

European Day of Music 205w

European fighter aircraft 429w
Military aircraft 891-2

European Regional Development Fund 630w
Barnstaple 392w
British Telecom 437-8w
Ilfracombe 396w
Manchester Airport 124-5w
Scotland 42-3w, 263w, 339
Textile industry 437w

European Union 1049-50, 1051

EUTELSAT (Immunities & Privileges) Order 1984 (03.12.84) 25

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
British Transport Police 578w
East London river crossing 530-1w
London docklands railway 611w
"Teaching Quality White Paper" 94w

Evidence
House of Commons select committees 361-5w

Ewing, Mr Harry
Debates etc
Prime Ministers question time points of order (11.12.84) 908
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 380
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 518
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 939, 1029-30, 1031
Questions
Regional planning & development, Scotland 340
Student grants, Scotland 337
Taxpayers 456-8w

Examinations
Scotland (11.12.84) 1027-34
Standing Order No 10 applications (12.12.84) 1076

Exceptional needs payments 84w
Domestic gas appliances 538w
Funerals 379w

Exercise Autumn Train 903
Helicopters 903

Exercise Brave Defender 428w

Exercise Lionheart 430w

Export controls
Drugs 191w
Foetal tissue 455w

Export credit guarantees 556-7w
Aircraft 1194
Cereals 286w

Export promotion 101w
Alarm missiles 429w

Exports
Art works 733-4
Computer software 629w
Tornado aircraft 421w

Extradition
Republic of Ireland 152-3w

Extremely low frequency 181-2w

Fabric Origin Marking Bill 1984/85 1R (05.12.84) 387

Factories
Wales 356-7w

Fair Employment Agency
Northern Ireland 458w

Fairbairn, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 511
Questions
Business statement 507
Police housing, Scotland 513w

Falkland Islands
Armed forces deployment 274w
Armed forces pay 49w
Armed forces strength 432w
Conventional war 617w
Costs 431w
Expenditure 1194
Fish conservation 598-9w
Fishing catches 599w
Fishing vessels 617w
Housing construction 440w
Peace negotiations 519-20w
Postal services 181w, 272w, 431w
Rules of engagement 233w, 617w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 575-6
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 864, 866
Questions
Tax burden, Small businesses 1201-2
Trains, Advertising 32w

Falmouth Shiprepair 7w
Privatisation 7w

Family allowances
Gibraltar 524w

Family doctors
Knutton 164w
Prescriptions 315w

Family income
Low incomes 73w, 663-4w
Scotland 540w

Family planning clinics 378w
Derbyshire 322w
Finance 322w

Family practitioner committees 77w, 659w
Computers in NHS 163-4w

Family practitioner services 267w

Farleigh Wallop
Prime Minister domestic visits 233w

Farm Animal Welfare Council 288-9w

Farm buildings
Asbestos 529w

Farm capital grant scheme 433-6w

Farm wardens 285w, 489
Civil defence 285w
Training 489

Farmers 284w
Civil defence 284w, 286-8w
VAT 371w

Farmers Union of Wales 160w

Farr, Sir John
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 964, 980-2
Oral question time points of order (12.12.84) 1052-3
Questions
Business statement 1210-1
Dept of Health & Social Security, Industrial disputes 170
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 16-7
India 516w
Secondary education, Information technology 92w
Tax allowances, Shipping 571w
Ugandan Asians 1036-7

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Debates etc
Companies (Political Donations) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 387-8
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 119-21 (04.12.84) 205, 220
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1139-41, 1148 (13.12.84) 1242, 1251, 1274-5, 1298
Local Government Bill, Standing Committee composition (13.12.84) 1236
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 865
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 924
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 369
Questions
Bus services, Competition 301-2w
Buses 335w
Buses, Metropolitan counties 336w
Expenditure, Local government reform 572w
Labour market, Men 557-8w
Local government expenditure 441w
Nicaragua 516w
Pregnant women, Diets 380w
Streamlining the Cities responses 392w
Student loans 160

Fats
Diet & disease 321w
Nutrition & health 321w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 22
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 356
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 396, 398, 427-9, 437
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 381
Questions
Auctions 554w
British Museum 494w
Business statement 1214
Furniture, Auctions 245-6w

Favell, Mr Tony
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1080, 1116
Questions
Student loans 91w

Fees & charges
Entry clearances 598w, 627-8w, 636w

Felixstowe
Dock labour scheme 448-9w

Felixstowe Dock & Railway Bill 1984/85 448-9w

Fenner, Mrs Peggy, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
"Advice to the Farmer" 288w
Advisory Committee on Pesticides 104w
Agricultural research, Pest control 625-6w
Animal experiments, Pesticides 290w
Animal welfare, Codes of practice 288-9w
Animals, Mawnan Smith 28-9w
Aujeszkys disease 483-4
Civil defence 284w
Crop spraying 28w, 622-3w
Diet & disease 485-6
Farm buildings, Asbestos 529w
Farm wardens 489
Farm wardens, Civil defence 285w
Farm wardens, Training 489
Farmers, Civil defence 286w
Food, Rationing 286w
"Food & Agricultural Controls in War" 286w
Food & Environment Protection Bill (HL) 1984/85 327w, 625w
Forestry 623w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 623w
Fungicides 327w
Hill farming 287w
"Home Defence & the Farmer" 284w, 287w
Horses, Animal welfare 289w
Insecticides 327-8w
Land drainage, Government grants 104w
Land use, Countryside 284-5w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Security 288w
Pesticides 104-5w, 327-8w, 529w
Pigeon racing, Poultry diseases 287w
Soil Survey of England & Wales, Finance 288w
Tree planting 623w

Ferries
Gibraltar 523-4w

Fertility
Medical research 465-6w
NHS 465-6w

FH70 howitzers 430w

Field, Mr Frank
Questions
Advertising, Dept of Health & Social Security 375w
Business statement 504
Crown Appointments Commission 127-8w
Exceptional needs payments, Domestic gas appliances 538w
Falkland Islands, Costs 431w
Housing benefits, Publicity 374w
Hypothermia, Death 461w
Low incomes, Family income 73w
Social security benefits, Industrial disputes 265-6w
Social security benefits, Publicity 168-9w
Supplementary benefits, Heating allowances 163w

Fields, Mr Terry
Questions
El Salvador, Military aid 340w
Tax rebates, Industrial disputes 457w

Fife
Prosecutions 201-2w
Regional aid 208w

Fife Regional Council 332

5 Airborne Brigade 99w

Financial management unit 497-8w

Financial targets
Ordnance Survey 116w
Water authorities 117w, 441w
Welsh Water Authority 159w, 399w

Fine defaulters
Prostitution 280-1w
Scotland 262-3w

Fines 280w
Industrial health & safety 257w
Magistrates courts 184w
Picketing 638w
Young offenders 275w

Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 212-5
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 859-61
Questions
Zoological Society of London 580w

Fire escapes 443w

Fire prevention
Multiple occupation 443w

Fire services 563w
Crimes of violence 485-6w
Privatisation 636w

Firearms
Customs & Excise 194w
Ulster Defence Regiment 414w

Firearms certificates
Northern Ireland 610w
Ulster Defence Regiment 349w

Fires
Oxford Circus Station 612-3w
Scotland 620-1w

Firing ranges 100w
Pirbright 100w

1st British Corps 272-3w

Fish conservation
Falkland Islands 598-9w

Fish farming
Government grants 624-6w
Pollution control 624w
River pollution 582-3w, 624w

Fish processing
Scotland 207-8w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 564-6, 589, 592
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 370
Questions
Coal mine closures 904
Coal mine closures, Costs 1207
House prices 571w
National Coal Board, Accounting 495
Primary education, Capitation allowances 162
Satellite killers 426-7w
Taxation 298w
Uganda, Human rights 1036

Fisheries 289-90w
Isle of Man 639w
Northern Ireland 639w
Research 328-9w

Fisheries Research & Development Board 328-9w

Fishery agreements
Herring 481
Spain 481-2

Fishery protection
Salmon 339

Fishing
North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board 302w

Fishing catches
Falkland Islands 599w

Fishing vessels
Falkland Islands 617w
North of Scotland box 350w

Fishing Vessels (Acquisition & Improvement) (Grants) (Amendment) Scheme 1984 (10.12.84) 754

501st Tactical Missile Wing 282w

Flannery, Mr Martin
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1297
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 928, 931, 932, 933, 936-7

Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 29, 62, 71
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1161-2, 1178
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 936
Questions
Economic policy 169

Gould, Mr Bryan
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 658, 671-5, 690, 701
Questions
Bank of England, Commercial bills 457-8w
Civil defence, Nuclear power stations 306w
Israel, EC external trade 555w
Manufactured exports, OECD countries 346w
Money supply 298w, 373w
Student grants 90w
Vosper Thornycroft, Pension funds 315w, 348w

Gourlay, Mr Harry
Questions
Teachers, Scotland 206w, 334

Government assistance to industry 555-6w, 609w
Barnstaple 342-4w
Bioengineering 499w
EC countries 12w
Electronics industry 499w
Ilfracombe 342-4w
Knowsley 126w
Prestwick Freeport Company 152w

Government Communications Headquarters 600w

Government contracts 329w

Government departments
Greater Manchester 12w
Inquiries 127w

Government grants
Action on Smoking & Health 466w
Agriculture 624w
BBC external services 517-8w
British Leyland 553w
Civic trust 395-6w
Drug abuse 385-6w, 585-6w
Fish farming 624-6w
Inner city partnerships 506-7w
Land drainage 104w
Private education 549w

Government grants to voluntary organisations 82w
Dept of Energy 23-4w
Dept of Trade & Industry 5w
Dept of Transport 34w
Health services 80-1w
Home Office 129-31w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 28w
Ministry of Defence 99w
Treasury 16w

"Government Purchasing" 329w

Gow, Mr Ian, Minister for Housing and Construction
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1338-44, 1357, 1359
Questions
Construction, Public expenditure 582w
Council house sales 644-56w
Council house sales, Local government revenue 505w, 585w
European Regional Development Fund, Barnstaple 392w
European Regional Development Fund, Ilfracombe 396w
Housing associations, Accounting 120w
Housing finance 119w
Housing investment programmes 393w
Housing subsidies 505w
Hulme estate 441w
Local government expenditure, Housing investment programmes 234w
Multiple occupation, Fire prevention 443w
Ordnance Survey, Financial targets 116w
Ordnance Survey Review Committee 117w
Polychlorinated biphenyl, Waste disposal 118w
Radioactive waste disposal 238w
Ronan Point, Public inquiries 507w
Stansted Airport 301w, 584-5w
Water authorities, Operating costs 396w

Gower, Sir Raymond
Questions
Factories, Wales 356-7w
High technology, Wales 356w
Milk, Wales 723-4
Nurses, Wales 720

Graduates
Information technology 241w

Grammar schools
School population 22-3w

Gransha Hospital
Army in Northern Ireland 896

Grant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1320
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 738
Crimes of violence, Unemployment 275w
NHS, Privatisation 222-3w

Greater Glasgow Health Board 209w

Greater London
Bed & breakfast accommodatiion 538-9w
Cars 253w
Council house waiting lists 238w
Council housing 68w
Cycling 37w
Further education 96w
Higher education 96w
Homelessness 443w
Housing associations 67w
Housing construction 61w
Housing improvement 61w
Housing starts 443-4w
Housing stock 392w
Intervention stocks 295w
Local government expenditure 70-1w
Lorries 29-30w, 534w
Parking 37w
Planning permission 237w
Police dogs 405w
Rate support grants 66-7w
Road accidents 35-6w
Road construction 36w
Road works 33-4w, 36w
Roads 34w
Sheltered housing 236w
Transport 36w
Unemployment 449w
Urban traffic control system 37w
Voluntary organisations 120w
Women only courses 57-8w

Greater London Council
Council house sales 67-8w
Housing improvement areas 62w
Local government expenditure 71w
Local government land 655w
Local government mortgages 238w
Local government reform 62-3w
Public petitions (10.12.84) 882
Seaside & country homes scheme 505w

Greater London Council research library
Local goverment reform 237w

Greater London transport survey 252w

Greater Manchester
Arts finance 733
Government departments 12w
Housing 441w
Local government expenditure 643-4w
Police 483w
Tuberculosis 225-6w

Greece
Armed forces deployment 450w, 628-9w
Defence 432w
Treaties 628w

Green field sites 118-9w

Greenfield Committee see Effective Prescribing Informal Working Group

Greenock
Unemployment 150-1w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1321-2
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 925
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 366
Questions
Business statement 504, 1214-5
Drug industry, Manpower 266w
Drug research, Costs 224w
Generic prescribing 463w
Generic prescribing, Limited list prescribing 323w
Hopson, Edward, Prisoners release 565w
Horses, Animal welfare 289w
Limited list prescribing 384w, 463w, 538w
Micros in schools, Expenditure 553-4w
Paymaster-General, Manpower 727
Poland, Human rights 597w
Prime Minister official engagements 233w, 404w, 546w
Prosecutions, North London Polytechnic 1w
Sri Lanka 597w
Student grants, Parental contributions 159, 239-40w
Teachers, Pay 93w, 164
USSR, Nuclear weapons 429-30w
VAT, Riding hats 372w

Greenwich
Mental health services 83w

Gregory, Mr Conal
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 666-71
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 10-1
Bus services, Yorkshire & Humberside 4

Griffiths, Mr Eldon
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 527
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 32, 33, 66-9
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 739

Griffiths, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 312-4

Grist, Mr Ian
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1062
Questions
Coal mining, Wales 722
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 354-5w
Forestry Commission, Wales 603w

Ground, Mr Patrick
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 227-9

Group training associations 59w

Gruinard Island 420w
Anthrax 420w

Grylls, Mr Michael
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 22
Small Businesses Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 385
Questions
Limited list prescribing 660w
VAT, Air courier services 455w
VAT, Imports 614w
VAT, Postal services 613-4w

Guatemala 525w

Guided weapons 46-7w
BAOR 46w
Defence procurement 46w, 426w

Guilty pleas 274w

Gummer, Mr John Selwyn, *Paymaster General*
Questions
Paymaster-General 727-8
Paymaster-General, Manpower 727
Paymaster-General, Ministerial duties 728-9
Paymaster-General, Pensions 728

Gwynedd
Unemployment 356w

Hackney
Building workers 312w, 359w

Hamilton, Mr James
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1233
Questions
Regional aid, Lanarkshire 344
Unemployment, Scotland 209-10w

Hamilton, Mr Neil
Debates etc
Lead free petrol, Public petitions (07.12.84) 647-8
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 314-7
Questions
"Economy & Higher Education" 166
Local government expenditure 387w
Local government staff, Manpower 62w
Nationalised industries, Profits 176w
Taxation, Pension funds 573w
UK trade with EC 346-7w

Hamilton, Mr Willie W
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 21
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 746
Oral question time points of order (13.12.84) 1208
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1228
Sunday trading, Standing Order No 10 applications (10.12.84) 748
Questions
Africa, Diplomatic relations 198-9w
Building regulations, Scotland 211-2w
Crop spraying 28w
Dentists, Pay 213w
Dentists, Scotland 212-3w
Fluoridation, Scotland 213w
Hospital bed occupancy rates, Scotland 212w
Hospital beds, Scotland 213-4w
Hospital costs per patient, Scotland 214-6w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 214w
Intervention stocks, Glenrothes 212w
Mental patients, Nursing staff 214w
Police, Pay 564-6w
Regional aid, Fife 208w
Teachers, Scotland 335
Unemployment 233w, 447w
VAT, Books 1195

Hampson, Dr Keith
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 372
Questions
Student grants, Parental contributions 159-60

Hancock, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 568-70
British Telecom Computer Centre, Portsmouth (05.12.84) 473-5, 477
Questions
China, Drugs 218w
Drugs, Imports 219w
Generic prescribing, Limited list prescribing 320-1w
HMS Vernon 615w
Limited list prescribing 163w, 166-7w, 384w
Limited list prescribing, Drug industry 166-7w
Limited list prescribing, Tranquillisers 167w
Student grants 488w

Handicap benefits 76w

Handicapped
Home care services 76w
Hong Kong 26w
Industrial training 59w
Information technology 59w
Self help 225w
Voluntary organisations 225w

Handicapped drivers
Driving tests 612w

Handicapped pupils 95w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 19, 20-1
Law of the sea (06.12.84) 642
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 799
Questions
Education support grants 488-94w

Hannam, Mr John
Questions
"Home Defence & the Farmer" 284w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 743-4
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 937
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 916
Questions
Ancient woodlands 658w

Hares 69-70w
Death 69-70w

Harman, Ms Harriet
Questions
Concessionary television licences 128-9w
Food & Environment Protection Bill (HL) 1984/85 327w
Newspaper press, VAT 342w
Pesticides 327w
Pesticides, Poisoning 534-6w
Post office closures 120w

Harmonisation of legislation
European Assembly elections 331w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 355
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 104, 109
Questions
Fisheries, Research 328-9w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 483
Potatoes, Surpluses 286w

Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Questions
Chile 525w
Chile, Debts 299w
Chile, International Monetary Fund 373-4w
Citizens advice bureaux, Scotland 191w

Harvey, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 567-8
Questions
Redundancy, Wales 720-1

Harworth colliery 360-1w

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 365-6
Questions
Airports 904
Stansted Airport 301w
Technical & vocational education initiative 86w

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 530-8, 591
Questions
Business statement 1209
Pay, Employment opportunities 1197
Public expenditure, Capital investment 1204
Taxation, Pensions 1200
VAT, Books 1195

Hattersley, Roy
Television programmes 170-2

Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael, *Attorney-General*
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Ministerial statements (11.12.84) 927-38
Questions
Juries, Oaths 329w
Legal aid, Picketing 602w
McCabe, Norah, Death 602w
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets 602w
Plastic bullets, Northern Ireland 330w

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Questions
Gambia, Shipping accidents 1040
Primary education, Capitation allowances 162
VAT, Books 1195-6

Hayhoe, Mr Barney, *Minister of State for the Treasury*
Questions
Blind, Treasury 177w
Cigarettes 249w
Civil service, Pay incentives 192-3w
Customs & Excise, Dogs 16w
Customs & Excise, Drug crimes 194w
Customs & Excise, Drug seizures 194w
Customs & Excise, Manpower 175-6w
Export controls, Foetal tissue 455w
Free ports 247-8w
Gays the Word, Books 17w, 177-8w, 455-6w
Government contracts 329w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Treasury 16w
House of Commons select committees 371-2w
Legislative drafting 604-5w
Official Report, Administrative delays 614w
Price elasticities, Tobacco 614w
Publishers Association 1203
Tax yields, Cigarettes 249w
Taxation, Pensions 176w
VAT 371w, 568-9w
VAT, Air courier services 455w
VAT, Books 17w, 568-9w, 1194-6, 1203
VAT, Building industry 569w, 614w
VAT, Construction 455w
VAT, EC action 17w, 97-9w
VAT, EC countries 1196
VAT, Farmers 371w
VAT, Footwear 1202
VAT, Housing improvement 570w
VAT, Imports 614w
VAT, Postal services 613-4w
VAT, Riding hats 372w
VAT, Take-away food shops 248w, 570w
VAT, Tax yields 614w
VAT, Telephone charges 298w
VAT, Water 455w
VAT zero rated goods 568-9w, 1195

Haynes, Mr Frank
Questions
Nicaragua 516w

Hayward, Mr Rob
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 23
Questions
Telephones, Metering approval scheme 343-4w

Hazardous materials
International cooperation 560w
Shipping safety 334w

Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Debates etc

Hong Kong (05.12.84) 399-400, 404
Questions
Arms control treaties, British strategic nuclear force 1044
Arms control treaties, Satellite killers 1038

Health education
Dental health 588w

Health hazards
NHS 661w

Health service staff 317w 459-62w
Back pain 589w
Fringe benefits 381w
Industrial accidents 590w
Prosecutions 461w

Health services 174w
Bolton 84w
Gibraltar 524w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 80-1w
Negligence 172w
Per capita costs 222w
Wars 466w

Health visitors 476w

Health & Safety Inspectorate
Hospitals 561-2w

Hearing
Medical research 299-300w

Heart diseases
Smoking 268w

Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 403-6
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 189-93

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 459-61
Questions
Arms control, Satellite killers 520w
Arms control treaties, Satellite killers 1038
Motorways, Speed limits 9
Pupil-teacher ratios, Somerset 92w
Tax credit system 572w

Heathrow 301w, 1207
Landing cards 129w

Heating allowances 171w, 904
Supplementary benefits 163w, 219w

Hebrides
Royal artillery range 508-9w

Heddle, Mr John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 55-8
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1093-4, 1099
Questions
Development land tax 247w
Misleading advertising, EC action 124w
Ordnance Survey 581w
Tenants Charter 300w
VAT, Construction 455w

Heffer, Mr Eric S
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 519
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 234-5, 260
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 365

Helicopters
Aircraft noise 895
Cross border cooperation in Ireland 896
Exercise Autumn Train 903
Northern Ireland 895-6
Palace of Westminster 38w

"Helping the Community to Care" 81-2w

Henderson, Mr Barry
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1227
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 510
Questions
Business statement 506-7
Coal mining, Scotland 341
Local government expenditure, Scotland 332
Prosecutions, Fife 201-2w

Heriot-Watt University 262w

Heroin
Death 270w
Wales 5w

Heron House 74-6w

Herring
Fishery agreements 481
North Sea 288w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for Defence
Questions
Arms trade 892
Defence 431w
Defence expenditure 430w
Defence expenditure, Conventional weapons 430-1w, 897-8
Defence research, Animal experiments 892
Falkland Islands, Armed forces deployment 274w
Falkland Islands, Conventional war 617w
Falkland Islands, Rules of engagement 617w
HMS Conqueror 425w
HMS Conqueror, Diaries 425w, 616w
HMS Conqueror, Log books 616w
HMS Conqueror, Members correspondence 424-5w
Military aircraft, European fighter aircraft 891-2
NATO ministerial meetings 410-1w
Nuclear weapons 429w
REME static workshops, Redundancy 898
Trident 900-1
Trident, Costs 422-3w
Trident, Defence expenditure 891-2
Trident, Finance 423w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering, Privatisation 901

Hickmet, Mr Richard
Debates etc
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 844-5
Questions
Cyprus 515w
Greece, Treaties 628w
Iron & steel industry, EC action 244w
Lemnos 432w, 450w, 628-9w
Local government finance, Humberside County Council 442-3w
Local government revenue, Humberside County Council 442w
Turkey, Peace treaties 450w

Hicks, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 677-9
Questions
Middle East 513-4w

Higgins, Mr Terence
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 538-42, 579
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 355
Questions
Civil service, Pay incentives 192-3w
Shipping, Liner conferences 338w
Taxation, Pensions 1200

High rent schemes 65-6w, 79w, 541-2w
Housing benefits 79w, 541-2w

High technology 356w, 1038-9
Israel 1038-9
Wales 356w

Higher education 96w, 187w
Educational finance 608-9w
Ethnic groups 157w
Expenditure 487w
Greater London 96w
Stockport 487w
Students 607-8w

Higher education admission
Cambridge University 186w
Oxford University 186w

Highlands restricted area 420w
Military aircraft 420w

Hill, Mr James
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 972
Oral question time points of order (12.12.84) 1054
Questions
Capital allowances, Shipping 567w
Post Office, Lost mail 121w
Western European Union 1051

Hill farming 287w
Scotland 209w
Wales 160w

Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1984
(04.12.84) 172

Hind, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1256-8, 1264
Questions
EC Budget Council 194-5w
Student grants, Parental contributions 90-1w

Hine, Patrick 273w

Hirst, Mr Michael
Questions
Prime Minister domestic visits, Baldernock 546w
Student unions, Political doctrines 594w
Tourist industry, Manpower 630w

Historic buildings 180w
Local government reform 582w

HMS Conqueror 100w, 274w, 403w, 424-5w, 433w, 616w, 618w
Diaries 425w, 616w
Log books 48w, 274w, 403w, 424-5w, 616w
Members correspondence 424-5w

HMS Vernon 615w

Hogg, Mr Douglas
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1163, 1168
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 934

Hogg, Mr Norman
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1230-1
Questions
Asbestos, Air pollution control 12-3w
Cancer, Departmental coordination 12w
Industrial health & safety, Carcinogens 60-1w
Industrial health & safety, Dyes 59-60w
Teachers, Scotland 333

Holland, Mr Stuart
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1368-70, 1378, 1380
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1005-12
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1271, 1281-4, 1285
Questions
Ethiopia, Ministers visits abroad 16
UNESCO 13-4w
Holliday, Fred **579w**

Holliday Committee see Radioactive Waste Dumping Independent Inquiry

Holliday, Fred 579w

Holloway Prison 486-7w
Members correspondence 566w
Prison employment 486w
Prison staff 486-7w

Holt, Mr Richard
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 925
Questions
Free school meals 157-8
Water authorities, Operating costs 396w

Home care services
Handicapped 76w
Rural areas 380w

"Home Defence & the Farmer" 284w, 287w

Home helps 380w
Manpower 471-2w
Wales 719-20

Home Office
Blind 133w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 129-31w
Race relations 305w
UK membership of EC 185w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1074
House of Commons Questions, VAT (05.12.84) 382
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 865
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 936
Railway accidents, Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 174
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1234
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 517
Questions
Aujeszkys disease 483
Cereals, Prices 487
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 892-3
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 490
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Expenditure 285w
Police, Blindwells 620w
Regional planning & development, Scotland 341
Teachers, Scotland 207w

Homelessness 234w
Greater London 443w
Private Members motions (14.12.84) 1323-81
Scotland 400-1w

Homelocators 345-6

Homicide
Metropolitan Police 307-8w

Homosexuality
Books 575-6w

Honduras
Diplomatic service 518-9w
Refugees 521w

Hong Kong 26w, (05.12.84) 389-472, 1042
Armed forces deployment 426w
British residents abroad 26w
Citizenship of the British Dependent Territories 200-1w
Civil service 26-7w
Elections 529w
Handicapped 26w
Nationality 200w
Official visits 527w
Pensions 27w

Hooson, Mr Tom
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1063
Questions
Enterprise zones, Wales 718

Hopson, Edward 565w
Prisoners release 565w

Hordern, Mr Peter
Questions
Public expenditure 494

Horses
Animal welfare 289w

Hospital ancillary staff
Redundancy 321w

Hospital bed occupancy rates 212w, 317-8w
Scotland 212w

Hospital beds 174w
Scotland 213-4w
Smoking related diseases 268-9w

Hospital closures 474-5w

Hospital Complaints Procedure Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 386

Hospital consultants
Ear nose & throat 473-4w

Hospital costs per patient
Scotland 214-6w

Hospital discharges 534-6w

Hospital doctors
Manpower 542w

Hospital patients (05.12.84) 386
Clothing 323w
Industrial disablement benefits 267w
Mobility allowance 385w
Wales 719-20

Hospital safety 321w

Hospital staff
Tuberculosis 666w

Hospital waiting lists
Dundee 40-1w, 512w
Ear nose & throat 474w
Scotland 214w

Hospitals
Cleaning services 590-1w
Food hygiene 321w
Health & Safety Inspectorate 561-2w
Improvement notices 562w
Prohibition notices 562w

House of Commons Liaison Committee
(13.12.84) 1237

House of Commons Library
Speakers rulings & statements (12.12.84) 1077

House of Commons questions
Speakers rulings & statements (05.12.84) 382, (06.12.84) 497, 498, 519, 553
Unemployment 259-60w

House of Commons select committees
365-72w, 551-2w
Civil servants 367w
Costs 361w
Evidence 361-5w
House of Commons staff 367-8w
Speakers rulings & statements (05.12.84) 349-50

House of Commons (Services) Select Committee (04.12.84) 322, 552-3w

House of Commons staff
Blind 229w
House of Commons select committees 367-8w

House of Commons standing committees
Speakers rulings & statements (13.12.84) 1236-7

House of Commons Standing Orders
Private bills (11.12.84) 891

House of Commons times of sittings 551w

House prices 571w

Housing
Block grant 581w
Control orders 443w
Gibraltar 523w
Greater Manchester 441w

Housing associations
Accounting 120w
Greater London 67w
Scotland 211w
Strathclyde 211w

Housing benefits 79w, 1197
Children 164w
High rent schemes 79w, 541-2w
Northern Ireland 44-5w
Publicity 374w
Supplementary benefits disregards of income 375w

Housing capital allocations 231-2w

Housing construction
Ealing 62w
Falkland Islands 440w
Greater London 61w
Scotland 211w

Housing finance 119w
Local government reform 235w

Housing improvement
Greater London 61w
Liverpool (03.12.84) 146-54
Scotland 211w
VAT 570w

Housing improvement areas
Greater London Council 62w

Housing investment programmes 69w, 393w
Local government expenditure 234w

Housing revenue accounts 65-7w, 261w
Scotland 261w

Housing standards 69w

Housing starts
Greater London 443-4w

Housing stock
Greater London 392w

Housing subsidies 65-6w, 505w
Brighton 64-5w

Housing support grants
Dundee 401-2w
Scotland 207w, 261w

Housing & elderly
Local government reform 68w
London boroughs 68w

Howard, Mr Michael
Questions
M25, Road accidents 533w

Howarth, Mr Alan
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 523, 534
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 369
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 697, 702-4
Questions
BBC external services 518w
Central America 1035-6
Interest rates 571w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc
Road construction, West Midlands (04.12.84) 327
Questions
Cheney School 89w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 14
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 899
Mutual & balanced force reductions 525w
Public sector borrowing requirement 370w
Road accidents, Motorcycles 339w
Tornado aircraft, Exports 421w
Wages councils 1192

Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey, *Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 389-99
Questions
Africa, Ministers visits abroad 1039
Bophuthatswana 1041
China, COCOM 1042
China, Foreign relations 1041-2
China, Overseas trade 1042
EC budget 1049-51
EC budget, EC Agricultural Council 1047-8
Ethiopia, Ministers visits abroad 521w

European Union 1051
Gambia, Shipping accidents 1040
Gibraltar 522-3w
Hong Kong 1042
Hong Kong, Elections 529w
India 516w
Intervention stocks 1048-9
Middle East 513-4w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 1049
Milk, Production quotas 1049
Namibia 1039-41
Northern Ireland 517w
South Africa 1041
Western European Union 1051-2

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 561-4
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 393, 425-7
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 44-6

Howell, Rt Hon Denis
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 381

Howell, Mr Ralph
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 358
Questions
Cereals, EC external trade 437w
Health service staff 459-62w
Health services, Per capita costs 222w
Hospital bed occupancy rates 317-8w
Hospital beds 174w
Housing benefits, Supplementary benefits disregards of income 375w
NHS, Manpower 317w
Student grants, Parental contributions 156
Supplementary benefits, Board & lodging charges 221-2w
Tax thresholds 606w
USSR, Cereals 436-8w
Wheat, Prices 623-4w

Howells, Mr Geraint
Questions
Coal mining, Wales 189w
Dairy farming 487-8
Dairy farming, Wales 355w
Employment opportunities, Wales 159w
Hill farming, Wales 160w
Milk, Wales 724

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Nuclear weapons tests, Armed forces deployment 182w

HS748 aircraft 5w, 126-7w, 137w, 439w, 501w
Leeward Islands 5w, 126-7w, 439w, 501w

Hubbard-Miles, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1064
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 679-81
Questions
Nurses, Wales 719
Unemployment, Wales 729

Hughes, Mr Mark
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1074
Questions
EC Agricultural Council 482

Hughes, Mr Robert
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 933
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 368, 378-9
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 515
Questions
Business statement 1214
Namibia 1040-1
South Africa, Durban three 517w
Student grants 91w
Student grants, Parental contributions 159
Taxation, Pensions 1199
Teachers, Scotland 335

Hughes, Mr Roy
Questions
Bus services, Wales 730-1
Enterprise zones, Wales 719
Milk, Wales 724
Northern Ireland 517w
Severn Bridge 12w
Severn Crossing Feasibility Study 578w
Student grants 90w
Welsh Development Agency 723

Hughes, Mr Sean
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 801-4
Questions
Buses White Paper, Merseyside County Council 31w
Generic prescribing, Information services 592w
Government assistance to industry, Knowsley 126w
Higher education, Ethnic groups 157w
Public expenditure 572-3w
Regional aid, Knowsley 7-8w
Regional planning & development, Merseyside 125w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 744
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 311-2
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 36, 57, 63, 127 (04.12.84) 178, 200-6
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1105-9, 1155-7, 1179 (13.12.84) 1238-45, 1264-6
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 854, 878
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 917
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 738

Hulme estate 441w

Human embryo experiments (05.12.84) 472, (07.12.84) 647, (11.12.84) 1026, (14.12.84) 1319, 1320-1, 1321-2
Public petitions (05.12.84) 472, (07.12.84) 647, (11.12.84) 1026, (14.12.84) 1318, 1319, 1320-1, 1321-2

Human rights
Ethiopia 628w
Poland 597w
Uganda 1036
USSR 526w

Humberside County Council 442-3w
Local government finance 442-3w
Local government revenue 442w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc
Army in Northern Ireland (07.12.84) 666
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 633, 635
Questions
Belfast City Hospital, Costs 45-6w
Housing benefits, Northern Ireland 44-5w
McCabe, Norah, Death 602w
Personal income, Northern Ireland 45w
Social security, Expenditure 44w
Social security claims, Northern Ireland 44w
Social security recipients, Northern Ireland 45w

Hunt, Mr David, *Under-Secretary of State for Energy*
Questions
Coal mining, Cooperatives 183w
Coal mining, EC countries 23w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 351-2w, 605w
Coal mining, Manpower 253-4w
Coal mining, Privatisation 23w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 693-6
Questions
Agricultural subsidies 290-3w
Arms control treaties, UK contributions 545-6w
Cereals, Prices 486-7
Common agricultural policy 404w
Drugs, Expenditure 162w
Economic growth 570w
Prime Minister domestic visits, Farleigh Wallop 233w
South Africa 515w
Trident, Costs 423w
Wildlife Inspectorate 508w

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas, *Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Plastic bullets 298w
Local government elections, Northern Ireland 204w
McCabe, Norah 298w
Plastic bullets, Northern Ireland 349w, 597w
Pre-trial procedures, Northern Ireland 229w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 504w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Plastic bullets 298w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Police discipline 597w
Short Brothers 595w
Short Brothers, Privatisation 229w
UK membership of EC, Northern Ireland Office 205w

Hybrid bills
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 26

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy 140w
Scotland 140w

Hypermarkets
Centre 21 582w

Hypothermia
Death 461w

H2 receptor blocking drugs 384w

Iberian Airways 576-7w

ICC Cleaning services 381w

Identification parades
Metropolitan Police 281w
Transport police 253w

Ilfracombe
Employment opportunities 343w
European Regional Development Fund 396w
Government assistance to industry 342-4w

Immigration rules (13.12.84) 1312-8

"Impact of the Overseas Aid Programme on Britains Domestic Economy" 333w

Imports
Domestic electrical appliances 121-2w
Drugs 219w
Furs 555w
Trailers 341-2w
VAT 614w

Improvement notices 562w
Hospitals 562w

In Vitro Fertilisation Departmental Committee 74w

Income
NHS 667-8w

Income tax 372-4w, 907
Gibraltar 524w
Pension funds 574w
Pensioners 494w
Tax yields 456w

Income tax assessment 569w

Independent prosecution service 565-6w

India 516w

Induction loops 379w
Public buildings 379w

Industrial accidents
Coal mining 257-8w
Death 360w
Health service staff 590w
Youth training scheme 50w, 256w

Industrial development
Neath 719
Wales 724-5

Industrial disablement benefits
Hospital patients 267w

Industrial disputes
Coal mining 14-5, 16w, 43w, 102-3w, 139-40w, 172w, 189w, 201-2w, 277w, 324w, 332-3w, 341-3, 346-7, 351-2w, 409-10w, 457w, 496, 510w, 605w, 620-2w, 632w, 637-9w, 720-2, 908, (11.12.84) 927-38, 1193-4
Dept of Health & Social Security 77w, 170, 171w, 226w, 271w, 591w, 666w
Injuries 332-3w
Social security benefits 265-6w
Tax rebates 457w

Industrial energy prices 24w

Industrial health & safety
Carcinogens 60-1w
Dyes 59-60w
Fines 257w
Merchant seamen 334-5w, 407-8w, 530w
Prosecutions 257w
Shipping 407w

Industrial investment 574w
Coal mining 722

Industrial noise
EC action 449w
Protective clothing 449w

Industrial production 575w
UK companies abroad 341w

Industrial training 57-9w, 157-9w
Expenditure 59w
Footwear industry 54-5w
Handicapped 59w
Leather & fur industries 54-5w
Paper industry 55w
Plastics 54w
Research 56w
Rubber industry 54w

Infant mortality
Scotland 619w
Social class 462w

Information
Ministry of Defence 412w
Power stations 101-2w

Information services
Generic prescribing 383-4w, 592w

Information technology
Graduates 241w
Handicapped 59w
Secondary education 92w

Injuries
Industrial disputes 332-3w
Picketing 277w
Ulster Defence Regiment 413-4w

Inland waterways
Acid rain 445w

Inner city areas
Cycleways 4-5

Inner city partnerships
Government grants 506-7w

Inner London Education Authority (03.12.84) 27-131
Finance 85w
Local government expenditure 240w

Inquiries
Government departments 127w
Shipping 339-40w

Insecticides 327-8w

Institute of Hearing Research 299-300w

Institute of Information Technology 94w

Integrated operations 357-8w, 555w
Clwyd 357w
Wales 357-8w

Interest rates 571w, 1191
Public sector borrowing requirement 571w
Small businesses 1202

Internal security operations 640-1w

International Bank for Reconstruction & Development (1984 Selective Capital Increase) Order 1985 (11.12.84) 1002-24

International cooperation 524w
Drugs 75w
Hazardous materials 560w
Polyurethane 347-8w

International Development Association (Seventh Replenishment) Order 1985 (11.12.84) 1002-24

International Garden Festival 1992 355w
Wales 355w

International Labour Conference 60-1w

International Lead & Zinc Study Group (Immunities & Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1984 (03.12.84) 25

International Monetary Fund 299w
Chile 373-4w

International monetary system 299w

International Youth Year 61w
Dept of the Environment 61w

Intervention Board
Expenditure 293-4w

Intervention stocks 624w, 1048-9
Cereals 492, 530w
Costs 294w
Disaster relief 609-10w
Glenrothes 212w
Greater London 295w
Northern Ireland 504w
Scotland 212w
West Midlands 295w

Inter-American Development Bank (Immunities & Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1984 (03.12.84) 25

Inter-city rail transport 32w

Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 384

Invalidity benefits 72-3w

Investment
British Rail 38w, 40w, 531w
Scottish Development Agency 264-5w

Iran-Iraq war 514w

Iraq
Ministers visits abroad 522w

Iron & steel
EC external trade 123-4w
USA 122-3w

Iron & steel industry
EC action 244w

Island councils
Scotland 41w

Island Councils of Scotland Committee of Inquiry 41w

Isle of Man
Fisheries 639w
Official visits 129w

Israel 1039
EC external trade 555w
High technology 1038-9
Official visits 403-4w

Italy
Dairy farming 283w
Milk 283w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 962, 974-6
Questions
Cereals, Prices 487
"Tackling Pollution: Experience & Prospects" 584w

Janner, Mr Greville
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 918-9, 924
Questions
Business statement 1217
Middle East 513-4w
Nuclear weapons deployment, Transport of radioactive materials 901-2
£1 coins 569w

Japan
Foreign companies in UK 629w
Typewriters 629-30w

Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick, *Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 27-36, 40, 60, (04.12.84) 182, 254, 274
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1079, 1085, 1095, 1096-7, 1114-20, 1120, 1162, 1173-9, 1184, (13.12.84) 1252, 1260-4
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 841-3, 844, 846, 848
Rate support grants, Ministerial statements (11.12.84) 912-26
Questions
Blind, Dept of the Environment 62w
International Youth Year, Dept of the Environment 61w
Ministers domestic visits, Merseyside 118w
Property Services Agency, Corruption 119w
Radioactive Waste Dumping Independent Inquiry 579w
River Mersey 395w
"Tackling Pollution: Experience & Prospects" 584w
UK membership of EC, Dept of the Environment 180w
Zoological Society of London 580w

Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 357
Questions
Further education teachers, Scotland 210w
Teachers, Scotland 333

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 245, 247-8
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 650, 652-3, 656, 675-7
Questions
Heathrow 1207

Job centres 360w
Low pay 52w
Westbury 52-3w
Wiltshire 53w

Job creation schemes (07.12.84) 709-16

Job release scheme
Wales 230w

Job splitting scheme
Wales 230w

John, Mr Brynmor
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1068-9
Questions
Advisory Committee on Pesticides 104w
Dairy farming, Production quotas 488-9
Pesticides 104-5w

Johnson Matthey 567w

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Questions
Agricultural Training Board 289w
Blond McIndoe Centre, Upper Waiting Hall 540w

Johnston, Mr Russell
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 946, 965, 969-74
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 359
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 394, 415-7
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1004, 1021
Questions
Arms control treaties, British strategic nuclear force 1043
Nuclear weapons 49w
Nursery schools, Scotland 205w
Salmon, Scotland 339
UNESCO 526-7w

Joint boards 235w
Local government reform 235w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1058
Questions
Building workers, Wales 230w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 722
Crop spraying 622-3w
Crop spraying, Prosecutions 577-8w
Dairy farming, Wales 357w
Educational finance, Wales 231-2w
Educational publications, Wales 296-7w
Elderly, Wales 548w
Enterprise agencies, Wales 230w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Wales 231w
Free school meals, Wales 547-8w
Heroin, Wales 5w
Job release scheme, Wales 230w
Laura Ashley, Wales 549-50w
Mid Wales Development Board, Finance 549w
Multiple sclerosis, Wales 296w
Pollution control, Wales 547w
Post Office, Wales 548w
Private education, Wales 549w, 718
Regional planning & development, Wales 726
Self-employed, Wales 230w
Training loans 229-30w
Unemployment, Wales 726-7w
Youth services, Wales 297w

Jones, Mr Gwilym
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1064
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 798, 809-10
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 721
Free ports, Cardiff 356w
Plugs & sockets, Electrical control equipment 314w

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council, Ministerial statements (12.12.84) 1067-74
Questions
Agricultural Development & Advisory Service 288w
Agricultural policy, Environment 529w
Agricultural subsidies 290-3w, 485
Agricultural surpluses 484-5
Agricultural Training Board 289w
Agriculture, Government grants 624w
Blind, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 103-4w
Butter, Food stocks 28w
Butter, Surpluses 287w
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 626w
Dairy farming 283w, 487-8
Dairy farming, Northern Ireland 490-1
Dairy farming, Outgoers scheme 488
Dairy farming, Production quotas 488-9
EC Agricultural Council 529-30w
EC Agricultural Council, EC budget 627w
EC Fisheries Council 289-90w, 626w
Farm capital grant scheme 433-6w
Fisheries, Research 328-9w
Food prices 105-16w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food 28w
Intervention Board, Expenditure 293-4w
Intervention stocks 624w
Intervention stocks, Greater London 295w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 482-3, 489-90
Milk, EC countries 29-30w
Milk, Italy 283w
Milk, Price controls 198w
Milk, Production quotas 283-4w, 482-3, 488, 491-2
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Expenditure 285w
UK membership of EC, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 197w
Veterinary investigation centres 284w
"Way Forward" 484

Jordanhill College of Education 210w

Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith, Secretary of State for Education and Science
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 116, 125-31
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 360-81
Questions
Blind, Dept of Education & Science 21w
Curriculum 95w
"Economy & Higher Education" 166
Education support grants 488-94w
Education & industry 159
Educational maintenance allowance 89w
Employment schemes 92w
Further education, Educational maintenance allowance 165
Further education, School population 94w
Further education, Student numbers 164-5
General Certificate of Secondary Education 93w
Graduates, Information technology 241w
Inner London Education Authority, Finance 85w
Inner London Education Authority, Local government expenditure 240w
Institute of Information Technology 94w
"Parental Influence at School Consultation Paper" 163
Peace studies 96w
Science budget 188w
Secondary education, Information technology 92w
Secondary education, Liverpool 165-6
Student grants, Parental contributions 155-60
Student loans 91w, 160
Teachers, Pay 93w, 163-4
"Teaching Quality White Paper" 94w
Technical & vocational education initiative 85-6w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Education & Science 187w

JP233 airfield attack weapon system 418-9w

Jubilee Park 62w

Judges
Freemasonry 12-3

Judiciary 13

Juries
Oaths 329w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc
Mundiya, Yasmin, Immigration (13.12.84) 1318
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 760, 763, 764-72, 774
Sunday trading, SO No 10 application (10.12.84) 747-8
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 737
Representation of the People Bill 1984/85 305w

Keep Low campaign 612w
Drinking & driving 612w

Keighley
Driving tests 336w

Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1070
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 249
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1160
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 373
Questions
Bus services, Lancashire 6
Student grants, Parental contributions 169-70

Kelsey, Mr
Unemployment benefits 360-1w

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1232
Questions
Composite classes, Scotland 210w
Dairy farming, Outgoers scheme 488
European Regional Development Fund, Scotland 42-3w
North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board, Fishing 302w

Kent University 299w

Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 358
Questions
Shipbuilding, Oil rigs 1203-4

Ketterick, Martin
Armed forces casualties 426w

Key, Mr Robert
Questions
Defence research, Animal experiments 903
General Certificate of Secondary Education 93w
Hares, Death 69-70w
Helicopters, Aircraft noise 895

Kidney machines 316-7w
West Wales Hospital 160w

Kidney patients 316-7w

Kidneys
Transplant surgery 316w

Kilroy-Silk, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 769, 820-5
Questions
Books, Police raids 575-6w
Prisons, Sanitation 132w
Wormwood Scrubs 132w
Young offenders, Fines 275w

King George Island 617-8w

King, Mr Roger
Debates etc
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 320-1
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 93-6, (04.12.84) 251
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1249-53
Questions
Local government reform 444w
Motorcycles, Road safety 5
Student grants 90w
VAT, Footwear 1202

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 537
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 353
Questions
Business statement 499-501
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 169
Science & technology research 493-4
Youth training scheme 905

Kirkwood, Mr Archy

Debates etc
Cream, Scotland (10.12.84) 885-6
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1229
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 939
Questions
Child benefit 375-6w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Scotland 140w
"Home Defence & the Farmer" 284w
Local government expenditure, Scotland 333
Local government finance, Scotland 208w
Personal tax allowances, Pensions 570w
Regional aid, Departmental coordination 403w
Retirement pensions 376-7w
Taxation, Pensions 1199
Trident, Finance 423w

Knight, Mr Greg
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 684-6
Questions
Government contracts 329w
Local government reform, Thamesmead 239w

Knight, Mrs Jill
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 772, 804-7
Questions
National Coal Board, Accounting 906
Parkhurst Prison, Prisoners dependents 592w

Knowsley
Government assistance to industry 126w
Regional aid 7-8w

Knox, Mr David
Questions
Dentistry 217w
Economic policy 1191
European Regional Development Fund, Scotland 339
European Union 1049-50
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 482
Primary education, Cost per pupil 161
Primary education, Wales 717
Rear seat belts 12

Knutton
Family doctors 164w

Laboratories 500-1w

Labour costs 1196-7

Labour market
Men 557-8w

Lambie, Mr David
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 367
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 517
Questions
Teachers, Scotland 206w, 334-5

Lamond, Mr James
Questions
EC internal trade 1052
"Economy & Higher Education" 166
Student grants, Parental contributions 159

Lamont, Mr Norman, *Minister of State for Trade and Industry*
Questions
Government assistance to industry, Barnstaple 342-4w
Iron & steel industry, EC action 244w
Manufactured goods, UK trade with EC 500w
Newspaper press, VAT 342w

Lanarkshire
Regional aid 344

Lancashire
Bus services 6

Land
London Docklands Development Corporation 657w

Land acquisition
Forestry Commission 151w
Forests 140-50w

Land drainage
Government grants 104w
River Blackwater 204w

Land use
Countryside 284-5w

Landing cards
Gatwick 129w
Heathrow 129w

Landing rights
Gibraltar 524w

Latent damage 13
Buildings 13

Latham, Mr Michael
Questions
British residents abroad, Religious freedom 520w
Business statement 503
Defence expenditure 430w
Helicopters, Palace of Westminster 38w
Industrial production 575w
Israel, Official visits 403-4w
Milk, Production quotas 283w, 435-6w
M1, Road traffic control 37-8w
Overseas aid 18
RAF Cottesmore, Sound insulation 48w
USA, Prime Minister visits abroad 545w

Laura Ashley
Wales 549-50w

Law of the sea (06.12.84) 638-46

Law of the Sea Convention 27w, 254w, 519w

Law Reform Committee 13-4

Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill 1984/85 (03.12.84) 145
2R* (11.12.84) 1024
Money res* (11.12.84) 1025

Law Society of Scotland 202w

Lawler, Mr Geoff
Debates etc
Fabric Origin Marking Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 387
Questions
Courts, Bradford 1w
International Youth Year, Dept of the Environment 61w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Security 288w
Textile industry, EC action 121w

Lawrence, Mr Ivan
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 932
Questions
BBC external services, Government grants 517-8w
Bophuthatswana 1041
Bus services, Privatisation 3
Crown Proceedings Act 1947 614-5w
Legislative drafting 604-5w

Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel, *Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 519-29, 536
Questions
Chile, Debts 299w
Chile, International Monetary Fund 373-4w
EC Finance Council 573w
Economic policy 1193
Employment level 1192
Employment opportunities, Skilled workers 1192
Industrial production 575w
Johnson Matthey 567w
Labour costs 1196-7
National insurance, Employers contributions 1196
Occupational pensions 1199
Pay, Employment opportunities 1196-7
Taxation, Pensions 1198-200
VAT, Footwear 613w
Wages councils 1192, 1197

Lead
Petrol additives (04.12.84) 302-22

Lead free petrol 506w
EC action 505-6w
Public petitions (07.12.84) 647-8

Leadbitter, Mr Ted
Questions
Iraq, Ministers visits abroad 522w

Leather & fur industries
Industrial training 54-5w

Lee, Mr John, *Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement*
Questions
Air accidents, Stornoway Airport 509w
Argentina, Skyhawk aircraft 617w
Armed forces, Prisoners 411w
Armed forces deployment, Northern Ireland 428w
Army, Military discipline 411-2w
Army in Northern Ireland 409w, 896
Army in Northern Ireland, Gransha Hospital 896
Chile, Military aircraft 617-8w
Defence research, Animal experiments 902-3
Defence research establishments, Shoeburyness 427w
Dockyards 430w
Exercise Brave Defender 428w
Firing ranges, Pirbright 100w
Gruinard Island, Anthrax 420w
Helicopters, Aircraft noise 895
Helicopters, Cross border cooperation in Ireland 896
Helicopters, Northern Ireland 895-6
HMS Vernon 615w
Ketterick, Martin, Armed forces casualties 426w
Military aircraft, Highlands restricted area 420w
Military aircraft, Low flying 419w
Military aircraft, Stornoway Airport 509w
Military balance, Conventional weapons 618w
Military exercises 99w
Military exercises, RAF Stornoway 509-10w
Ministry of Defence, Information 412w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 47w
Radio, Western Isles 509w
RAF Cottesmore, Sound insulation 48w
REME static workshops 397-8w
Royal artillery range, Hebrides 508-9w
Training aircraft, Defence procurement 618w
Type 22 frigates 48w, 427w
Ulster Defence Regiment 413w, 415w, 417w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Armed forces deployment 415w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Armed forces recruitment 415-7w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Armed forces strength 415-6w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Convictions 418w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Costs 414-5w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Death 413-5w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Defence equipment 412-3w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Firearms 414w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Length of service 416-7w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Military discipline 417w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Proscribed organisations 414w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Religion 413w
US bases, Satellite communications 419w
Warships 615w
Warships, Shipbuilding 428w
World War II, Members correspondence 508w

Lee Valley Regional Park 71w

Leeds University 299w

Leeward Islands
Aircraft 137w
HS748 aircraft 5w, 126-7w, 439w, 501w

Leeward Islands Air Transport 5w, 126-7w, 439w, 501w

Legal aid
Administrative delays 330w
Picketing 602w
Scotland 43w, 202w, 346-7, 621w
Waiting lists 329-30w

Legislative drafting 604-5w

Lehman, John 181w

Leicester City Council
Rate limitation 656w

Leicestershire
Teachers 595w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 536, 552
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1073
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 30, 31, (04.12.84) 223-5
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1162-3, 1170
Questions
British Gas Corporation, Privatisation 605w
British Leyland, Government grants 553w
Cereals, Export credit guarantees 286w
Coal mining, Pay 358w
Company liquidations 438w
NHS finance, Trent Regional Health Authority 73w
Peace studies 96w
Prime Minister official engagements 233w, 404w, 546w
Public sector borrowing requirement 1193
Regional aid, Expenditure 344-5w
Salmon, Scotland 338
Student grants 299w
Training loans 359w
Trident 900
Wages councils 501w

Leigh Road School
Saltley 158w

Leighton, Mr Ron
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 990-2
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 90, (04.12.84) 220-3, 259
Unemployment, job creation schemes (07.12.84) 709-12
Questions
Community programme 558w
Epidural injections, Midwives 323w
Unemployed, Social security reviews 384w

Leisure facilities (05.12.84) 385
Paisley 340

Lemnos 432w, 450w, 628-9w

Length of service 416-7w
Ulster Defence Regiment 416-7w

Level crossings
Miniature warning lights 250w

Lewisham
Prime Minister domestic visits 233w

Lewis, Sir Kenneth
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 23
Questions
Student grants, Parental contributions 493

Lewis, Mr Ron
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 458-9
Questions
British Rail, Safety standards 33w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1243
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 300
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 196w
Africa, World Bank 196w
British Telecom, Privatisation 553w
Engineering industries, Apprentices 558w
Food aid from EC 196-7w
South Africa 514-5w
Students, Travelling expenses 93w
Teacher training, Deaf 451w
Unemployment 1203

Liability
Buildings 13

Liaison Committee see House of Commons Liaison Committee

Licensing
Asbestos 358w
Cosmetics 438w
Ravendale Securities 8w
Stocks & shares 8-11w

Licensing laws 133w
Scotland 151w

Life imprisonment
Northern Ireland 596w

"Lifting of Patients in the Health Services" 589w

Lightbown, Mr David
Questions
Multifibre arrangement 556w
Radioactive Waste Dumping Independent Inquiry 579w

Lighting
Motorways 532w, 911
M1 532w, 611w
M25 611w

Lilley, Mr Peter
Questions
Soil Survey of England & Wales, Finance 547w

Limited list prescribing 83w, 163w, 166-7w, 218-20w, 318-21w, 323w, 381-4w, 463-5w, 538w, 660w
Analgesics 465w
Drug industry 166-7w
Generic prescribing 83w, 318-21w, 323w
Rural areas 383w
Tranquillisers 167w
Vitamins 383w

Liner conferences 338w
Shipping 338w

Lion Intoximeter 3000 405w, 642-3w

Lisbon agreement 25w

Litherland, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1137-9
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 300
Questions
Defence expenditure, Conventional weapons 430-1w
Hulme estate 441w
Industrial noise, Protective clothing 449w

Lithotripsy
Medical equipment 84w

Liver diseases
Alcoholism 324-5w

Liverpool
Housing improvement (03.12.84) 146-54
Secondary education 165-6
Skillcentres 258w, 313w
Youth unemployment 631w

Liverpool Prison 184-5w, 566w
Drugs 566w
Prisoners dependents 184-5w

Livestock
Nuclear war 286w

Lloyd, Mr Ian
Debates etc
Energy Select Committee (05.12.84) 349

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 91-3, (04.12.84) 236
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1091-3, 1146 (13.12.84) 1251, 1258-60
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 866
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 922
Questions
Africa, Ministers visits abroad 1039
Aids for handicapped, Trafford Borough Council 1206
Business statement 1218
Concessionary fares 611-2w
Drug abuse 564w
Drugs, Export controls 191w
Drugs, International cooperation 75w
Enterprise zones, Trafford Park 441w
FH70 howitzers 430w
Generic prescribing 75-6w
Guatemala 525w
Local government reform, Arts finance 733
Town & country planning, Manpower 440w
Trafford, Members correspondence 378-9w
Unemployment, Costs 570w

Loans
British Technology Group 5w

Local Argicultural Control Organisation Manual 286w

Local authorities
Disclosure of information (05.12.84) 384

Local democracy (12.12.84) 1078-84, (13.12.84) 1238-311

Local education authorities
VAT 187w

Local government
Charter trustees (05.12.84) 386
Council of Europe 394w

Local Government Bill 1984/85 179w, 657w
Possible hybridity of (03.12.84) 26
2R (03.12.84) 27-131, (04.12.84) 173-280
Money res (04.12.84) 281-95
Com (12.12.84) 1078-84, (13.12.84) 1238-311
Orders & regulations 179w

Local government elections
Local government reform (10.12.84) 839-79
Northern Ireland 97w, 204w

Local government expenditure 68-9w, 387w, 441w
Child care 395w
Dundee 402w, 511w
Education 95w
Glenrothes 908
Greater London 70-1w
Greater London Council 71w
Greater Manchester 643-4w
Housing investment programmes 234w
Inner London Education Authority 240w
Scotland 332-3, 511w
Transport subsidies 39w

Local government finance
Humberside County Council 442-3w
Scotland 208w

Local government functions
Scottish Office 217w

Local government land
Greater London Council 655w

Local government mortgages
Greater London Council 238w
Local government reform 235w

Local government reform (03.12.84) 27-131, (04.12.84) 173-280, 281-95, 444w, (12.12.84) 1078-84, (13.12.84) 1238-311
Arts 353w
Arts finance 733
Block grant 236w
Dept of Transport 36w
Expenditure 572w
Greater London Council 62-3w

Greater London Council research library 237w
Historic buildings 582w
Housing finance 235w
Housing & elderly 68w
Joint boards 235w
Local government elections (10.12.84) 839-79
Local government mortgages 235w
Roads 34w
Seaside & country homes scheme 235w
Thamesmead 239w

Local government revenue
Ards 43w
Council house sales 505w, 585w
Humberside County Council 442w

Local government services
Capital investment 70w

Local government staff
Manpower 62w

Local Government (Access to Information) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 384

Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (10.12.84) 839-79

Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 839-79

Lochmaddy & East Loch Tarbert (Improvement of Piers etc) Order Confirmation Bill 1984/85
Rep* (04.12.84) 155
3R* (05.12.84) 331

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 90, 101 (04.12.84) 193, 209-12
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 936
Questions
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco industry 237w
VAT, Books 1203

Log books
HMS Conqueror 48w, 274w, 403w, 424-5w, 616w

Lome convention 137-9w

London boroughs
Bed & breakfast accommodation 440-1w
Housing & elderly 68w

London Country Bus Services 310w

London docklands
Airports 301w
Employment opportunities 656w

London Docklands Development Corporation
Land 657w

London docklands railway 611w

London Housing Aid Centre 392w

London Planning Commission 393-4w

London Regional Transport 5-6, 36-7w, 39w, 612w
Capital investment 36w
Employment policy 37w
Public appointments 37w

Longmoor base 892-3

Lorazepam
Drug side effects 270w

Lorries
EC action 336-7w, 339w
Greater London 29-30w, 534w
Road accidents 408w
Weighing machines 31-2w

Lorry drivers
Working hours (03.12.84) 132-45

Lost mail 121w
Post Office 121w

Lothian
Drug crimes 202-4w
Nurses 512w

Low flying
Military aircraft 419w

Low incomes
Family income 73w, 663-4w

Low pay
Job centres 52w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Debates etc
Housing improvement, Liverpool (03.12.84) 152
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1301
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 925
Questions
Honduras, Diplomatic service 518-9w
Intervention stocks, Costs 294w
River Mersey 395w
Secondary education, Liverpool 165
Unemployment 167, 1191
VAT, Books 568w

Luce, Mr Richard, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 466-72
Questions
Arms control 517w
Arms control, Chemical weapons 199-200w, 254w
Arms control, Satellite killers 520w
Arms control treaties, 525w, 1043
Arms control treaties, British strategic nuclear force 1043-4
Arms control treaties, Chemical weapons 514w
Arms control treaties, Nuclear weapons 1037-8
Arms control treaties, Satellite killers 1037-8
Blind, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 101w
British residents abroad, Religious freedom 520w
Honduras, Diplomatic service 518-9w
Hong Kong 26w
Hong Kong, British residents abroad 26w
Hong Kong, Citizenship of the British Dependent Territories 200-1w
Hong Kong, Civil service 26-7w
Hong Kong, Handicapped 26w
Hong Kong, Nationality 200w
Hong Kong, Official visits 527w
Hong Kong, Pensions 27w
Iran-Iraq war 514w
Iraq, Ministers visits abroad 522w
Israel 1039
Israel, High technology 1038-9
Mutual & balanced force reductions 525w
Nidal, Abu 520w
Nuclear test ban 198w, 450w
Syrian Arab Republic, Terrorism 515w
Westerm European Union, Ministerial speeches 341w

Lump sum payments 18w, 574w, 1198
Pensions 18w, 1198-200
Taxation 18w

Lung cancer
Smoking 268w

Lyell, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 898

McCabe, Norah 295-6w, 298w
Death 602w

McCormack, George Compensation 51w

McCrea, Rev William
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 611-2

McCrindle, Mr Robert
Debates etc
British Transport Police (14.12.84) 1382-4, 1385, 1388
Questions
Business statement 501
Generic prescribing 905
Taxation, Pensions 1199-200

McCurley, Mrs Anna
Questions
Corporal punishment, Scotland 205w
Teachers, Scotland 619w

McCusker, Mr Harold
Questions
Divis flats, Demolition 348w
Fair Employment Agency, Northern Ireland 458w
School meals, Costs 487w
School meals, Scotland 512w
School meals, Wales 602-3w

McDonald, Dr Oonagh
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 992-6, 997
Questions
Bus services 310w
Business expansion scheme 17w, 195-6w
Capitation allowances, Essex 189w
Cost per pupil, Essex 189w
Dartford tunnel 310-1w, 340w
Dartford tunnel, Debts 310w
Economic policy 1193
Education, Essex 188w
Education, Local government expenditure 95w
Income tax 372-4w
Personal taxation 246-8w
Public transport, Essex 310w
Ravendale Securities 8w
Ravendale Securities, Licensing 8w
Stocks & shares, Bankruptcy 10-1w
Stocks & shares, Company investigations 10w
Stocks & shares, Complaints 9w
Stocks & shares, Fraud 11w
Stocks & shares, Licensing 8-11w
Stocks & shares, Trade associations 9w
Tax allowances 457w
VAT, EC action 17w

Macfarlane, Mr Neil, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment
Questions
Bacteria, EC action 117w
Boxing, Unfair competition 584w
Centre 21, Hypermarkets 582w
Fish farming, River pollution 582-3w
Freight transport, British Waterways Board 117w
Historic buildings 180w
Housing construction, Ealing 62w
Local government land, Greater London Council 655w
Local government reform, Historic buildings 582w
London docklands, Airports 301w
London Planning Commission 393-4w
Maltby Common 63w
Planning inquiries 393w
Planning permission 67w, 655w
Planning permission, Greater London 237w
Playing fields, Planning permission 393w
Sewage 117w
Sports Council 387-92w
Sports sponsorship, Tobacco industry 237w
Structure plans, Avon 118-9w
Town & country planning, Manpower 440w
Water authorities, Financial targets 117w, 441w
Water charges 70w, 115-6w
Welfield, Public inquiries 582w

MacGregor, Mr John, Minister of State for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Questions
Beef & veal 436w
Beef & veal, Consumption 625w
Beef & veal, Retail prices 625w
Butter, Subsidies 104w
Cereals, Export credit guarantees 286w

Cereals, Intervention stocks 492, 530w
Cereals, Prices 486-7
Cereals, Surpluses 285w
EC Agricultural Council 482
Eggs, Food standards 285w
Fish farming, Government grants 624-6w
Fish farming, Pollution control 624w
Fish farming, River pollution 624w
Herring, Fishery agreements 481
Herring, North Sea 288w
Intervention stocks, Costs 294w
Milk, Outgoers scheme 435w
Milk, Production quotas 435-6w
Milk deliveries 197w
Potatoes, Surpluses 286w
Sheep, France 285w
Spain, Fishery agreements 481-2
Wheat, Prices 623-4w

McKay, Mr Allen
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 225-7
Questions
British Airways, Privatisation 29w
Business statement 1213

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 771
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 367
Questions
Ethiopia 521w
Student grants, Parental contributions 158
VAT, Books 568w

MacKay, Mr John, *Under-Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc
Cream, Scotland (10.12.84) 886-90
Questions
Agriculture, Scotland 150w
Childrens Hospitals, Expenditure 209w
Death rate, Scotland 619w
Dentists, Pay 213w
Dentists, Scotland 212-3w
Doctors, Scottish health boards 350-2w
Fish processing, Scotland 207-8w
Fishing vessels, North of Scotland box 350w
Fluoridation, Scotland 213w
Forestry Commission, Company accounts 151w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 151w
Forestry Commission, Manpower 151w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 619-20w
Forestry Commission, Rights of way 620w
Forestry Commission, Scotland 152w, 620w
Forests, Land acquisition 140-50w
Greater Glasgow Health Board 209w
Hospital bed occupancy rates, Scotland 212w
Hospital beds, Scotland 213-4w
Hospital costs per patient, Scotland 214-6w
Hospital waiting lists, Dundee 40-1w, 512w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 214w
Hyperbaric oxygen therapy, Scotland 140w
Infant mortality, Scotland 619w
Intervention stocks, Glenrothes 212w
Mental patients, Nursing staff 214w
NHS, Privatisation 206w, 512-3w
Nurses, Lothian 512w
Salmon, Fishery protection 339
Salmon, Scotland 338-9
Scottish health boards 209w

McKelvey, Mr William
Questions
Caravan sites, Scotland 209w
Decriminalisation, Scotland 348

Maclean, Mr David
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1073
Questions
Agricultural Development & Advisory Service 288w
BBC, Television licences 302-3w
British Technology Group, Loans 5w
Milk, Price controls 198w
Teachers, Pay 164

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 740
European Regional Development Fund, Scotland 42-3w, 263w
Teacher training, Scotland 331

McNair-Wilson, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Hospital Complaints Procedure Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 386
Questions
Family practitioner services 267w
Nurses, Manpower 542w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Gransha Hospital 896
Body searches, Armagh prison 297w
Brazil, Airports 408w
Brazil, Military aircraft 432w
Firearms certificates, Northern Ireland 610w
Generic prescribing, Limited list prescribing 319-20w
Military aircraft 421-2w
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 899-900
Nimrod aircraft, Radar 421w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 610w
Remand in custody, Northern Ireland 459-60w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 610w
Terrorism 640-1w
Terrorism, Sentencing 641w
Terrorism, Statistics 639-40w
Tornado aircraft, Compensation 421w
Trident 422w
Trident, Defence contracts 422w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Firearms 414w
Ulster Defence Regiment 348-9w, 413w, 415w, 417w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Armed forces deployment 415w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Armed forces recruitment 415-7w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Armed forces strength 415-6w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Convictions 418w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Costs 414-5w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Death 413-5w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Defence equipment 412-3w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Firearms certificates 349w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Length of service 416-7w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Military discipline 417w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Proscribed organisations 414w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Religion 413w
Youth training scheme, Take-up of employment 312w

McQuarrie, Mr Albert
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (11.12.84) 1026
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1230
Questions
Aujeszkys disease 483-4
EC Agricultural Council 529-30w
EC Fisheries Council 289-90w, 626w
Fish processing, Scotland 207-8w
Gibraltar 25w, 522-3w
Herring, Fishery agreements 481
Members facilities, Reprography 601w
Official Report, Administrative delays 614w
Peterhead Prison, Crimes of violence 201w
Teachers, Scotland 140w, 333

McTaggart, Mr Bob
Questions
Accommodation agencies, Scotland 207w
Homelocators 345-6

McWilliam, Mr John
Questions
Defence procurement 903-4

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc
Entry clearances, Orders & regulations (10.12.84) 753 (11.12.84) 941, (12.12.84) 1055
Mundiya, Yasmin, Immigration (13.12.84) 1312-5
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 937
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 770
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 4
Business statement 507, 1212
Entry clearances, Fees & charges 598w, 627-8w, 636w
Flexible response 426w
Namibia 524w
Student grants, Parental contributions 158-9
VAT zero rated goods 569w

Madel, Mr David
Debates etc
Education (School Budgets) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 386
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 364
Questions
Education & industry 159
Institute of Information Technology 94w

Magazine press
VAT 333-4w, 1194-5

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Questions
Brazil, 520-1w
Brazil, Arms exports 429w
Dairy farming, Northern Ireland 595-6w
Life imprisonment, Northern Ireland 596w
Prisoners, Northern Ireland 596w

Magistrates
Newcastle upon Tyne 1w, 244-5w
Public appointments 1w, 245w

Magistrates courts 274w
Fines 184w

Major, Mr John, *a Lord Commissioner*
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (3.12.84) 1296

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1366-8

Malone, Mr Gerald
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1232
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 513
Questions
Arms control treaties 1043
Building regulations, Energy conservation 180w
Building regulations, Scotland 211w
Civil defence 284w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 343
Employment opportunities, Scotland 208-9w
Law Society of Scotland 202w
NATO, Weapons 431w
Prime Minister official engagements 546w
Safety belts, Scotland 345
Student grants, Scotland 336-7

Maltby Common 63w

Managers
NHS 81-2w, 172w, 478w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority 82-3w, 226w, 271w, 381w

Managing agents 254-6w

Manchester Airport 11w, 32w, 124-5w, 336w, 439w
European Regional Development Fund 124-5w
Freight transport 439w
Regional aid 11w

Mandatory student grants 153-4w, 450-1w
Parental contributions 154w

Manpower Services Commission
Wales 159w
Women only courses 55-7w

Manufactured exports
OECD countries 346w

Manufactured goods
UK trade with EC 500w

Manufacturing industries
Employment 502w
Scotland 206w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 574
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1101, 1107, 1110, 1133-6, 1145
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 917
Questions
Interest rates, Public sector borrowing requirement 571w
National insurance, Employers contributions 1196

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 441-3
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1278
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 301
Questions
Central America, Peace negotiations 518w
Conwy tunnel 399w
Conwy tunnel, Construction costs 232w
Education, Wales 355w
Military balance, Conventional weapons 618w
M25, Road accidents 910
NATO, Conventional weapons 615w
Nurses, Wales 720
Personal records, Computer privacy 331w
Prime Minister, Railway travel 403w
Railway maintenance 337w
Railway travel, Passenger transport executives 39w
Regional aid, Wales 126w
St Helena, Birds 340-2w
Trident, Costs 423w

Marginal land 287w

"Marine Pilotage Consultation Paper" 576w

Marine surveys 335w

Marland, Mr Paul
Questions
Asbestos, Construction 61w
Coal mining , Co-operatives 183w
Coal mining, Privatisation 23w
UK trade with EC 1206

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 526
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1074
EC budget (11.12.84) 945, 947, 950, 951, 953, 954, 964, 969, 973, 998
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 192
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1173
Questions
Business statement 506, 1213
Development plans 657w
EC budget 568w, 1049
Law of the Sea Convention 254w
Middle East 513-4w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 489-90
Nuclear weapons deployment 894-5
Student grants, Parental contributions 96w

Married personal allowance
Tax yields 370w

Married women
Community programme 446-7w

Marshall, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 438-41

Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 930-1
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 2-3
Community programme 53-4w, 260w
Community programme, Barnsley 53w
Local government expenditure, Child care 395w
Rates & rating, National Coal Board 394-5w
Salmon, Scotland 338

Maternity Services Advisory Committee 476w

Maude, Mr Francis
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 357
Road construction, West Midlands (04.12.84) 323-6
Question
Business statement 1215-6
Milk, Production quotas 283w
Orbital roads, West Midlands 32w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Debates etc
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 305
Oral question time point of order (03.12.84) 6
Questions
Business statement 1212
China, Foreign relations 1041-2
Cruise missile sites 894
Debts, Developing countries 572w
Railway electrification, East Coast railway line 7

Mawnan Smith 28-9w
Animals 28-9w

Maxton, Mr John
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 376
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 514-5, 518
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 1027-9, 1031
Questions
Business statement 507
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 342
NHS, Privatisation 206w
Safety belts, Scotland 344-5

Maxwell-Hyslop, Mr Robin
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 916
Questions
Falkland Islands, Armed forces pay 49w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 482
Tax burden, Self-employed 1205

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Solicitor-General
Questions
Books, Police raids 575-6w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 14-5
Commercial court 14
Courts, Bradford 1w
Crown prosecution service 246w
Furniture, Auctions 245-6w
Judges, Freemasonry 12-3
Judiciary 13
Law Reform Committee 13-4
Legal aid, Administrative delays 330w
Legal aid, Waiting lists 329-30w
Liability, Buildings 13
Magistrates, Newcastle upon Tyne 1w, 244-5w
Magistrates, Public appointments 1w, 245w
McCabe, Norah 295-6w
Prosecutions, North London Polytechnic 1w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Crimes of violence 296w
Solicitors, Complaints 15
UK membership of EC, Attorney-General 180-1w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1339, 1355-61
Questions
Abortion, NHS 271w
Broadmoor Hospital, Riot control weapons 228w
Dentists, Pay 271w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Industrial Disputes 271w, 666w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 82w
Health services, Government grants to voluntary organisations 80-1w
"Helping the Community to Care" 81-2w
"Policy Studies Institute Working Paper C" 661w
Private patients, NHS charges 592w
Regional health authorities, Contracts 661w
Social Security Advisory Committee 227-8w
VAT, Water 455w

Meadowcroft, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 275
Questions
Business statement 503-4
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 567w
Cruise missiles, Military exercises 427w
Diet & disease 486
Further education, Educational maintenance allowance 165
NHS, Fertility 465-6w
Nicaragua 1035
"Parental Influence at School Consultation Paper" 163
Student grants, Travel grants 90w
Unemployment 501-2w
VAT, Housing improvement 570w

Medical equipment
Dentists 78w
Lithotripsy 84w

Medical research
Abortion 601-2w
Animal experiments 593w
Back pain 589w
Contraceptives 601-2w
Fertility 465-6w
Foetal tissue 472-3w
Hearing 299-300w
Multiple sclerosis 224-5w
Public petitions (06.12.84) 637
Royal College of Surgeons 483-4w
Test tube babies 74w

Medical Research Council
Finance 89w

Medical students
Developing countries 592w

Medical treatments
Carbon monoxide 140w

Mellor, Mr David, Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department
Debates etc
Representation of the people Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 785, 789, 825-32
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 638w
Crimes of violence, Unemployment 275w
Day fines 280w
Drug abuse 564w
Drug abuse, Merseyside 564w
Drug crimes, Young offenders 332w
Drugs, Prisons 331-2w
Election offences, Prosecutions 567w
European Assembly elections, Harmonisation of legislation 331w
European Assembly members, Pay 3w
General elections, Northern Ireland 185w
General elections, Voting behaviour 185w
Holloway Prison, Members correspondence 566w
Holloway Prison, Prison employment 486w
Holloway Prison, Prison staff 486-7w
Hopson, Edward, Prisoners release 565w
Independent prosecution service 565-6w
Licensing laws 133w
Liverpool Prison, Drugs 566w
Liverpool Prison, Prisoners dependents 184-5w

Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 364
Questions
Middle East 513-4w
Teachers, Pay 164

***Fletcher, Mr Alex**, Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Questions
Auctions 554w
Bankruptcy, Scotland 498w
Citizens advice bureaux, Scotland 191w
Company liquidations 438w
Cosmetics, Licensing 438w
Credit card frauds, Office of Fair Trading 313w
Domestic electrical appliances, Imports 121-2w
Misleading advertising, EC action 124w
Plugs & sockets, Electrical control equipment 314w
Ravendale Securities 8w
Ravendale Securities, Licensing 8w
Stocks & shares, Bankruptcy 10-1w
Stocks & shares, Company investigations 10w
Stocks & shares, Complaints 9w
Stocks & shares, Fraud 11w
Stocks & shares, Licensing 8-11w
Stocks & shares, Trade associations 9w
Takeovers 11w
Yorkshire Water Authority, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 190-1w

Flexible response 426w, 430w

Fluoridation
Dental services 377w
Scotland 213w

Foetal alcohol syndrome 325-6w

Foetal tissue 455w, 472-3w
Export controls 455w
Medical research 472-3w

Follow on force attack 273w
NATO 273w

Fontainebleau Summit 1050-1

Food
Civil defence 286w
Prisoners on remand 134w
Rationing 286w

Food aid
Ethiopia 492

Food aid from EC 196-7w

Food hygiene
Hospitals 321w
Scotland (10.12.84) 883-8

Food labelling
Restaurants 345-6w

Food prices 105-16w

Food standards
Eggs 285w

Food stocks
Butter 28w

Food surpluses 105-16w, 300w

"Food & Agricultural Controls in War" 286w

Food & Environment Protection Bill (HL) 1984/85 290w, 327w, 625w

Fookes, Miss Janet
Debates etc
Sexual Offences Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 384
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 654-7

Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1060
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 775-80, 831, 832
Questions
Special development areas, Wales 725-6

Footwear
VAT 613w, 1202

Footwear industry
EC action 121w
Industrial training 54-5w

Foreign companies in UK
Japan 629w

Foreign investment
South Africa 1039

Foreign investment in UK
Wales 354-5w

Foreign relations
China 1041-2

Foreign students
EC countries 241w

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Blind 101w
Oral questions (12.12.84) 1054
Privatisation 519w
UK membership of EC 200w

Forestry 623w

Forestry Commission
Audit 354w
Company accounts 151w
Environment protection 152w
Land acquisition 151w
Manpower 151w
Privatisation 140-51w, 215w, 619-20w, 623w
Rights of way 620w
Scotland 152w, 620w
Wales 603w

Forests
Land acquisition 140-50w
Wales 548-9w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 553-5, 582
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 744-5
Questions
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 167-8w
Personal taxation, Employment 573w
Procurement 1197-8

Forrester, Mr John
Questions
Driving tests, Administrative delays 251w
Driving tests, Stoke-on-Trent 251w

Forsyth, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Cream, Scotland (10.12.84) 861-3
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 367
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 513
Questions
Agriculture, Scotland 150w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 908
Forestry Commission, Company accounts 151w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 151w
Forestry Commission, Manpower 151w
Forestry Commission, Scotland 152w
Money supply 574w
NHS 174w
Student grants 156w
Student grants, Parental contributions 154-6w, 167
Student loans 155-6w
Student unions 594w
Teachers, Scotland 399-400w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1071
EC budget (11.12.84) 945, 949, 951, 1000
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 357
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 651, 657, 700-2
Questions
Agricultural policy, Environment 583w
EC budget 370w
European Assembly members, Pay 3w
European Union 1050
Farm wardens, Civil defence 285w
"Parental Influence at School Consultation Paper" 163
VAT, EC countries 1196

Forward defence 426w, 430w

Foster, Mr Derek
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 746
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 923
Questions
Further education, Student numbers 164-5

Foster care
Ethnic minorities 477-8w

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1233-4
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 379
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 512
Questions
Africa, EC aid 493-4w
Bus services, Privatisation 31w
Business statement 1217
Cereals, Intervention stocks 530w
Christmas bonus 223-4w
Citizens advice bureaux, Scotland 191w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 43w, 201w
Cockfield, Lord, European Commission 493w
EC aid 497w
EC budget 1050-1
Exceptional needs payments, Funerals 379w
General Belgrano 100w, 432-3w, 618w
HMS Conqueror 100w, 425w, 616w
HMS Conqueror, Members correspondence 424-5w
Legal aid, Scotland 43w
Nuclear weapons 429w
Prestwick Freeport Company, Government assistance to industry 152w
Prisoners transfers 4w
Stirling University 167

***Fowler, Rt Hon Norman**, Secretary of State for Social Services*
Questions
Advertising, Dept of Health & Social Security 375w
Expenditure, Dept of Health & Social Security 374-5w
Office of Chief Scientist, Dept of Health & Social Security 227w
Social Security Advisory Committee, Public appointments 272w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Health & Social Security 226w

France
Prime Minister visits abroad 545w
Sheep 285w

Franco-British Council 128w

Franks, Mr Cecil
Questions
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering, Privatisation 901

Fraser, Mr John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1253-6
Questions
City Roads detoxification unit 659w
Council house sales 644-56w
Council house sales, Local government revenue 505w, 585w
Deportation 479w
Housing subsidies 505w
Inner city partnerships, Government grants 506-7w
Judges, Freemasonry 12-3
Local government expenditure, Housing investment programmes 234w
Rent rebates, Social security recipients 586w
Supplementary benefits, Mortgages 540w
Urban development grants 507w

Fraser, Mr Peter, *Solicitor-General for Scotland*
Questions
Bail, Scotland 346
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 201w
Coal mining, Scotland 632w
Complaints against police, Scotland 16w
Convictions, Scotland 102-3w
Decriminalisation, Scotland 348
Drug crimes, Lothian 202-4w
Homelocators 345-6
Law Society of Scotland 202w
Legal aid, Scotland 202w, 346-7
Peterhead Prison, Crimes of violence 201w
Picketing, Scotland 632w
Prosecutions, Fife 201-2w
Prosecutions, Scotland 16w, 102w, 203w
Republic of Ireland, Extradition 152-3w
Safety belts, Scotland 344-5
Salmon, Scotland 347-8
Scottish Law Commission 201w

Fraud
Stocks & shares 11w

Free ports 247-8w
Cardiff 356w
Scotland 152w

Free school meals 157-8
Scotland 403w
Wales 547-8w

Freeman, Mr Roger
Questions
Community programme 501w
EC budget 1045-6
Employment schemes, Small businesses 256-7w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Northamptonshire 52w
Prime Minister official engagements 127w
Public sector borrowing requirement 575w
Railway electrification, Midland main railway line 38w
Unemployment benefits, Earnings rules 78w
Veterinary investigation centres 284w

Freemsonry
Judges 12-3

Freeson, Rt Hon Reg
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 46-9
Questions
Nidal, Abu 520w

Freight transport
British Waterways Board 117w
Manchester Airport 439w

Freud, Mr Clement
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1296
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 687-8
Questions
Ambulance services 170w
Aujeszkys disease 483
Eastern Arts Association 732-3
Local government reform, Greater London Council research library 237w
Special education, Statistics 595w

Fringe benefits
Health service staff 381w

Fry, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Gaming (Bingo) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 388
Questions
British Airports Authority, Privatisation 11-2
Bus services 3
London docklands, Airports 301w
Rate rebates, Water charges 375w
Rent rebates 265w

Funerals
Exceptional needs payments 379w

Fungicides 327w

Furniture
Auctions 245-6w

Furniture grants 79w, (14.12.84) 1323-81

Furs
Imports 555w

Further education
Educational maintenance allowance 165
Greater London 96w
School population 94w
Student numbers 164-5

Further education teachers
Scotland 210w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1352-5
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1320-1

Galley, Mr Roy
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 218-20
Questions
A1, Road works 531w
M1, Lighting 611w
Opticians, Manpower 587-8w
Opticians, Training 588w
Opticians, Women 588w
Social Security Advisory Committee, Public appointments 272w

Gambia
Shipping accidents 1040

Gaming clubs
Bingo (05.12.84) 388

Gaming (Bingo) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 388

Gardiner, Mr George
Questions
Lorries, Greater London 534w
M25, Road accidents 909-10

Garel-Jones, Mr Tristan, *a Lord Commissioner*
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 769

Garrett, Mr Ted
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 31w

Gas showrooms 605w

Gatwick
Landing cards 129w

Gays the Word 17w, 177-8w, 455-6w
Books 17w, 177-8w, 455-6w

General Belgrano 100w, 432-3w, 618w

General Certificate of Secondary Education 93w

General Dental Service 377w

General elections
Northern Ireland 185w
Voting behaviour 185w

Generic prescribing 75-6w, 463-5w, (07.12.84) 648, 905
Information services 383-4w, 592w
Limited list prescribing 83w, 318-21w, 323w
Overseas aid 15w
Quality control 162-3w

Generic Substitution (National Health Service) Bill 1984/85
1R (07.12.84) 648

George, Mr Bruce
Questions
Early warning systems, Shackleton aircraft 296w, 425w
Farm buildings, Asbestos 529w
House of Commons select committees 365-72w, 551-2w
House of Commons select committees, Civil servants 367w
House of Commons select committees, Costs 361w
House of Commons select committees, Evidence 361-5w
House of Commons select committees, House of Commons staff 367-8w

Gibraltar 25w, 234w, 522-3w, 600w
Air routes 523w
Building industry 523w
Dockyards 523w
Family allowances 524w
Ferries 523-4w
Health services 524w
Housing 523w
Income tax 524w
Landing rights 524w

Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1087-8, 1091

Glasgow
Redundancy payments office 359w

Glenrothes
Intervention stocks 212w
Local government expenditure 908

Glue sniffing (05.12.84) 384

Glyn, Dr Alan
Questions
Generic prescribing, Limited list prescribing 83w
VAT, Take-away food shops 248w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 944, 977-80
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1234
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 512
Questions
Doctors, Scottish health boards 350-2w
Falkland Islands, Fish conservation 598-9w
Falkland Islands, Fishing catches 599w
Falkland Islands, Fishing vessels 617w
Rape 185-6w
Scottish Development Agency, Investment 264-5w
Sexual offences, Scotland 217w, 619w
Spain, Fishery agreements 481-2
Unemployment, Greenock 150-1w

Golding, Mr John
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 21
Questions
Ambulance services, Newcastle under Lyme 77w
Family doctors, Knutton 164w
Post office closures 121w
School closures, Newcastle under Lyme 96w

Goodhart, Sir Philip
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 62-4
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1167, 1168
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 761
Questions
British Rail, Public service obligation grant 253w

Goodlad, Mr Alastair, *Under-Secretary of State for Energy*
Questions
Coal stocks 102w
Electricity generation, Coal fired power stations 551w
Industrial energy prices 24w
Nuclear safeguards, Plutonium 25w
Nuclear safeguards, Prototype fast reactors 24w
Nuclear safety, Treaties 23w
Plutonium 182w, 510w, 550-1w, 606w
Power stations, Information 101-2w
USA, Plutonium 24w, 352-3w

Gorbachev, Mikhail 520w

Gorst, Mr John

Community programme 53-4w, 260w, 312w, 501w, 558-60w
Community programme, Barnsley 53w
Community programme, Married women 446-7w
Employment, Manufacturing industries 502w
Employment schemes, Small businesses 256-7w
Engineering industries, Apprentices 558w
Engineering industry training board 447w
Industrial training 57-9w, 157-9w
Industrial training, Expenditure 59w
Industrial training, Footwear industry 54-5w
Industrial training, Handicapped 59w
Industrial training, Paper industry 55w
Industrial training, Research 56w
Industrial training, Rubber industry 54w
Job centres 360w
Job centres, Low pay 52w
Job centres, Westbury 52-3w
Job centres, Wiltshire 53w
McCormack, George, Compensation 51w
Skillcentre training agency 448w
Skillcentres 52w
Skillcentres, Computer training 448w
Skillcentres, Liverpool 258w, 313w
Skillcentres, Mobile instructor force 448w
Skillcentres, Yorkshire & Humberside 51-2w
Student grants, Parental contributions 156
Training loans 359w
Women only courses, Greater London 57-8w
Women only courses, Manpower Services Commission 55-7w
Women only courses, Youth training scheme 51w
Youth training scheme 358w, 447w
Youth training scheme, Industrial accidents 50w
Youth training scheme, Mental hospitals 312w
Youth training scheme, Rank Xerox 51w
Youth training scheme, Stockport 254-6w
Youth training scheme, Take-up of employment 312w
Youth training scheme, Training allowances 50-1w

Mortgage relief 16w, 194w

Mortgages 178w
Strike benefits 324w
Supplementary benefits 539-40w

Moss, Brian 616w

Motor vehicle safety
Tyres 338w

Motor vehicles 244w
Consumer information 347w

Motorcycles
Crash helmets (05.12.84) 386-7
Road accidents 339w
Road safety 5

Motorways
Lighting 532w, 911
Speed limits 9-10, 910-1

Motor-Cycle Crash Helmets (Restriction of Liability) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 386-7

Mount Pleasant 440w

Movement for London 250-1w

Moynihan, Mr Colin
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 231-4
Questions
Gorbachev, Mikhail 520w
Prime Minister domestic visits, Lewisham 233w
Prime Minister official engagements 233w

Mudd, Mr David
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (05.12.84) 472
Questions
Animals, Mawnan Smith 28-9w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Members correspondence 323w
Falmouth Shiprepair, Privatisation 7w
World War II, Members correspondence 508w

Multifibre arrangement 556w

Multiple occupation
Fire prevention 443w

Multiple sclerosis 224-5w
Medical research 224-5w
Wales 296w

Mundiya, Yasmin (13.12.84) 1312-8

Murphy, Mr Christopher
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1319
Standing Charges (Abolition) Bill, 1R (13.12.84) 1237
Torture, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1319
Questions
Acid rain 70w
Death grants 72w
Dog licences 180w
Mortgage relief 194w
Museums & galleries, Admission charges 734
Paymaster-General, Ministerial duties 728-9
Student grants 19w
Taxation, Pensions 176w
Test tube babies, Medical research 74w
VAT, Books 17w
Welfield, Public inquiries 582w

Museums & galleries
Admission charges 734

Mutual & balanced force reductions 525w

Myasthenia gravis 270-1w

M1 37-8w, 532w, 611w
Lighting 532w, 611w
Road traffic control 37-8w

M6 (04.12.84) 323-30

M25 8, 33-4w, 533w, 611w, 909
Lighting 611w
Road accidents 533w, 909-11
Road construction 8, 33w

Namibia 524w, 1039-41
Peace negotiations 199w, 525w
UN resolutions 524w

National Air Traffic Services 532w

National Association of Local Government Officers 478w

National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education 166, 187w

National Bus Company 338w
Privatisation 10-1

National Chamber of Trade 250-1w

National Coal Board 355w
Accountants 721
Accounting 495, 906-7
Rates & rating 394-5w, 584w

National Coal Board Rateable Valuation Order 1977 394-5w

National Council of Building Material Producers 582w

National Farmers Union 160w, 209w, 484

National Heritage Memorial Fund 128w

National income 454w

National insurance
Employees contributions 585w
Employers contributions 1196

National insurance contributions 372-4w
Earnings limits 167-8w
Sick pay 168w

National Measurement Accreditation Service 500-1w

National Union of Mineworkers 17w, 168, 602w, (11.12.84) 927-38
Ministerial statements (11.12.84) 927-38
Sequestration of assets 602w

National Union of Students 91w

Nationalised industries
Profits 176w

Nationality
Hong Kong 200w

NATO 272-3w
Conventional weapons 615w
Europe 273w
Follow on force attack 273w
Nuclear weapons 28w
Weapons 431w

NATO joint exercises
Nuclear weapons 431w

NATO ministerial meetings 410-1w

Nature conservation (05.12.84) 384
Capital transfer tax 572w

Navy
USA 181w

Neale, Mr Gerrard
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1330-4

Neath
Industrial development 719

Negligence
Health services 172w

Nellist, Mr Dave
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 104
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 283-7
Minimum Wages Etc Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 387
Questions
Business statement 1215
Economic situation 1197

Nelson, Mr Anthony
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 570-3
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 21
Questions
Lorries, EC action 339w
USSR, Official visits 522w

New towns
Capital investment 301w

Newcastle under Lyme
Ambulance services 77w
School closures 96w

Newcastle upon Tyne
Magistrates 1w, 244-5w

Newport Pagnell 532w

Newspaper press
VAT 17w, 342w, 568-9w, 1203

Newton, Mr Tony, Minister of State for Social Security
Questions
Asbestos, Death 267w
Attendance allowance, Social security appeals 83-4w
Christmas bonus 223-4w
Computer staff, Dept of Health & Social Security 226w
Death grants 72w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Industrial disputes 171w, 271w, 591w, 666w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Members correspondence 323w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 467w
Ear disorders, Radiophones 379w
Handicap benefits 76w
Handicapped, Voluntary organisations 225w
Heating allowances 171w
Housing benefits 79w
Housing benefits, High rent schemes 79w, 541-2w
Induction loops, Public buildings 379w
Industrial disputes, Dept of Health & Social Security 226w
Invalidity benefits 72-3w

Mobility allowance, Hospital patients 385w
Multiple sclerosis 224-5w
Occupational asthma, Publicity 467-8w
Occupational asthma, Social security claims 467w
"Policy Studies Institute Working Paper C" 661w
Rent rebates 265w
Sick pay, Coal mining 172w
Social Security Advisory Committee 227-8w
Social security benefits, Industrial disputes 265-6w
Social security claims, Advertising 77w
Social Security Policy Inspectorate 80w
Social security reviews 80w
Strike benefits 586-7w
Strike benefits, Mortgages 324w
Supplementary benefits, Board & lodging charges 226-7w
Trafford, Members correspondence 378-9w
Unemployed, Social security reviews 384w
Wheelchairs 221w

Newtownards
Slaughterhouses 43w

NHS 174w
Abortion 271w
AIDS 471w
Expenditure 78w
Fertility 465-6w
Health hazards 661w
Income 667-8w
Managers 81-2w, 172w, 478w
Manpower 317w
Privatisation 206w, 222-3w, 321w, 512-3w, 590-1w
Redundancy 589w
Scotland 206w, 512-3w
VAT 455w
Venereal diseases 468-70w

NHS administration
Public appointments 466w

NHS charges 475-6w, 667-8w
Private patients 592w

NHS complaints (05.12.84) 386

NHS dental services 322w

NHS finance
Teaching hospitals 475w
Trent Regional Health Authority 73w

NHS Management Board 546-7w
Public appointments 546-7w

Nicaragua 516w, 1035
Diplomatic service 340w, 518-9w
Overseas aid 15w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 371
Questions
Spain, Cars 554w

Nicholson, Mr James
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 633-4
Questions
Dairy farming, Northern Ireland 490-1
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 482
Milk deliveries 197w

Nidal, Abu 520w

Nimrod aircraft 272w, 421w
Early warning systems 272w
Radar 421w

Nitrogen dioxide (10.12.84) 741-6

Nitrogen oxides 445w

Non-metropolitan counties
Education 188w

Norris, Mr Steve
Debates etc
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 317-8
Questions
Surveillance 642w

North London Polytechnic 1w
Prosecutions 1w

North of Scotland Box 350w
Fishing vessels 350w

North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board
Fishing 302w

North Sea
Herring 288w
Seals 295w

North Sea oil
Oil revenues 454w

North West region
Regional aid 438w

Northamptonshire
Enterprise allowance scheme 52w

Northern Ireland 517w
Aircraft noise 895-6
Armed forces deployment 409w, 428w
Baton rounds 330w
Civil servants 43w
Civil service 97w
Complaints against police 298w
Dairy farming 490-1, 595-6w
Death 295-6w, 298w
Elections (06.12.84) 604-37
Fair Employment Agency 458w
Firearms certificates 610w
Fisheries 639w
General elections 185w
Helicopters 895-6
Housing benefits 44-5w
Intervention stocks 504w
Life imprisonment 596w
Local government elections 97w, 204w
Milk 203w
Nurses training 203w
Personal income 45w
Personal injury compensation 298w
Personation (06.12.84) 604-37
Plastic bullets 330w, 349w, 597w
Pre-trial procedures 229w
Prisoners 596w
Prosecutions 296w
Public expenditure 504w, 610w
Remand in custody 459-60w
Social security 44w
Social security claims 44w
Social security recipients 45w
Urban development grants 348w
Womens prisons 297w

Northern Ireland government (05.12.84) 386

Northern Ireland Office
Blind 204-5w
UK membership of EC 205w

Northern Ireland (Termination of Jurisdiction) Bill 1984/85 1R (05.12.84) 386

North-West Arts Association 733

Not guilty pleas 274w

Nott, John 617w

Nuclear disarmament 1043

Nuclear power 125w

Nuclear power stations
Civil defence 306w

Nuclear safeguards
Plutonium 25w
Prototype fast reactors 24w

Nuclear safety
Treaties 23w

Nuclear test ban 198w, 450w

Nuclear war
Civil defence 279-80w
Livestock 286w

Nuclear weapons 49w, 429w
Arms control treaties 1037-8
Defence procurement 48w
NATO 28w
NATO joint exercises 431w
USSR 429-30w

Nuclear weapons deployment 894-7
Cruise missiles 892-5
Transport of radioactive materials 901-2

Nuclear weapons tests
Armed forces deployment 182w

Nursery schools 94w
Racial discrimination 381w, 543w
Scotland 205w

Nurses
Back pain 661w
Lothian 512w
Manpower 542w
Republic of Ireland 203w
Wales 719-20

Nurses training
Ards Hospital 203w
Northern Ireland 203w
Royal Victoria Hospital 203w

Nursing staff
Mental patients 214w

Nutrition & health
Fats 321w

Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Debates etc
Tachographs, EC action (03.12.84) 139-41

Oaths 329w
Juries 329w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 82-4

Occupational asthma 467-8w
Publicity 467-8w
Social security claims 467w

Occupational pensions 1199

Occupational therapists 170-1w, 591-2w

OECD countries
Manufactured exports 346w

Office of Chief Scientist 227w
Dept of Health & Social Security 227w

Office of Fair Trading
Credit card frauds 313w

Official Report
Administrative delays 614w
Speakers rulings & statements (05.12.84) 350

Official visits
Hong Kong 527w
Isle of Man 129w
Israel 403-4w
USSR 522w

Offset arrangements 618w

Oglesby Report 385w

Oil consumption
Electricity generation 170

Oil industry
Scotland (12.12.84) 1077

Oil revenues 1201
North Sea oil 454w

Oil rigs
Shipbuilding 1203-4

Old houses 63-4w

Older workers
Unemployment 209-10w

£1 coins 569w, (12.12.84) 1185-90

£1 notes (12.12.84) 1185-90

O'Neill, Mr Martin J
Questions
REME static workshops, Redundancy 898

Onslow, Mr Cranley
Questions
Firing ranges, Pirbright 100w

Open foyer policy 353w

Open government (05.12.84) 384

Open university
Finance 95w

Opera 734-5

Operating costs
Water authorities 396w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Questions
Derbyshire County Council 495
EC staff 1047-8
Falkland Islands, Housing construction 440w
Milk, Italy 283w

Opticians
Manpower 587-8w
Training 588w
Women 588w

Oral questions
Foreign & Commonwealth Office (12.12.84) 1054
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 10, (05.12.84) 363, (06.12.84) 486, 496, (12.12.84) 1054

Orbital roads
West Midlands 32w

Order of business
Speakers rulings & statements (04.12.84) 173-4

Orders & regulations
Local Government Bill 1984/85 179w
Speakers rulings & statements (10.12.84) 753, (11.12.84) 941, 1002, (12.12.84) 1055

Ordnance Survey 581w, 655-6w
Financial targets 116w

"Ordnance Survey Plan, 1985/88" 581w

Ordnance Survey Review Committee 117w, 581w

Origin marking
Clothes (05.12.84) 387
Textiles (05.12.84) 387

Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (10.12.84) 751, (11.12.84) 935
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 297
Questions
Coal mining, EC countries 23w

Orthopaedics
Cardiovascular diseases 269w

Osborn, Sir John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 49-52

Osteopathy 169w

Ottaway, Mr Richard
Questions
Commercial court 14
Exercise Lionheart 430w

Outgoers scheme 435w
Dairy farming 488
Milk 435w

Out-patients
Smoking related diseases 269w

Overseas aid 15w, 16-8, 333w
Africa 196w
Generic prescribing 15w
Nicaragua 15w
Resettlement 603w
World Bank (11.12.84) 1002-24
Zimbabwe 593w

Overseas electors (10.12.84) 754-838

Overseas students
Tuition fees 188w, 200w, 241-2w, 452-3w

Overseas trade
China 330-1w, 345w, 557w, 1042

Overtime
Dept of Energy 23w

Owen, Rt Hon David
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 355
Questions
Namibia 1039-40
Public expenditure, Employment schemes 1205
Science & technology research 496
Western European Union 1051-2

Oxford Circus 612w

Oxford Circus Station 613w
Fires 612-3w

Oxford University 186w
Higher education admission 186w

Oxfordshire Bill (HL) 1983/84
2R* (04.12.84) 155

Ozone
Plants 446w, 658w

Paediatrics
Drugs 81w

Page, Sir John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 50, 89-91, 122

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Export promotion 101w
Farm wardens, Civil defence 285w
Overseas aid 333w

Paige, Victor 546-7w

Paisley
Leisure facilities 340

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 608, 614-7, 619, 632, 634-6
Oral question time points of order (06.12.84) 491
Questions
Dairy farming, Northern Ireland 491

Pakistan
Prisoners 25-6w

Palace of Westminster
Helicopters 38w

Paper industry
Industrial training 55w

Parallel imports
Drugs 165w

Parental contributions
Mandatory student grants 154w
Student grants 19w, 90-2w, 96w, 154-6w, 156-60, 167, 169-70, 186-7w, 239-40w, 242w, 492-3
Tuition fees 242w

"Parental Influence at School Consultation Paper" 163

Park, Mr George
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1250-1, 1270, 1273
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 852
Questions
Higher education 96w
Passenger transport executives 39-40w

Parkhurst Prison 3w, 592w
Prisoners dependents 592w
Sanitation 3w

Parking
Greater London 37w

Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 546-9, 584

Parliamentary counsel
Manpower 604-5w

Parliamentary party committees 552-3w

Parole 280w
Scotland 217w
Youth offenders 563w
Youth custody 485w

Parris, Mr Matthew
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 787-92
Questions
Lorries, EC action 336-7w

Parry, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 394, 401, 423-5
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1009, 1013-4, 1022-3
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Plastic bullets 298w
British Rail, Investment 38w
British Telecom, Privatisation 629w
Business statement 1215
Coal mining, Death 257-8w
Coal mining, Manpower 253-4w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 453w
Hong Kong, Armed forces deployment 426w
Hong Kong, Official visits 527w
Liverpool Prison, Drugs 566w
Liverpool Prison, Prisoners dependents 184-5w
McCabe, Norah 295-6w, 298w
Ministers domestic visits, Merseyside 118w
Nicaragua, Diplomatic service 340w
Overseas aid 17-8
Picketing, Injuries 277w
Plastic bullets, Northern Ireland 330w, 349w, 597w
Police, Plastic bullets 306-7w, 332w
Prime Minister official engagements 127w, 404w, 546w
Prisoners dependents, Security 184w
Public order policing 637w
Public order policing, Costs 277w
Public order policing, Merseyside 277w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Crimes of violence 296w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Plastic bullets 298w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Police discipline 597w
Unemployment 557w
VAT, Take-away food shops 248w

Passenger transport executives 1-2, 39-40w
Railway travel 39w

Patchett, Mr Terry
Questions
Guided weapons, Defence procurement 426w

Patents
Drugs 169w

Patten, Mr Chris, *Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Questions
Divis flats, Demolition 348w
Urban development grants, Northern Ireland 348w

Patten, Mr John, *Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security*
Questions
Action on Smoking & Health, Government grants 466w
Alcoholism, Liver diseases 324-5w
Ambulance services, Assault 541w
Ambulance services, Newcastle under Lyme 77w
Ambulance services, Sick pay 541w
Baby care units 476w
Back pain, Medical research 589w
Carbon monoxide, Poisoning 77w
Children in care 322-3w
City Roads detoxification unit 659w
Community care, Finance 477w
Cot deaths 377w
Cruelty to children, Sexual offences 591w
Diabetes 76w
Drug abuse, Government grants 385-6w

Electorate 535-8w
Epidural injections, Midwives 323w
Fats, Nutrition & health 321w
Foetal alcohol syndrome 325-6w
Foster care, Ethnic minorities 477-8w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 82w
Health service staff 459-62w
Health service staff, Prosecutions 461w
Health services, Bolton 84w
Health services, Government grants to voluntary organisations 80-1w
Health services, Wars 466w
"Helping the Community to Care" 81-2w
Home care services, Rural areas 380w
Home helps 380w
Home helps, Manpower 471-2w
Hospital bed occupancy rates 317-8w
Hospital beds 174w
Hospital patients, Clothing 323w
Hospital safety 321w
Hospital waiting lists, Ear nose & throat 474w
Hypothermia, Death 461w
Infant mortality, Social class 462w
Kidney machines 316-7w
Kidneys, Transplant surgery 316w
Lithotripsy, Medical equipment 84w
Maternity Services Advisory Committee 476w
Mental health community care, Rural areas 379-80w
Mental health services, Greenwich 83w
NHS, Health hazards 661w
Nursery schools, Racial discrimination 381w, 543w
Osteopathy 169w
Paediatrics, Drugs 81w
Perinatal mortality, West Midlands 175w, 476w
Pesticides, Poisoning 534-6w
Pregnant women, Diets 380w
Regional health authorities, Trades Union Congress 329w
Smoking related diseases, Death 665-6w
Social workers 79w

Pattie, Mr Geoffrey, *Minister of State for Information Technology*
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 19-24
Questions
Columbus space station 500w
Electronics industry, Government assistance to industry 499w
Electronics industry, Research 498w
Laboratories 500-1w
Post Office, Lost mail 121w
Post office closures 120-1w
Telephones, Metering approval scheme 343-4w

Pavitt, Mr Laurie
Debates etc
Generic Substitution (National Health Service) Bill, 1R (07.12.84) 648
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 34
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1086, 1160-1 (13.12.84) 1300
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 847
Railway accidents, Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 173
Questions
Arts sponsorship, Tobacco industry 732
Cigarettes 249w
Drug abuse 269w
Greater London Council, Seaside & country homes scheme 505w
Heart diseases, Smoking 268w
Heroin, Death 270w
Hospital beds, Smoking related diseases 268-9w
Local government land, Greater London Council 655w
Lung cancer, Smoking 268w
Orthopaedics, Cardiovascular diseases 269w
Out-patients, Smoking related diseases 269w
Smoking, Death 269w
Smoking related diseases, Costs 270w, 384w
Tax yields, Cigarettes 249w

Pawsey, Mr J F
Questions
Action on Smoking & Health, Government grants 466w
Civic trust, Government grants 395-6w
Education finance 162
Expenditure, Dept of Health & Social Security 374-5w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Dept of Trade & Industry 5w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Dept of Energy 23-4w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Dept of Transport 34w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Home Office 129-31w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 28w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Ministry of Defence 99w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Treasury 16w
Kidney machines 316w
Kidneys, Transplant surgery 316w
NHS, Expenditure 78w
Skillcentres, Computer training 448w
Skillcentres, Mobile instructor force 448w

Pay 631w

Pay incentives
Civil service 192-3w

Paymaster-General 727-8
Manpower 727
Ministerial duties 728-9
Pensions 728

Peace negotiations
Central America 518w
Falkland Islands 519-20w
Namibia 199w, 525w

Peace studies 96w

Peace treaties
Turkey 450w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Questions
Housing finance 119w
Teachers, Manpower 157w

Peat Marwick Mitchell 655-6w

Pelican crossings 8-9

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
Boxing, Unfair competition 584w
Cruelty to children, Sexual offences 591w

Penhaligon, Mr David
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 20
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1070
Questions
Dentistry, Appeals 587w

Pension funds
Income tax 574w
Tax allowances 248w
Taxation 176-7w, 573-4w
Vosper Thornycroft 315w, 348w

Pensioners
Income tax 494w
Supplementary benefits 223w
Wales 548w

Pensions
Hong Kong 27w
Lump sum payments 18w, 1198-200
Paymaster-General 728
Personal tax allowances 570w
Taxation 176w, 1198-200
Teachers 335

Per capita costs
Education 20-1w
Health services 222w

Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Debates etc
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 866, 870-1
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 933
Questions
Business statement 502-3

Perinatal mortality
West Midlands 175w, 476w

Pernicious anaemia 383w

Personal income 193w
Northern Ireland 45w
Scotland 454w

Personal injury compensation
Northern Ireland 298w

Personal records
Computer privacy 331w
Council tenants 238w

Personal tax allowances 457w
Merchant seamen 572w
Pensions 570w

Personal taxation 246-8w
Employment 573w

Personation 567w, (06.12.84) 604-37
Northern Ireland (06.12.84) 604-37

Perth Prison 42w

Pest control
Agricultural research 625-6w

Pest resistance 327-8w

Pesticides 104-5w, 242w, 327-8w, 529w
Animal experiments 290w
Poisoning 534-6w
Sites of special scientific interest 393w

Peterhead Prison 201w, 349-50w
Crimes of violence 201w

Petrol additives
Lead (04.12.84) 302-22

Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 166-7w, 169w

Physiotherapists 170-1w

Picketing 642w
Fines 638w
Injuries 277w
Legal aid 602w
Police powers 632w, 641w
Prosecutions 637-8w
Scotland 622w, 632w

Pigeon racing 287w
Poultry diseases 287w

Pike, Mr Peter
Questions
District health authorities, Planning 539w
Electricity generation, Oil consumption 170
European Regional Development Fund, British Telecom 437-8w
European Regional Development Fund, Textile industry 437w
Housing, Block grant 581w
Housing investment programmes 393w
Local government expenditure, Greater Manchester 644w
Middle East 513-4w
Prime Minister official engagements 404w
Regional aid, North West region 438w
Regional health authorities, Planning 539-40w
Royal ordnance factories, Redundancy 410w
Student grants, Parental contributions 91w
Unemployment 499w
VAT zero rated goods 1195

Pilotage
Redundancy 576w

Pilotage Commission 576w

Pirbright
Firing ranges 100w

Planning
District health authorities 539w
Regional health authorities 539-40w

Planning Authorities (Restriction of Liability) Bill 1984/85
1R (07.12.84) 648

Planning compensation (07.12.84) 648

Planning inquiries 393w

Planning permission 67w, 655w
Greater London 237w
Playing fields 393w

Plants
Air pollution 446w
Ozone 446w, 658w

Plastic bullets
Army in Northern Ireland 298w
Northern Ireland 330w, 349w, 597w
Police 306-7w, 332w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 298w

Plastics
Industrial training 54w

Playing fields (05.12.84) 385
Planning permission 393w

Plugs & sockets
Electrical control equipment 314w

Plutonium 182w, 510w, 550-1w, 606w
Nuclear safeguards 25w
USA 24w, 352-3w

Plymouth
Bus services 3

Pneumoconiosis Etc (Workers Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 1984 (10.12.84) 879

Poaching
Prosecutions 347-8

Points of order (13.12.84) 1261
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 34 (05.12.84) 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 378, (07.12.84) 666 (10.12.84) 740, (12.12.84) 1052, (13.12.84) 1208, 1318

Poisoning
Carbon monoxide 77w
Pesticides 534-6w
Wild animals 327w

Poland 526w
Human rights 597w

Police
Baton rounds 306-7w, 332w
Blindwells 620w
Capital investment 636w
Civil defence 561-2w
Departmental circulars 129w
Greater Manchester 483w
Manpower 563w
Metropolitan counties 639w
Pay 564-6w
Plastic bullets 306-7w, 332w
Privatisation 636w

Police discipline
Royal Ulster Constabulary 298w, 597w

Police dogs 405w, 479w
Greater London 405w
Metropolitan Police 405w, 479w

Police housing
Scotland 513w

Police National Reporting Centre 129w

Police powers
Picketing 632w, 641w
Young offenders 565w

Police raids
Books 575-6w

Police training
Civil disorder 642w
Scotland 622w

Policy Studies Institute 661w

"Policy Studies Institute Working Paper C" 661w

Political doctrines
Student unions 594w

Pollock, Mr Alexander
Questions
Domestic electrical appliances, Imports 121-2w

Pollution control
Fish farming 624w
Wales 547w

Polychlorinated biphenyl
Waste disposal 118w

Polyurethane
COMECON 315w
Eastern Europe 315w
International cooperation 347-8w

Port Talbot
Regional aid 723

Porter, Mr Barry
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 180
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1089-91
Questions
Type 22 frigates 903

Porton Down 47w
Animal experiments 47w

Portsmouth
British Telecom Computer Centre (05.12.84) 473-80

Post Office
Lost mail 121w
Wales 548w

Post office closures 120-1w

Postal services
Armed forces 181w, 431w
Falkland Islands 181w, 272w, 431w
VAT 613-4w

Potato Marketing Board 286w

Potatoes
Surpluses 286w

Poultry diseases
Pigeon racing 287w

Poverty
Children 79w

Powell, Rt Hon J Enoch
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1072
EC budget (11.12.84) 982
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 604-6, 607, 614, 623-4, 634
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 354
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 406-8, 442
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 759, 783-7, 830
Unborn Children (Protection) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 384
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 409w
Business statement 501
European Assembly elections, Harmonisation of legislation 331w
Fisheries, Isle of Man 639w
Franco-British Council 128w
VAT, EC countries 1196

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 577-9
Oral question time point of order (10.12.84) 735, 736
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1061
Sunday trading, Standing Order No 10 applications (10.12.84) 748
Questions
Bus services, Wales 730
National Bus Company, Privatisation 10
National Coal Board 355w
National Coal Board, Accountants 721

Powell, Mr William
Debates etc
Copyright (Computer Software) Amendment Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 385
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 812-3

Power stations
Acid rain 445-6w, 508w
Information 101-2w
Sulphur dioxide 446w, 508w, 658-9w

Powley, Mr John
Debates etc
Medical research, Public petitions (06.12.84) 637
Questions
Council tenants, Personal records 238w

Powys
Enterprise zones 718

Pregnant women
Alcoholic drinks 325-6w
Diets 380w

Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1083-4

Prescott, Mr John
Debates etc
Tachographs, EC action (03.12.84) 139
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 657-8
Questions
Merchant seamen, Industrial health & safety 334-5w, 407-8w, 530w
Merchant seamen, Shipping accidents 334w
Shipping, Industrial health & safety 407w
Shipping accidents 335w
Shipping safety, Hazardous materials 334w

Prescribed documents (06.12.84) 604-37

Prescription charges exemptions
Metropolitan Police 282w

Prescriptions 164w, 661w
Antiseptic lozenges & sprays 169w
Doctors 540w
Drugs 463-5w, 538w, 660w
Family doctors 315w
Rural areas 162w

Prestwich Hospital, Manchester 164w

Prestwick Freeport Company 152w
Government assistance to industry 152w

Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 10-1w

Prevention of Terrorism (Supplemental Temporary Provisions) Order 1984 129w

Prevention of Terrorism (Supplementary Provisions) Order 1984 641w

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 639-40w, 640-1w

Pre-trial procedures
Northern Ireland 229w

Price, Sir David
Questions
Arts sponsorship 732
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 467w
English National Opera 734-5
European Day of Music 205w
Osteopathy 169w
Shops, Sunday trading 276w
Type 22 frigates 48w
Vosper Thornycroft 189-90w

Price controls
Milk 198w

Price elasticities 614w
Tobacco 614w

Price Waterhouse 602w, (11.12.84) 927-38

Prices
Animal feed 486-7
Cereals 486-7
Wheat 623-4w

Primary education
Capitation allowances 162
Cost per pupil 161
Staffordshire 161
Wales 547w, 717
Welsh language 547w

Prime Minister
Railway travel 403w

Prime Minister domestic visits
Baldernock 546w
Farleigh Wallop 233w
Lewisham 233w
Pwllheli 404w

Prime Minister official engagements 127w, 233w, 404w, 546w

Prime Minister visits abroad
China 330-1w
France 545w
USA 545w

Prime Ministers efficiency unit 127w

Prison Accommodation
Youth custody 633w

Prison employment
Holloway Prison 486w

Prison population
Remand centres 632-4w
Scotland 41w, 262-3w
Young offenders 634-6w
Youth custody 634w

Prison sentences
Prostitution 280-1w

Prison staff
Holloway Prison 486-7w

Prisoners
Armed forces 411w
Northern Ireland 596w
Pakistan 25-6w

Prisoners dependents
Liverpool Prison 184-5w
Parkhurst Prison 592w
Security 184w

Prisoners on remand
Food 134w

Prisoners release 280w
Hopson, Edward 565w
Scotland 263w

Prisoners transfers 4w

Prisons
Construction 304-6w
Drugs 331-2w, 566w
Safety equipment 3w
Sanitation 3w, 132w
Scotland 42w

Private bills
House of Commons Standing Orders (11.12.84) 891

Private education
Government grants 549w
Wales 549w, 718

Private Members motions
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1323-81
Tourism (07.12.84) 649-708

Private patients
NHS charges 592w

Privatisation 1202-3
British Airports Authority 11-2
British Airways 29w, 612w
British Gas Corporation 605w
British Rail 35w
British Steel Corporation 554w
British Telecom 6-7w, 341w, 553w, 629w
Bus services 2-7, 10-1, 30-1w
Coal mining 23w
Falmouth Shiprepair 7w
Fire services 636w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 519w
Forestry Commission 140-51w, 215w, 619-20w, 623w
National Bus Company 10-1
NHS 206w, 222-3w, 321w, 512-3w, 590-1w
Police 636w
Shipbuilding 315w
Short Brothers 229w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering 901

Probation & aftercare
Metropolitan counties 134-6w

Proctor, Mr K Harvey
Questions
Arts sponsorship 731-2
EC budget, UK contributions 1207-8
Free ports 247-8w
Government assistance to industry, EC countries 12w
Local government land, Greater London Council 655w
Price elasticities, Tobacco 614w
Regional aid 121w
Regional planning & development 555w
Social workers 79w
South Africa, Durban three 1045

Procurators fiscal 203w

Procurement 329w, 1197-8
European Commission 127w

Production quotas
Dairy farming 488-9
Milk 283-4w, 435-6w, 482-3, 488, 491-2, 723-4, 907-8, 1049

Professional misconduct 378w

Prohibition notices 562w
Hospitals 562w

Project Cold Witness 50w

Property Services Agency
Corruption 119w

Proprietary drugs 465w

Proscribed organisations
Ulster Defence Regiment 414w

Prosecution of Offences Bill (HL) 1984/85 246w

Prosecutions
Crop spraying 577-8w
Election offences 567w
Fife 201-2w
Health service staff 461w
Industrial health & safety 257w
North London Polytechnic 1w
Northern Ireland 296w
Picketing 637-8w
Poaching 347-8
Road accidents 409w
Safety belts 344-5
Scotland 16w, 102w, 203w
Young offenders 275-6w

Prostitution (05.12.84) 384
Fine defaulters 280-1w
Prison sentences 280-1w

Protective clothing
Industrial noise 449w

Prototype fast reactors
Nuclear safeguards 24w

"PSI Working Paper, C" 661w

Public appointments
European Commission 1048
London Regional Transport 37w
Magistrates 1w, 245w
NHS administration 466w
NHS Management Board 546-7w
Social Security Advisory Committee 272w
World Bank 137w

Public bills
Speakers rulings & statements (04.12.84) 275

Public buildings
Induction loops 379w
Scotland 40w

Public expenditure 494, 572-3w
Capital investment 1200-1, 1204
Construction 582w
Employment schemes 1205
Northern Ireland 504w, 610w

Public inquiries
Roads 252w
Ronan Point 507w
Welfield 582w

Public meetings
Water authorities (05.12.84) 385

Public Order Act 1936 641w

Public Order Act 1936 & Related Legislation Review 641w

Public order policing 637-9w
Costs 277w, 639w
Merseyside 277w
RAF Greenham Common 282w
Scotland 621-2w

Public petitions
Greater London Council (10.12.84) 882
Human embryo experiments (05.12.84) 472, (07.12.84) 647, (11.12.84) 1026, (14.12.84) 1318, 1319, 1320-1, 1321-2
Lead free petrol (07.12.84) 647-8
Medical research (06.12.84) 637
Rate limitation (14.12.84) 1322
Torture (07.12.84) 648, (14.12.84) 1319

Public sector borrowing requirement 370w, 575w, 1193
Interest rates 571w

Public service obligation grant
British Rail 253w

Public transport (14.12.84) 1382-88
Essex 310w

Publicity
Employers statutory sick pay scheme 374w
Housing benefits 374w
Occupational asthma 467-8w
Social security benefits 168-9w

Publishers Association 1203

Punta Arenas 617-8w

Pupil-teacher ratios
Somerset 92w
Wales 232-3w
West Midlands 153w

Pwllheli
Prime Minister domestic visits 404w

Quality control
Generic prescribing 162-3w

Race relations
Home Office 305w

Race Relations Act 1976 3w

Racial conflict
Metropolitan Police 277-9w

Racial discrimination
Nursery schools 381w, 543w

Radar 50w
Nimrod aircraft 421w
Tiree 531w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 121-5, 129, 130
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 361-2
Questions
Student grants, Parental contributions 156-7

Radio
Western Isles 509w

Radio frequencies
Submarines 181-2w

Radioactive waste disposal 238w

Radioactive Waste Dumping Independent Inquiry 579w

Radiophones
Ear disorders 379w

RAE Oakhanger 419w

RAF Alconbury 427w, 894

RAF Cottesmore 48w
Sound insulation 48w

RAF Greenham Common 282w
Public order policing 282w

RAF Molesworth 427w, 894

RAF Stornoway 509-10w
Military exercises 509-10w

Raffan, Mr Keith
Debates etc
Controlled Drugs (Penalties) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 386
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1062
Questions
Education, Wales 297w
Educational finance, Wales 232w, 355w
Enterprise zones, Delyn 718-9
Pupil-teacher ratios, Wales 232-3w
Regional planning & development, Wales 726

Railway accidents
Death 309-10w
Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 173, 296-301
Salford (04.12.84) 173, 296-301, 578w

Railway electrification 7-8, 102w
East Coast railway line 7
Midland main railway line 38w

Railway freight transport
Coal 721

Railway Inspectorate 309w

Railway maintenance 337w

Railway safety 309w

Railway signals 309w

Railway travel
Passenger transport executives 39w
Prime Minister 403w

Raison, Rt Hon Timothy, *Minister of State for Overseas Development*
Debates etc
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1002-5, 1023-4
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 196w
Africa, World Bank 196w
Disaster relief 15w
Disaster Relief Office 17
EC Development Council 15w
Ethiopia, Cereals 594w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 14-5w, 16-8, 135-8w, 453w
Ethiopia, Ministers visits abroad 16
Food aid from EC 196-7w
Leeward Islands, Aircraft 137w
Lome convention 137-9w
Nicaragua, Overseas aid 15w
Overseas aid 15w, 16-8, 333w
Overseas aid, Generic prescribing 15w
Overseas aid, Resettlement 603w
UN Development Programme, UK contributions 604w
UNESCO 13-4w, 526-7w
World Bank, Public appointments 137w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 593w

Rampton Committee see Education of Children From Ethnic Minority Groups Committee of Inquiry

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 373
Questions
British Airways, Privatisation 29w
Training aircraft, Defence procurement 421w

Rank Xerox 51w
Youth training scheme 51w

Rape 185-6w
Scotland 216-7w

Rate fund contributions 261w

Rate limitation
Leicester City Council 656w
Public petitions (14.12.84) 1322

Rate rebates 265w
Caravan sites 209w
Water charges 375w

Rate support grant penalties 395w, (11.12.84) 912-26 (12.12.84) 1056-66

Rate support grants 237w, 584w
Brighton 65w
Greater London 66-7w
Ministerial statements (11.12.84) 912-26, (12.12.84) 1056-66, (13.12.84) 1220-35
Scotland (13.12.84) 1220-35
Tayside 208w
Wales (12.12.84) 1056-66

Rates Act 1984 (14.12.84) 1322

Rates & rating
National Coal Board 394-5w, 584w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 799-801

Rationing
Food 286w

Ravendale Securities 8w
Licensing 8w

Rear seat belts 12, 344-5

Redmond, Mr Martin
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 927, 935

Redundancy
Hospital ancillary staff 321w
NHS 589w
Pilotage 576w
REME static workshops 898
Royal ordnance factories 410w
Wales 720-1

Redundancy payments office
Glasgow 359w

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 35
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 292
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 930
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 739
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 15
Student grants, Parental contributions 156

Rees, Rt Hon Peter, *Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 587-94
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 1193-4
Economic growth 454w, 570w
Economic models, Unemployment 568w
Economic policy 1191
Economic situation 1197
Employment 574w
Employment level 571-2w
Expenditure, Local government reform 572w
Export credit guarantees, Aircraft 1194
Falkland Islands, Expenditure 1194
Financial management unit 497-8w
House prices 571w
Industrial investment 574w
Interest rates 1191
Money supply 574w
Nationalised industries, Profits 176w
Personal taxation, Employment 573w
Procurement 1197-8
Public Expenditure 572-3w
Public expenditure, Capital investment 1200-1
Public sector borrowing requirement 370w, 575w, 1193
Unemployment 1191-2
Unemployment, Costs 570w
Wages councils 1198

Refugees
Honduras 521w

Regional aid 121w, 314-5w, 555w
Cynon Valley 342w
Departmental coordination 403w
Expenditure 344-5w
Fife 208w
Knowsley 7-8w
Lanarkshire 344
Manchester Airport 11w
North West region 438w
Port Talbot 723
Wales 126w, 724-5
West Midlands 314w, 439w

Regional airports 336w, 338w

Regional arts associations 732-3

Regional development grants
Scotland 344
Yorkshire & Humberside 345w

Regional health authorities
Contracts 661w
Planning 539-40w
Trades Union Congress 324w

"Regional Industrial Development White Paper" 555w

Regional planning & development 555w
Merseyside 125w
Scotland 207w, 340-1
Wales 724-6

Religion
Ulster Defence Regiment 413w

Religious freedom
British residents abroad 520w

Remand centres 484w
Prison population 632-4w

Remand in custody
Northern Ireland 459-60w
Young offenders 633-4w

REME static workshops 397-8w
Redundancy 898

Rent allowances
Social security recipients 586w

Rent rebates 265w
Social security recipients 586w

Renton, Mr Tim, *Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Questions
Adelaide Island 599w
Argentina 527w
Arif, Hassan Zafir 25-6w
BBC external services 518w
BBC external services, Government grants 517-8w
Belize 519w
Brazil 520-1w
Central America 1035-6
Central America, Peace negotiations 518w
Chile 525w
Chile, British Antarctic Territory 599w
Cyprus 515w
Diplomatic service 521w
El Salvador 522w
El Salvador, Military aid 340w
Entry clearances, Fees & charges 598w, 627-8w
Falkland Islands, Fish conservation 598-9w
Falkland Islands, Fishing catches 599w
Falkland Islands, Peace negotiations 519-20w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Privatisation 519w

Gibraltar 25w, 600w
Gibraltar, Air routes 523w
Gibraltar, Building industry 523w
Gibraltar, Dockyards 523w
Gibraltar, Family allowances 524w
Gibraltar, Ferries 523-4w
Gibraltar, Health services 524w
Gibraltar, Housing 523w
Gibraltar, Income tax 524w
Gibraltar, Landing rights 524w
Greece, Treaties 628w
Guatemala 525w
Honduras, Refugees 521w
Lemnos 450w, 628-9w
Nicaragua 516w, 1035
Nicaragua, Diplomatic service 340w
Overseas students, Tuition fees 200w
Sri Lanka 597w
St Helena, Birds 340-2w
Training aircraft 1044-5
Turkey, Peace treaties 450w
UK membership of EC, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 200w
UN Decade for Women 1976-1985 527-8w
United Nations, Sex discrimination 528-9w
USA, Conferences 308w

Representation of the People Bill 1984/85 305w, (10.12.84) 749-50
Ministerial statements (10.12.84) 749-50
2R (10.12.84) 754-838
Money res* (10.12.84) 838
Ways & means resolution* (10.12.84) 838

Reprography
Members facilities 601w

Republic of Ireland
Extradition 152-3w
Nurses 203w

Research 331w
Acid rain 444-5w
AIDS 451w
Drinking & driving 337w
Electronics industry 498w
Fisheries 328-9w
Industrial training 56w
Tranquillisers 173-4w

Resettlement
Overseas aid 603w

Residential care
Concessionary television licences 276-7w

Resources exploration
Minerals 557w

Restaurants
Food labelling 345-6w

Retail prices
Beef & veal 625w
Sheep meat 625w

Retirement age 78w

Retirement pensions 376-7w

Rhodes James, Mr Robert
Debates etc
Access to Parliament (03.12.84) 25
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1319

Rhymney Valley District Council 231w
Council housing finance 231-2w

Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Debates etc
Planning Authorities (Restriction of Liability) Bill, 1R (07.12.84) 648
Questions
Income tax, Pensioners 494w
Interest rates 1191
Social security benefits, Administrative costs 266-7w
Student grants, Parental contributions 186-7w

Richardson, Ms Jo
Debates etc
Greater London Council, Public petitions (10.12.84) 882
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 871-2
Questions
Community programme, Married women 446-7w
Holloway Prison, Members correspondence 566w

Riding hats 372w
VAT 372w

Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas, *Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 174-81, 188
Railway accidents, Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 173, 296-301
Questions
Air traffic, Defence land 578-9w
Blind, Dept of Transport 34w
British Rail, Public service obligation grant 253w
Bus services 3
Bus services, Lancashire 6
Bus services, Plymouth 3
Bus services, Privatisation 2-3, 5-7, 10-1, 30w
Concessionary fares, Block grant 579w
Driving tests, Handicapped drivers 612w
Employees suggestion schemes, Dept of Transport 252w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Dept of Transport 34w
Lorries, EC action 336-7w, 339w
Lorries, Greater London 534w
National Bus Company, Privatisation 10-1
Pilotage, Redundancy 576w
Radar, Tiree 531w
Shipping, Liner conferences 338w
Transport supplementary grants 406-7w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Transport 179w

Rifkind, Mr Malcolm, *Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 942-54, 956, 957, 958
Law of the sea (06.12.84) 642-6
Questions
Africa, Diplomatic relations 198-9w
Common commercial policy 1052
Diplomatic immunity 521-2w
Diplomatic immunity, Road accidents 101w
East West relations 515-6w
EC budget 598w
EC budget, EC Agricultural Council 598w
EC internal trade 1052
EC staff 1047-8
Ethiopia 521w
Ethiopia, Human rights 628w
European Commission, Public appointments 1048
European Union 1049-50
Export promotion 101w
Gorbachev, Mikhail 520w
Government Communications Headquarters 600w
Law of the Sea Convention 27w, 254w, 519w
Namibia 524w
Namibia, Peace negotiations 199w, 525w
Namibia, UN resolutions 524w
Poland 526w
Poland, Human rights 597w
South Africa 514-5w
South Africa, Durban three 517w, 1045
Spain, EC accession 25w
Uganda, Human rights 1036
Ugandan Asians 1036-7
USSR, Human rights 526w
USSR, Official visits 522w

Rights of way
Forestry Commission 620w

Riot control weapons
Broadmoor Hospital 228w
Special hospitals 228w

Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 206-9, 259

River Blackwater 204w
Land drainage 204w

River Canon 302w

River Mersey 395w

River pollution
Fish farming 582-3w, 624w

River Thames 117w

Road Accident Statistics English Regions 578w

Road accidents
A3 336w
Cycling 251-2w
Diplomatic immunity 101w
Greater London 35-6w
Lorries 408w
Motorcycles 339w
M25 533w, 909-11
Prosecutions 409w

Road blocks 642w
A360 642w

Road construction
A465 355w
Bitumens 309w
Greater London 36w
M25 8, 33w
West Midlands (04.12.84) 323-30

Road safety
Motorcycles 5

Road safety barriers 35w

Road tax
Tax evasion 338w

Road traffic 253w

Road traffic control
M1 37-8w

Road traffic offences
Speed limits 485w

Road Traffic (Production of Documents) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 388

Road works
A1 531w
Greater London 33-4w, 36w

Roads
A3 336w
Construction materials 249w
Greater London 34w
Local government reform 34w
Public inquiries 252w

Roberts, Mr Allan
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 68, 69, 77-80
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1149-50 (13.12.84) 1239, 1241, 1244, 1249, 1287-9
Local Government Bill, Standing Committee composition (13.12.84) 1236
Questions
Air pollution, Trees 658w
Ozone, Plants 658w
Sulphur dioxide, Power stations 658-9w

Roberts, Mr Ernie
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 358
Northern Ireland (Termination of Jurisdiction) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 386
Questions
Building workers, Hackney 312w

Roberts, Mr Wyn, *Under-Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Council housing finance, Rhymney Valley District Council 231w

Heroin, Wales 5w
Hospital patients, Wales 719-20
Kidney machines, West Wales Hospital 160w
Multiple sclerosis, Wales 296w
Nurses, Wales 719-20
Pollution control, Wales 547w
UK membership of EC, Welsh Office 189w
Welsh language 356w
Welsh Water Authority, Financial targets 159w, 399w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 461-6
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1233
Questions
Arms control 517w
Hong Kong 1042

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Questions
Advanced manufacturing industry 500w
Bioengineering, Government assistance to industry 499w
Columbus space station 500w
Community programme 243w
Electronics industry, Government assistance to industry 499w
Race relations, Home Office 305w
Regional airports 338w
Tax allowances, Shipping 574-5w
Tourism 498w
Trident, Defence contracts 423-4w
Youth training scheme, Mental hospitals 312w

Robinson, Mr Mark
Questions
Hong Kong 1042

Robinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 609-10, 631-3

Roe, Mrs Marion
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 98-102
Questions
El Salvador 522w
Intervention Board, Expenditure 293-4w
Sheep, France 285w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 950
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 865
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1064
Questions
Air force bases 427w
Handicapped pupils 95w
Namibia, UN resolutions 524w

Ronan Point 507w
Public inquiries 507w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 587, 591-2
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 95
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 921
Questions
Dentists, Pay 161w
Enveloping schemes 63-4w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Areas of special need, Dundee 665w
Average earnings 359w
Capital taxes, Scotland 496w
Death rate, Scotland 619w
Disposable income, Scotland 454w
Employment by sector, Dundee 510w
Employment level, Scotland 509w
Estates, Scotland 495w
European fighter aircraft 429w
Family income, Scotland 540w
Food surpluses 300w
Hospital waiting lists, Dundee 512w
Housing support grants, Dundee 401-2w
Infant mortality, Scotland 619w
Israel 1039
Local government expenditure, Dundee 402w, 511w
Personal income, Scotland 454w
Rate support grants, Tayside 208w
Supplementary benefits, Dundee 586w
Unemployment, Dundee 511w
Unemployment, Scotland 401w
Wealth distribution, Scotland 494-5w
Youth training scheme, Dundee 619w

Ross, Mr Stephen
Questions
Interest rates, Small businesses 1202
Lorries, EC action 337w
Lorries, Greater London 29-30w
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 899
NHS, Managers 81-2w
Training aircraft, Defence procurement 420-1w

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1071
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 606-9, 612, 618, 627, 629-31
Questions
General elections, Northern Ireland 185w
General elections, Voting behaviour 185w

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Debates etc
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 743
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 192, 197-200

Rost, Mr Peter
Questions
British Steel Corporation, Privatisation 554w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 457-8
Questions
Stamp duties 249w

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1063
Questions
Manpower Services Commission, Wales 159w

Royal artillery range
Hebrides 508-9w

Royal College of Surgeons 483-4w
Medical research 483-4w

Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers 397-8w

Royal Marsden Hospital 472-3w

Royal Observer Corps 306w

Royal Opera House 353-4w
Finance 353-4w

Royal ordnance factories 48-9w
Ammunition 410w
Redundancy 410w

Royal Ulster Constabulary 610w
Crimes of violence 296w
Plastic bullets 298w
Police discipline 298w, 597w

Royal Victoria Hospital 203w
Nurses training 203w

Rubber industry
Industrial training 54w

Rules of engagement 233w, 617w
Falkland Islands 233w, 617w

Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Questions
Shops, Sunday trading 906-7

Rural areas
Home care services 380w
Limited list prescribing 383w
Mental health community care 379-80w
Prescriptions 162w
Strathclyde 350w

Sackville, Mr Tom
Questions
Drug abuse, Government grants 585-6w
Manchester Airport 32w

Safety belts
Driving offences 332w
Prosecutions 344-5
Scotland 344-5

Safety equipment
Prisons 3w

Safety standards
British Rail 33w

Salford
Railway accidents (04.12.84) 173, 296-301, 578w

Salmon
Fishery protection 339
Scotland 338-9, 347-8

Saltley
Leigh Road School 158w

Sanitation
Parkhurst Prison 3w
Prisons 3w, 132w

Satellite communications
US bases 419w

Satellite killers 426-7w
Arms control 520w
Arms control treaties 1037-8

Saughton Prison 42w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc
Law of the sea (06.12.84) 641-2
Questions
Employment opportunities 404w
House of Commons times of sittings 551w
Law of the Sea Convention 27w, 519w
VAT 569w
VAT, Books 569w
VAT, Building industry 569w, 614w
VAT, Tax yields 614w
Warships 615w

Scargill, Arthur 168

Schedule D income tax 569w

School choice
Secondary education 89w

School closures 97w
Midlothian 207w
Newcastle under Lyme 96w

School leaving certificates 22-3w
Scotland (12.12.84) 1076

School meals 157
Costs 487w
Scotland 512w
Wales 602-3w

School population 93-4w
Further education 94w
Grammar schools 22-3w

School transport 34-5w

Schools
Disclosure of information (05.12.84) 386

Science & Engineering Research Council 89w

Science & technology research 331w, (05.12.84) 360-81, 453w, 493-4, 496

Science budget 188w

Science education
University finance 333w

Science Policy Research Unit, Sussex 453w

Scientists
USA 308w

Scope of debate (12.12.84) 1091, (13.12.84) 1274, 1279, 1281

Speakers rulings & statements (06.12.84) 607, 609, 613, 616, 630, 632, (10.12.84) 764, 772, 859, (11.12.84) 1010, 1015, 1020

Scotland
Access to buildings 40w
Accommodation agencies 207w
Agriculture 150w
Armed forces training 181w
Assisted places scheme 263-4w
Bail 346, 621w
Bankruptcy 498w
Blind 140w
Building regulations 211-2w
Bus services 620w
Capital investment 333
Capital taxes 496w
Caravan sites 209w
Citizens advice bureaux 191w
Coal mining 139-40w, 341-3, 632w
Complaints against police 16w, 621w
Composite classes 210w
Convictions 102-3w
Corporal punishment 205w
Cream (10.12.84) 883-8
Crime prevention panels 206w
Criminal statistics 42w
Death rate 619w
Decriminalisation 348
Dentists 212-3w
Disposable income 454w
Drug crimes 202-4w
Employment 150w
Employment by sector 510w
Employment level 509w
Employment opportunities 208-9w
Energy conservation 211w
Enterprise allowance scheme 140w
Estates 495w
European Regional Development Fund 42-3w, 263w, 339
Examinations (11.12.84) 1027-34
Family income 540w
Fine defaulters 262-3w
Fires 620-1w
Fish processing 207-8w
Fluoridation 213w
Food hygiene (10.12.84) 883-8
Forestry Commission 152w, 620w
Free ports 152w
Free school meals 403w
Further education teachers 210w
Hill farming 209w
Homelessness 400-1w
Hospital bed occupancy rates 212w
Hospital beds 213-4w
Hospital costs per patient 214-6w
Hospital waiting lists 214w
Housing associations 211w
Housing construction 211w
Housing improvement 211w
Housing revenue accounts 261w
Housing support grants 207w, 261w
Hyperbaric oxygen therapy 140w
Infant mortality 619w
Intervention stocks 212w
Island councils 41w
Legal aid 43w, 202w, 346-7, 621w
Licensing laws 151w
Local government expenditure 332-3, 511w
Local government finance 208w
Manufacturing industries 206w
Mental patients 212w, 214w
NHS 206w, 512-3w
Nursery schools 205w
Oil industry (12.12.84) 1077
Parole 217w
Personal income 454w
Picketing 622w, 632w
Police housing 513w
Police training 622w
Prison population 41w, 262-3w
Prisoners release 263w
Prisons 42w
Prosecutions 16w, 102w, 203w
Public buildings 40w
Public order policing 621-2w
Rape 216-7w
Rate support grants (13.12.84) 1220-35
Regional development grants 344
Regional planning & development 207w, 340-1
Safety belts 344-5
Salmon 338-9, 347-8
School leaving certificates (12.12.84) 1076
School meals 512w
Sexual offences 217w, 619w
Sheltered housing 210-1w
Skillcentres 210w, 344
Standard grade courses 208w, 332
Student grants 262w, 336-7, (06.12.84) 508-18
Submarines 181-2w
Teacher training 331-2
Teachers 140w, 206-7w, 332-6, 351w, (05.12.84) 383, 399-400w, 619w, (11.12.84) 1027-34 (12.12.84) 1075
Thermal insulation 402w
Unemployment 209-10w, 262w, 401w, 511w
Unemployment benefits 262w
Universities 166-7
Wealth distribution 494-5w
Youth training scheme 206-7w

***Scott, Mr Nicholas**, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 617-9, 622-3, 624, 626-7, 636
Questions
Body searches, Armagh prison 297w
Firearms certificates, Northern Ireland 610w
Life imprisonment, Northern Ireland 596w
Local government elections, Northern Ireland 97w
Prisoners, Northern Ireland 596w
Remand in custody, Northern Ireland 459-60w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 610w
Ulster Defence Regiment 348-9w
Ulster Defence Regiment, Firearms certificates 349w

Scottish Development agency
Investment 264-5w

Scottish Grand Committee (03.12.84) 145, (12.12.84) 1077

Scottish health boards 209w
Dentists 350-2w
Doctors 350-2w

Scottish Law Commission 201w

Scottish Office
Blind 210w
Local government functions 217w
UK membership of EC 216w

Screening
Blood 71-2w, 160w

Seals
North Sea 295w

Seaside & country homes scheme 235w, 505w
Greater London Council 505w
Local government reform 235w

Secondary education
Information technology 92w
Liverpool 165-6
School choice 89w

Security
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 288w
Prisoners dependants 184w

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 86-9
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1111-1113
Questions
Building workers, Hackney 359w
Council for National Academic Awards 21-2w
St Martins School of Art 21w
Teachers, Manpower 86w

Select Committees 361w, 365-72w 551-2w

Self-employed
Tax burden 1205
Wales 230w

Self help 225w
Handicapped 225w

Sentencing
Terrorism 641w
Youth custody 635w

Separated people 558-60w

Sequestration of assets 602w, (11.12.84) 927-38
National Union of Mineworkers 602w

Serpell Committee see British Rail Finances Independent Review Committee

Service industries
Employment 502w

"Services For Under Fives From Ethnic Minority Communities" 543w

Sethia, Lt 616w

Severn Bridge 32w

Severn Crossing Feasibility Study 578w

Sewage 117w

Sex discrimination
Community programme 168
United Nations 528-9w

Sexual offences 185-6w
Cruelty to children 591w
Scotland 217w, 619w

Sexual Offences Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 384

Shackleton aircraft 296w, 425w
Early warning systems 296w, 425w

Shares
British Telecom (03.12.84) 19-24, 167-8

***Shaw, Mr Giles**, Minister of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1270
Questions
Assaults on police 485-6w
Association of Chief Police Officers 132w
BBC, Television licences 302-3w
Civil defence 4w
Civil defence, Bolton 306w
Civil defence, Nuclear power stations 306w
Civil defence, Nuclear war 279-80w
Civil defence, Training 184w
Civil Defence College 275w
Complaints against police 638w
Concessionary television licences 128-9w, 276-7w
Concessionary television licences, Residential care 276-7w
Detection rates, Metropolitan Police 277w
Fire services 563w
Fisheries, Isle of Man 639w
Fisheries, Northern Ireland 639w
Heathrow, Landing cards 129w
Homicide, Metropolitan Police 307-8w
Identification parades, Metropolitan Police 281w
Industrial disputes, Injuries 332-3w
Isle of Man, Official visits 129w
Lion Intoximeter 3000 405w, 642-3w
Metropolitan Police, Computers 183-4w
Metropolitan Police, Detection rates 4w, 479-84w
Metropolitan Police, Stop & search 2w, 279w
Metropolitan Police, Travel concessions 282w
Picketing 642w
Picketing, Fines 638w
Picketing, Injuries 277w
Picketing, Police powers 641w
Picketing, Prosecutions 637-8w
Plastic bullets, Police 332w
Police, Capital investment 636w
Police, Civil defence 561-2w

Police, Departmental circulars 129w
Police, Greater Manchester 483w
Police, Manpower 563w
Police, Metropolitan counties 639w
Police, Pay 564-6w
Police, Plastic bullets 306-7w
Police, Privatisation 636w
Police dogs, Greater London 405w
Police dogs, Metropolitan Police 479w
Police training, Civil disorder 642w
Prosecutions, Road accidents 409w
Public Order Act 1936 641w
Public order policing 637-9w
Public order policing, Costs 277w, 639w
Public order policing, Merseyside 277w
Public order policing, RAF Greenham Common 282w
Racial conflict, Metropolitan Police 277-9w
Road blocks, A360 642w
Road traffic offences, Speed limits 485w
Shoplifting 564w
Surveillance 642w
Television licences 487w
Youth custody, Prison population 634w

Shaw, Sir Michael
Questions
Animal welfare, Codes of practice 288-9w
Housing associations, Accounting 120w
Milk, Production quotas 488
Yorkshire Water Authority, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 190-1w

Sheep
Agricultural subsidies 285w
France 285w

Sheep meat 436w
Consumption 625w
Retail prices 625w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 85, 127
Questions
Community programme 312w, 501w, 558-60w
Drinking & driving, research 337w
Further education, Educational maintenance allowance 165
Youth Service Provision Review 451w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 524, 543-6
Questions
Art works, Exports 733-4
Business statement 1211
Student grants, Parental contributions 155
Taxation, Pensions 1198

Shelter Housing Aid Centre 392w

Sheltered housing
Greater London 236w
Scotland 210-1w

Shelton, Mr William
Debates etc
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 851-4

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Questions
Dairy farming 283w
India 516w
Milk, Production quotas 488

Sherbrook School 89w

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 242-4

Shipbuilding
Oil rigs 1203-4
Privatisation 315w
Warships 428w

Shipping 408w
Capital allowances 567w
Industrial health & safety 407w
Inquiries 339-40w
Liner conferences 338w
Tax allowances 571w, 574-5w

Shipping accidents 335w
Gambia 1040
Merchant seamen 334w

Shipping safety
Hazardous materials 334w

Ships
Electromagnetic interference 33w

Shoeburyness
Defence research establishments 427w

Shoplifting 564w

Shops
Sunday trading 276w, 906-7

Shops Act 1950 Committee of Inquiry 276w

Short Brothers 360w, 595w, 1044-5
Manpower 360w
Privatisation 229w

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 520, 559, 573-5, 587
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 94, (04.12.84) 244-6
Questions
British Rail, Investment 40w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 496
Employment 574w
Employment schemes 92w
Fire services 563w
Job centres, Low pay 52w
Middle East 513-4w
Nuclear power 125w
Police, Capital investment 636w
Police, Manpower 563w
Police, Metropolitan counties 639w
Police, Privatisation 636w
Young workers scheme 311-2w
Youth training scheme 358w

Short, Mrs Renée
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 74-5
Questions
AIDS, Blood donors 160-1w
Alcoholism, Liver diseases 324-5w
Asbestos, Death 267w
Baby care units 476w
Birmingham Airport 338w
Bus services, Privatisation 31w
Buses 338w
Cervical cancer, Death 218w
Cleaning services, Trent Regional Health Authority 381w
Coal stocks 102w
Community care, Finance 477w
Community dental service clinics 217-8w
Computer staff, Dept of Health & Social Security 226w
Cot deaths 377w
Dartford tunnel 250-1w
Dental charges 589w
Dental Estimates Board, Computers 322w
Dental health, Health education 588w
Dental health, Sugar 377-8w
Dental services, Fluoridation 377w
Dentistry 322w
Dentists, Complaints 378w
Dentists, Costs 161w
Dentists, Manpower 461-2w
Dentists, Pay 377w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Industrial disputes 171w
Doctors, Prescriptions 540w
Drug abuse, Government grants 385-6w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 609-10w
Foetal alcohol syndrome 325-6w
Foster care, Ethnic minorities 477-8w
Free school meals 157
Generic prescribing, Information services 383-4w
Health service staff, Fringe benefits 381w
Health services, Negligence 172w
Health visitors 476w
Heating allowances 171w
Higher education 187w
Hospital ancillary staff, Redundancy 321w
Hospital safety 321w
Hospital staff, Tuberculosis 666w
Hospitals, Cleaning services 590-1w
H2 receptor blocking drugs 384w
Industrial accidents, Death 360w
Industrial disputes, Dept of Health & Social Security 226w
Inner London Education Authority 61-2w
Inner London Education Authority, Local government expenditure 240w
Job centres 360w
Limited list prescribing 538w
Limited list prescribing, Vitamins 383w
London Planning Commission 393-4w
Maternity Services Advisory Committee 476w
MIND, Mental patients 218w
Mobility allowance, Hospital patients 385w
New towns, Capital investment 301w
NHS, Managers 478w
Nursery schools, Racial discrimination 381w, 543w
Overseas students, Tuition fees 452-3w
Oxford University, Higher education admission 186w
Perinatal mortality, West Midlands 175w, 476w
Peterhead Prison 349-50w
Polyurethane, Eastern Europe 315w
Polyurethane, International cooperation 347-8w
Prescriptions 164w
Prescriptions, Family doctors 315w
Pupil-teacher ratios, West Midlands 153w
Regional aid 314-5w
Regional aid, West Midlands 314w, 439w
Regional health authorities, Trades Union Congress 324w
Road works, Greater London 33-4w
Roads, Greater London 34w
Royal Opera House, Finance 353-4w
Science & technology research 453w
Smoking related diseases, Death 665-6w
Strike benefits 586-7w
Student grants 299w
Student grants, Scotland 262w
Student loans 186w
Students, Tuition fees 452w
Supplementary benefits, Pensioners 223w
Swann Committee 153w
Tax allowances, Pension funds 248w
Teachers, Pay 451-2w
Theatres, Arts finance 18w
Unemployment, West Midlands 312-3w
VAT, Books 333-4w
Water charges 115-6w
Young offenders, Police powers 565w
Young offenders, Prosecutions 275-6w

Sick pay 167w
Ambulance services 541w
Coal mining 172w
National insurance contributions 168w

Siddique, Mohammed 2w

Silvester, Mr Fred
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 71-3
Questions
Lithotripsy, Medical equipment 84w
Road traffic 253w
Stansted Airport 584-5w

Sims, Mr Roger
Questions
Members, Surveillance 405-6w
School population 93-4w
Unruly children 305w

Sites of special scientific interest
Pesticides 393w

Skeet, Mr T H H
Debates etc
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 308, 312, 314
Questions
Mineral, Resources exploration 557w

Skillcentre Training Agency 58w, 157-9w, 448w

Skillcentres 52w
Computer training 448w
Liverpool 258w, 313w
Mobile instructor force 448w
Scotland 210w, 344
Wales 159w
Yorkshire & Humberside 51-2w

Skilled workers
Employment opportunities 1192

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 527
Energy Select Committee (05.12.84) 350-1
House of Commons questions (06.12.84) 497
House of Commons questions, VAT (05.12.84) 382
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1007
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 927, 928, 935-6
Prime Ministers question time intervention (06.12.84) 496
Railway accidents, Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 174
Stansted Airport (11.12.84) 940
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 696-700
Questions
Agricultural machinery, Accidents 257w
Agricultural subsidies 485
Business statement 501, 1217-8
Children, Poverty 79w
Children in care 322-3w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 1193-4
Cruise missile sites 894
Cycling 251w
Cycling, Road accidents 251-2w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 404-5w
Family planning clinics 378w
Family planning clinics, Derbyshire 322w
Family planning clinics, Finance 322w
Homelessness 234w
Industrial health & safety, Fines 257w
Industrial health & safety, Prosecutions 257w
Industrial production, UK companies abroad 341w
Infant mortality, Social class 462w
Inner London Education Authority, Finance 85w
Johnson Matthey 567w
Prosecutions, Road accidents 409w

Skyhawk aircraft 617w
Argentina 617w

Slaughterhouses
Newtownards 43w

Small Business Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 385

Small businesses
Employment 1192
Employment schemes 256-7w
Interest rates 1202
Tax burden 1201-2

Small Firms Technical Enquiry Service 344w

Smith, Mr Chris
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1340, 1342, 1363-6, 1377
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 199, 203
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1102, 1136-7
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 873
Questions
Bed & breakfast accommodation, Greater London 538-9w
Bed & breakfast accommodation, London boroughs 440-1w
Blood, Screening 71-2w
Building industry, Unemployment 449w
Honduras, Refugees 521w
Housing stock, Greater London 392w
McCormack, George, Compensation 51w
Supplementary benefits 661-2w
Supplementary benefits, Mortgages 539w
Supplementary benefits, Youth training scheme, 165-6w
VAT, Take-away food shops 570w
Youth training scheme, Industrial accidents 50w
Youth training scheme, Rank Xerox 51w
Youth training scheme, Supplementary benefits 78-9w
Youth training scheme, Training allowances 50-1w

Smith, Mr Cyril
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 215-8
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 300

Smith, Sir Dudley
Debates etc
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 920
Questions
Business statement 1210
Computer privacy 132w
Drugs, Parallel imports 165w
Social security claims, Advertising 77w

Smith, Rt Hon John
Questions
Enterprise zones, Employment opportunities 238w

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 932
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 919
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 769
Road Traffic (Production of Documents) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 388
Questions
Dentistry, Appeals 587w
Student grants 91-2w

Smoking
Death 269w
Heart diseases 268w
Lung cancer 268w

Smoking related diseases 268-70w, 665-6w
Costs 270w, 384w
Death 665-6w
Hospital beds 268-9w
Out-patients 269w

Smuggling
Drugs 194w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Questions
Cosmetics, Licensing 438w
Export controls, Foetal tissue 455w
Foetal tissue, Medical research 472-3w
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 899

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 216
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 296
Questions
Bus services, Privatisation 5-6

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 532-3
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 251
Questions
Agriculture, Government grants 624w
Argentina 527w
Common land 440w
East West relations 515-6w
Fish farming, Government grants 624-6w
Fish farming, Pollution control 624w
Fish farming, River pollution 582-3w, 624w
M25, Road accidents 911
Planning inquiries 393w
Playing fields, Planning permission 393w
Railway electrification 8
Salmon, Scotland 339
Wessex helicopters 618w

Social class
Infant mortality 462w

Social security
EC law 267w
Expenditure 44w
Northern Ireland 44w

Social Security Advisory Committee 227-8w
Public appointments 272w

Social security appeals
Attendance allowance 83-4w
Mobility allowance 83-4w

Social security benefits
Administrative costs 266-7w
Councillors 266w
Expenditure 664w
Industrial disputes 265-6w
Publicity 168-9w

Social security claims
Advertising 77w
Northern Ireland 44w
Occupational asthma 467w

Social Security Commissioners 609w

Social security order books 171w

Social Security Policy Inspectorate 79-80w

Social security recipients
Northern Ireland 45w
Rent allowances 586w
Rent rebates 586w
Temporary accommodation 661-2w

Social security reciprocal agreements
Unemployed 323w

Social security reviews 80w, 384w
Unemployed 384w

Social Services Select Committee (14.12.84) 1381

Social workers 79w

Soil Survey of England & Wales 288w, 547w
Finance 288w, 547w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 175
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1113-4
Questions
Air force 428w
Association of Chief Police Officers 132w
Coal mining, Scotland 139-40w
Complaints against police, Scotland 16w
Convictions, Scotland 102-3w
Police, Departmental circulars 129w
Prosecutions, Scotland 102w

Solicitors
Complaints 15

Solvents (05.12.84) 384

Somerset
Pupil-teacher ratios 92w

Sound insulation
RAF Cottesmore 48w

South Africa 514-5w, 1041
Durban three 517w, 1045
Foreign investment 1039

South Bank weekend 353w

South East region
Unemployment 312-3w

South West Africa Peoples Organisation 199w

Spain
Cars 554w
EC accession 25w, 600w, 1052
Fishery agreements 481-2

Magistrates courts 274w
Magistrates courts, Fines 184w
Medical research, Animal experiments 593w
Parkhurst Prison, Sanitation 3w
Parole 280w
Prisoners dependents, Security 184w
Prisoners on remand, Food 134w
Prisoners transfers 4w
Prisons, Construction 304-6w
Prisons, Safety equipment 3w
Prisons, Sanitation 3w, 132w
Probation & aftercare, Metropolitan counties 134-6w
Prostitution, Fine defaulters 280-1w
Rape 185-6w
Remand centres 484w
Remand centres, Prison population 632-4w
Representation of the People Bill 1984/85 305w
Royal College of Surgeons, Medical research 483-4w
Safety belts, Driving offences 332w
Seals, North Sea 295w
Shops, Sunday trading 276w
Siddique, Mohammed 2w
Steel leghold traps 486w
Unruly children 305w
Winson Green Prison, Dental services 282w
Wormwood Scrubs 132w
Young offenders, Fines 275w
Young offenders, Parole 563w
Young offenders, Police powers 565w
Young offenders, Prison population 634-6w
Young offenders, Prosecutions 275-6w
Young offenders, Remand in custody 633-4w
Youth custody 485w
Youth custody, Parole 485w
Youth custody, Prison accommodation 633w
Youth custody, Sentencing 635w

Members
Surveillance 405-6w

Members & Ministers
Speakers rulings & statements (06.12.84) 491, (13.12.84) 1208

Members conduct
Speakers rulings & statements (04.12.84) 261, (06.12.84) 495, (10.12.84) 864, (11.12.84) 928, 935

Members correspondence
Dept of Health & Social Security 323w
Dept of Transport 1206, (13.12.84) 1208
Education Act 1944 234w
HMS Conqueror 424-5w
Holloway Prison 566w
Trafford 378-9w
World War II 508w

Members facilities
Reprography 601w

Members interventions
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 33, 100, (04.12.84) 262, (11.12.84) 1033

Members speeches
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 27, 69, 71, 91, (04.12.84) 173, 223, 234, 240, (05.12.84) 389, 406, 417, 433, 450, (06.12.84) 537, (10.12.84) 750, 789, 799, 801, (11.12.84) 920, 924, (12.12.84) 1059, 1061, 1066

Men
Labour market 557-8w

Mental Health Act 1983 79w

Mental health community care
Rural areas 379-80w

Mental health services
Greenwich 83w

Mental hospitals
Youth training scheme 312w

Mental patients
MIND 218w
Nursing staff 214w
Scotland 212w, 214w

Merchant, Mr Piers
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 84-6 (04.12.84) 230

Merchant seamen
Industrial health & safety 334-5w, 407-8w, 530w
Personal tax allowances 572w
Shipping accidents 334w

Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Conditions for Recognition) Regulations 1985 338w

Merrell-Dow Corporation 74w

Merseyside
Drug abuse 564w
Ministers domestic visits 118w
Public order policing 277w
Regional planning & development 125w
Tranquillisers 269-70w

Merseyside County Council 31w
Buses White Paper 31w

Metering approval scheme
Telephones 343-4w

Metra Consulting Group 343-4w

Metropolitan counties
Buses 336w
Police 639w
Probation & aftercare 134-6w

Metropolitan districts
Education 20-1w

Metropolitan Police
Computers 183-4w
Crimes of violence 277w
Detection rates 4w, 277-9w, 307-8w, 479-84w
Homicide 307-8w
Identification parades 281w
Manpower 480-4w
Police dogs 405w, 479w
Prescription charges exemptions 282w
Racial conflict 277-9w
Stop & search 2w, 279w
Travel concessions 282w

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 950, 956, 985-7
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1059-60
Questions
Educational finance, Wales 717-8
European Commission, Public appointments 1048
Regional aid, Wales 724-5

Michie, Mr Bill
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 50, 96-8, (04.12.84) 179
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 858, 877
Questions
Kidney machines 316-7w
NATO ministerial meetings 411w

Micros in schools 553-4w
Expenditure 553-4w

Mid Glamorgan local education authority 550w

Mid Wales 549w

Mid Wales Development Board 549w
Finance 549w

Middle East 513-4w

Midland main railway line 38w
Railway electrification 38w

Midlothian
School closures 207w

Midwives
Epidural injections 323w

Mikardo, Mr Ian
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 53, 69-71, 80
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 738-9
Iraq, Ministers visits abroad 522w

Military aid
El Salvador 340w

Military aircraft 421-2w, 903-4
Brazil 432w
Chile 617-8w
Defence procurement 427-8w
European fighter aircraft 891-2
Highlands restricted area 420w
Low flying 419w
Stornoway Airport 509w
Training aircraft 898-200

Military balance
Conventional weapons 46w, 618w

Military Corrective Training Centre 411w

Military discipline 411-2w, 417w
Army 411-2w
Ulster Defence Regiment 417w

Military exercises 99w
Cruise missiles 427w
RAF Stornoway 509-10w
Submarines 419w

Milk 283w
Co-responsibility levy 203w, 482-3, 487-90, 1049
EC countries 29-30w
Italy 283w
Northern Ireland 203w
Outgoers scheme 435w
Price controls 198w
Production quotas 283-4, 435-6w, 482-3, 488, 491-2, 723-4, 907-8, 1049
Wales 723-4

Milk deliveries 197w

Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1227-8
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 510
Questions
Parole, Scotland 217w
Regional development grants, Scotland 344

Miller, Mr Hal
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 429-31

Miller, Dr M S
Questions
Teachers, Scotland 335

Mills, Mr Iain
Questions
A1, Construction materials 250w
Lorries, Road accidents 408w
Medical research, Animal experiments 593w
Roads, Construction materials 249w

Mills, Sir Peter
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1070
Questions
Diet & disease 485
NHS Management Board, Public appointments 546-7w

MIND
Mental patients 218w

Mineral Exploration & Investment Grants Act 1972 557w

Minerals
Resources exploration 557w

Miniature warning lights 250w
Level crossings 250w

Minimum student grants 19w, 154w, 156w, (05.12.84) 360-81, (06.12.84) 508-18

Minimum wage 501w
Underpayments 260w

Minimum Wages etc Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 387

Ministerial duties
Paymaster-General 728-9
Speakers rulings & statements (11.12.84) 940

Ministerial speeches
Speakers rulings & statements (11.12.84) 1034, (12.12.84) 1077
Third London airport 546w
Western European Union 341w

Ministerial statements
British Telecom (03.12.84) 19-24
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1067-74
EC Environment Council (10.12.84) 741-6
European Council, Dublin (05.12.84) 352-9
National Union of Mineworkers (11.12.84) 927-38
Railway accidents (04.12.84) 173, 296-301
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 912-26, (12.12.84) 1056-66 (13.12.84) 1220-35
Representation of the People Bill 1984/85 (10.12.84) 749-50
Speakers rulings & statements (04.12.84) 173-4, (05.12.84) 375, 375, 376, 380, 381, (06.12.84) 518, (11.12.84) 920, 924, 927, 939-40
Student grants (05.12.84) 360-81, (06.12.84) 508-18

Ministers
Speakers rulings & statements (11.12.84) 1027

Ministers domestic visits
Merseyside 118w

Ministers visits abroad
Africa 1039
Ethiopia 16, 521w
Iraq 522w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food
Blind 103-4w
Expenditure 285w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 28w
Security 286w
UK membership of EC 197w

Ministry of Defence
Blind 99-100w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 99w
Information 412w
UK membership of EC 181w

Misleading advertising
EC action 124w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Boarding schools, Education allowances 606w
Common agricultural policy 607w
EC budget 607w
Educational finance, Higher education 608-9w
Employment level 631-2w
Food prices 105-16w
Mortgage relief 16w
Students, Higher education 607-8w
Students, Tuition fees 609w
VAT, Farmers 371w

Mitchell, Mr David, *Under-Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc
British Transport Police (14.12.84) 1384-8
Questions
British Rail, Investment 38w, 40w, 531w
British Rail, Privatisation 35w
British Rail, Safety standards 33w
British Transport Police 578w
Bus services 310w
Bus services, Competition 301-2w
Bus services, Privatisation 4, 31w
Bus services, Yorkshire & Humberside 4
Buses 335w, 338w
Buses, Metropolitan counties 336w
Buses White Paper 30w
Buses White Paper, Merseyside County Council 31w
Channel crossing 35w
Coastal shipping, EC countries 39w
Concessionary fares 611-2w
Electromagnetic interference, Ships 33w
Level crossings, Miniature warning lights 250w
Merchant seamen, Industrial health & safety 334-5w, 407-8w, 530w
Merchant seamen, Shipping accidents 334w
Passenger transport executives 1-2, 39-40w
Public transport, Essex 310w
Railway accidents, Death 309-10w
Railway accidents, Salford 578w
Railway electrification 7, 102w
Railway electrification, East coast railway line 7
Railway electrification, Midland main railway line 38w
Railway maintenance 337w
Railway safety 309w
Railway travel, Passenger transport executives 39w
Shipping 408w
Shipping, Industrial health & safety 407w
Shipping, Inquiries 339-40w
Shipping accidents 335w
Shipping safety, Hazardous materials 334w
Trains, Advertising 32w
Trinity House 533-4w

Mobile instructor force 448w
Skillcentres 448w

Mobility allowance
Hospital patients 385w
Social security appeals 83-4w

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Debates etc
Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, Rem stages (06.12.84) 619-21, 627-8

Money supply 298w, 373w, 574w

Monopolies & Mergers Commission
Yorkshire Water Authority 190-1w

Monro, Sir Hector
Debates etc
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1226
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 510
Questions
Hill farming, Scotland 209w
Salmon, Fishery protection 339
Salmon, Scotland 347-8
Teachers, Scotland 334

Montgomery Committee see Island Councils of Scotland Committee of Inquiry

Moore, Mr John, *Financial Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Budget 575w
Business expansion scheme 17w, 195-6w, 370w
Capital allowances, Shipping 567w
Capital taxes, Scotland 496w
Capital transfer tax, Nature conservation 572w
Development land tax 247w
Disposable income, Scotland 454w
EC budget 568w
Estates, Scotland 495w
Income tax 372-4w
Income tax, Pension funds 574w
Income tax, Pensioners 494w
Income tax assessment 569w
Interest rates, Small businesses 1202
Mortgage relief 16w, 194w
Mortgages 178w
Oil revenues 1201
Oil revenues, North Sea oil 454w
Personal income 193w
Personal income, Scotland 454w
Personal tax allowances, Merchant seamen 572w
Personal tax allowances, Pensions 570w
Personal taxation 246-8w
Privatisation 1202-3
Stamp duties 249w
Tax allowances 457w
Tax allowances, Pension funds 248w
Tax allowances, Shipping 571w, 574-5w
Tax burden, Small businesses 1201-2
Tax credit system 572w
Tax rebates, Industrial disputes 457w
Tax yields 573w
Tax yields, Income tax 456w
Tax yields, Married personal allowance 370w
Taxation 298w
Taxation, Day nurseries 569w
Taxation, Lump sum payments 18w
Taxation, Pension funds 176-7w, 573-4w
Taxpayers 456-8w
Wealth distribution, Scotland 494-5w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 393
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 28, 29
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 298
Questions
Business statement 502, 1210
Disablement resettlement officers 158w
Driving tests, Handicapped drivers 612w
Ear disorders, Radiophones 379w
Government departments, Greater Manchester 12w
Home care services, Rural areas 380w
Home helps 380w
Home helps, Manpower 471-2w
Hong Kong 26w
Hong Kong, British residents abroad 26w
Hong Kong, Handicapped 26w
Induction loops, Public buildings 379w
Institute of Hearing Research 299-300w
Manchester Airport, European Regional Development Fund 124-5w
Manchester Airport, Freight transport 439w
Manchester Airport, Regional aid 11w
Mental health community care, Rural areas 379-80w
NHS, Health hazards 661w
Nurses, Back pain 661w
Occupational asthma, Publicity 467-8w
Occupational asthma, Social security claims 467w
Occupational therapists 591-2w
Prescriptions 661w
Social security, EC law 267w
Social security reciprocal agreements, Unemployed 323w
Third London airport, Ministerial speeches 546w
USA, Plutonium 352-3w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 929, 938
Questions
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 15
Law Reform Committee 13-4
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets 602w

Morris, Mr Michael
Questions
Drugs, Patents 169w
Generic prescribing, Limited list prescribing 318-9w
Limited list prescribing 166w, 219-20w, 381w, 464w, 660w
Pharmaceutical price regulation scheme 169w

Morrison, Mr Charles
Debates etc
Charter Trustees Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 386
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1109-10, 1171, 1178
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 918
Questions
Paediatrics, Drugs 81w

Morrison, Mr Peter, *Minister of State for Employment*
Questions
Adult training strategy 58w, 447-8w
Apprentices, Engineering industries 58w

Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 370
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 1027
Questions
Bail, Scotland 346
Milk, Production quotas 284w
NATO ministerial meetings 411w
Nuclear test ban 198w, 430w
Open University, Finance 95w
Scottish health boards 209w
Teachers, Scotland 332
Trident 900-1
VAT, Books 568w

Strategic nuclear weapons 46w

Strathclyde
Crimes of violence 513-4w
Housing associations 211w
Rural areas 350w

Straw, Mr Jack
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 521, 588
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 35, 114, 128 (04.12.84) 179, 148-56, 258
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1078-83, 1115, 1118, 1171-2 (13.12.84) 1241, 1295-7, 1299
Local Government Bill, Standing Committee composition (13.12.84) 1236
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 851, 873-6, 878
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 920, 926
Questions
Arif, Hassan Zafir 25-6w
Royal ordnance factories, Ammunition 410w

"Streamlining the Cities Consultation Papers" 69w

Streamlining the Cities Responses" 392w

Strike benefits 586-7w
Mortgages 324w

Structure plans
Avon 118-9w

Student grants 19w, 22w, 90-2w, 156w, 299w, 333w, 403w, 488w
Administrative costs 594w
Costs 18-9w, 19-20w
Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 360-81, (06.12.84) 508-18
Parental contributions 19w, 90-2w, 96w, 154-6w, 156-60, 167, 169-70, 186-7w, 239-40w, 242w, 492-3
Scotland 262w, 336-7, (06.12.84) 508-18
Travel grants 90w

Student loans 91-2w, 155-6w, 160, 186w, 299w

Student numbers 450-1w
Further education 164-5

Student unions 594w
Political doctrines 594w

Students
Higher education 607-8w
Travelling expenses 93w
Tuition fees 452w, 609w

Stuttgart summit 1049-50

Sub judice
Speakers rulings & statements (05.12.84) 346, (11.12.84) 927

Submarines 273w
Military exercises 419w
Radio frequencies 181-2w
Scotland 181-2w

Subsidies
Butter 104w

Sugar
Dental health 377-8w

Sulphur dioxide 409w, 446w, 508w
Power stations 446w, 508w, 658-9w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 24
Questions
Prestwich Hospital 164w

Sunday trading
Shops 276w, 506-7
Standing Order No 10 applications (10.12.84) 747-8

Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Amendment & Temporary Provisions Regulations 1984 (03.12.84) 25

Supplementary benefits 126w, 163w, 661-2w
Board & lodging charges 221-2w, 226-7w
Dundee 586w
Heating allowances 163w, 219w
Mortgages 539w, 540w
Pensioners 223w
Youth training scheme 78-9w, 165-6w

Supplementary benefits disregards of income
Housing benefits 375w

Supplementary questions
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 10, 11 (11.12.84) 909, (12.12.84) 1040

Supply estimates (13.12.84) 1237
Speakers rulings & statements (10.12.84) 751-2

"Supply Estimates 1984/85, Supplementary Estimates" (13.12.84) 1237

"Supporting the Informal Carers" 81-2w

Surpluses
Butter 287w
Cereals 285w
Potatoes 286w

Surveillance 642w
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 567w, 737-40
Members 405-6w

Swann Committee 153w

Syrian Arab Republic
Terrorism 515w

Tachographs
EC action (03.12.84) 132-45

"Tackling Pollution: Experience & Prospects" 584w

"Tackling Pollution: Experience & Prospects Government Response" 584w

Takeovers 11w

Take-away food shops
VAT 248w, 570w

Tapsell, Mr Peter
Questions
Occupational pensions 1199

Tax allowances 457w
Pension funds 248w
Shipping 571w, 574-5w

Tax burden
Self-employed 1205
Small businesses 1201-2

Tax credit system 572w

Tax evasion
Road tax 338w

Tax rebates 457w
Industrial disputes 457w

Tax thresholds 606w, 907

Tax yields 573w
Cigarettes 249w
Income tax 456w
Married personal allowance 370w
VAT 614w

Taxation 298w
Day nurseries 569w
Lump sum payments 18w
Pension funds 176-7w, 573-4w
Pensions 176w, 1198-200

Taxpayers 456-8w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 953, 982-5
Questions
Ards Hospital, Nurses training 203w
British Telecom, Privatisation 341w
Ethiopia, Human rights 628w
Fisheries, Northern Ireland 639w
Heathrow, Landing cards 129w
Helicopters, Northern Ireland 895-6
Local government elections, Northern Ireland 97w, 204w
Local government revenue, Ards 43w
Milk, Co-responsibility levy 203w
Milk, Production quotas 907-8
Republic of Ireland, Extradition 152-3w
Republic of Ireland, Nurses 203w
Royal Victoria Hospital, Nurses training 203w
Short Brothers, Manpower 360w
Slaughterhouses, Newtownards 43w
Spain, EC accession 25w
VAT, Footwear 613w

Taylor, Mr John Mark
Questions
EC budget 1046

Taylor, Mr Teddy
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 942, 949, 951-2, 963-8, 976, 999, 1000
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 372-3
Questions
Beef & veal 436w
Beef & veal, Consumption 625w
Beef & veal, Retail prices 625w
British rail, Privatisation 35w
Business statement 506
Civil Aviation Authority 532w
Civil Aviation Authority, Corporate plans 533w
Defence research establishments, Shoeburyness 427w
EC budget 177-8w, 571w
EC external trade, Iron & steel 123-4w
France, Prime Minister visits abroad 545w
Manufactured goods, UK trade with EC 500w
National Air Traffic Services 532w
Overseas aid 15w
Prime Minister official engagements 127w, 233w, 546w
Student grants, Parental contributions 158
USA, EC external trade 122-3w

Tayside
Rate support grants 208w

Teacher training
Deaf 93w, 451w
Dyslexia 487-8w
Scotland 331-2

Teachers
Blind 333w
Deaf 333w
Leicestershire 595w
Manpower 86w, 157w
Pay 93w, 140w, 163-4, 168-9, 333-6, 351w, 399-400w, 451-2w, 619w
Pensions 335
Scotland 140w, 206-7w, 332-6, 351w, (05.12.84) 383, 399-400w, 619w, (11.12.84) 1027-34, (12.12.84) 1075
Standing Order No 10 applications (05.12.84) 383 (12.12.84) 1075
Unemployment 595w

Teaching hospitals
NHS finance 475w

"Teaching Quality White Paper" 94w

Technical & vocational education initiative 85-6w, 231-2w

Technicians
Theatres 449w, 501w

Telephone charges
VAT 298w

Telephone exchanges
British Telecom 7w

Telephone tapping
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 737-40

Telephones
Metering approval scheme 343-4w

Television advertising
BBC 1205

Television licences 276-7w, 487w, 1205
BBC 302-3w

Television programmes
Hattersley, Roy 170-2

Temple-Morris, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 408-10
Questions
Diplomatic service 521w

Temporary accommodation
Social security recipients 661-2w

Tenants Charter 300w

Terlezki, Mr Stefan
Debates etc
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 356
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1063
Questions
Coal mining, Wales 720-1
Death Grants 72w
"Food & Agricultural Controls in War" 286w
Nuclear weapons deployment 897
Small Firms Technical Enquiry Service 344w

Terrorism 640-1w
Sentencing 641w
Statistics 639-40w
Syrian Arab Republic 515w

Test tube babies (05.12.84) 384
Medical research 74w

Textile industry
EC action 121w
European Regional Development Fund 437w

Textiles
Origin marking (05.12.84) 387

Thames Day 353w

Thames Water Authority 236w

Thamesmead
Local government reform 239w

Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret, *Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc
European Council, Dublin, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 352-9
Questions
Africa, EC aid 493-4w
Aids for handicapped, Trafford Borough Council 1206
Airports 904
Arms control treaties, UK contributions 545-6w
Asbestos, Air pollution control 12-3w
Boarding schools, Education allowances 606w
Cancer, Departmental coordination 12w
Christmas bonus 906
Coal mine closures 904, 907
Coal mine closures, Costs 1207
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 496, 908
Cockfield, Lord, European Commission 493w
Common agricultural policy 404w, 607w
Crown Appointments Commission 127-8w
Derbyshire County Council 495
EC budget 607w
EC budget, UK contributions 1207-8
Economic policy 496
Education Act 1944, Members correspondence 234w
Educational finance, Higher education 608-9w
Employment opportunities 404w
Ethiopia, Disaster relief 404-5w, 609-10w
European Day of Music 205w
Falkland Islands, Rules of engagement 233w
Food surpluses 300w
France, Prime Minister visits abroad 545w
Franco-British Council 128w
Generic prescribing 905
Gibraltar 234w
Government assistance to industry 609w
Government departments, Greater Manchester 12w
Government departments, Inquiries 127w
Heathrow 1207
Heating allowances 904
HMS Conqueror, Log books 403w
Income tax 907
Israel, Official visits 403-4w
Members correspondence, Dept of Transport 1206
Milk, Production quotas 907-8
National Coal Board, Accounting 495, 906
National Heritage Memorial Fund 128w
NHS Management Board, Public appointments 546-7w
Prime Minister, Railway travel 403w
Prime Minister domestic visits, Baldernock 546w
Prime Minister domestic visits, Farleigh Wallop 233w
Prime Minister domestic visits, Lewisham 233w
Prime Minister domestic visits, Pwllheli 404w
Prime Minister official engagements 233w, 404w, 546w
Prime Minister visits abroad, China 330-1w
Procurement, European Commission 127w
Public expenditure 494
Public expenditure, Capital investment 1204
Public expenditure, Employment schemes 1205
Regional aid, Departmental coordination 403w
Research 331w
Science & technology research 493-4, 496
Shipbuilding, Oil rigs 1203-4
Shops, Sunday trading 906-7
Social Security Commissioners 609w
Soil Survey of England & Wales, Finance 547w
Student grants 403w
Student grants, Parental Contributions 492-3
Students, Higher education 607-8w
Students, Tuition fees 609w
Tax burden, Self-employed 1205
Tax thresholds 606w
Television licences 1205
Third London airport, Ministerial speeches 546w
UK trade with EC 1206
Unemployment 233w, 1203
USA, Prime Minister visits abroad 545w
Youth training scheme 905

Theatres
Arts finance 18w
Technicians 449w, 501w

Thermal insulation
Building regulations 190w
Scotland 402w

Third London airport
Ministerial speeches 546w

Thomas, Mr D E
Questions
Average earnings 631w
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 740
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 721-2
Education, Wales 717
Education, Welsh language 550w
Electricity generation, Coal fired power stations 551w
Family income, Low incomes 663-4w
5 Airborne Brigade 99w
Military exercises 99w
NATO ministerial meetings 410-1w
Nuclear safety, Treaties 23w
Nuclear weapons deployment 897
Plutonium 182w, 510w, 550-1w, 606w
Primary education, Wales 547w
Primary education, Welsh language 547w
Public order policing, RAF Greenham Common 282w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 664w
Tiryberth School, Bilingual education 550w
UNESCO 526w
Welsh language 356w

Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 421-3

Thomas, Dr Roger
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1073
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1065
Questions
Bypasses, Compensation 335w
Carbon monoxide, Poisoning 77w
Diabetes 76w
Family practitioner committees 77w
Family practitioner committees, Computers in NHS 163-4w
Generic prescribing, Quality control 162-3w
Handicap benefits 76w
Hyperbaric oxygen therapy, Scotland 140w
Kidney machines, West Wales Hospital 160w
Prescriptions, Rural areas 162w

Thompson Committee see Youth Service Provision Review

Thompson, Mr Jack
Questions
Cruise missiles, Military exercises 427w
National Coal Board, Rates & rating 584w
Rate support grants 584w
Rates & rating, National Coal Board 394w

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Questions
Student grants, Parental contributions 91-2w

Thorne, Mr Neil
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1370-2
Questions
Civil defence, Training 184w
Civil Defence College 275w
Farmers, Civil defence 286w
Health services, Wars 466w
Police, Civil defence 561-2w

Thorne, Mr Stan
Questions
European fighter aircraft 429w

Thornton, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 80-2

Threshold prices 105-16w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 298
Questions
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Privatisation 519w
Privatisation 1202-3
Railway accidents, Death 309-10w
Railway accidents, Salford 578w
Railway safety 309w
Short Brothers, Privatisation 229w

Tidworth
Army 411w

Tilshead 642w

Tiniente Ridolfo March Martin 617-8w

Tiree
Radar 531w

Tiryberth School 550w
Bilingual education 550w

Titanium dioxide (10.12.84) 741-6

Tobacco
Price elasticities 614w

Tobacco industry
Arts sponsorship 732
Sports sponsorship 237w

Tornado aircraft 421w
Compensation 421w
Exports 421w

Torney, Mr Thomas
Questions
Milk, Production quotas 482-3

Torture
Public petitions (07.12.84) 648, (14.12.84) 1319

Tourism 498w
Private Members motions (07.12.84) 649-708
Statistics 630w
Wales 729

Tourist industry
Manpower 630w

Town & country planning
Compensation (07.12.84) 648
Manpower 440w

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 557-60
Questions
Seals, North Sea 295w
Sick pay, Coal mining 172w
Strike benefits, Mortgages 324w
Trinity House 533-4w
Wages councils 1197

Townsend, Mr Cyril D
Debates etc
Law of the sea (06.12.84) 638-40
Questions
Defence expenditure, Conventional weapons 898

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 534
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 40, 95, 107-10, 120, 124
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 848
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 739-40
Employment level 571-2w
Generic prescribing 464w
Student grants 333w
Transport supplementary grants 406-7w

Trade associations
Stocks & shares 9w

Trades Union Congress
Regional health authorities 324w

Trafford
Members correspondence 378-9w

Trafford Borough Council 1206
Aids for handicapped 1206

Trafford Park
Enterprise zones 441w

Trailers
East Germany 341-2w
Imports 341-2w

Training
Civil defence 184w
Farm wardens 489
Opticians 588w

Training aircraft 421w, 427-8w, 618w, 898, 1044-5
Defence procurement 420-1w, 618w
Military aircraft 898-900

Training allowances 50-1w
Youth training scheme 50-1w

Training loans 229-30w, 359w

Trains
Advertising 32w

Tranquillisers
Drug side effects 172w
Limited list prescribing 167w
Merseyside 269-70w
Research 173-4w

Transplant surgery
Kidneys 316w

Transport (04.12.84) 173-280
Greater London 36w

Transport of radioactive materials
Nuclear weapons deployment 901-2

Transport police (14.12.84) 1382-88
Identification parades 253w

Transport Select Committee 11-2

Transport subsidies
Local government expenditure 39w

Transport supplementary grants 406-7w

Transport & General Workers Union 448-9w

Transport & Road Research Laboratory 250w, 337w

Travel concessions
Metropolitan Police 282w

Travel grants
Student grants 90w

Travelling expenses
Students 93w

Travel-to-work areas
Unemployment 503w

Treasury
Blind 177w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 16w
UK membership of EC 195w

"Treasury & Civil Service Select Committee on Autumn Statement" (06.12.84) 518-602

Treaties
China (05.12.84) 389-472
Greece 628w
Nuclear safety 23w
Turkey 628w

Treaty of Lausanne 450w

Treaty of Rome 17w

Tree planting 623w
Wales 549w

Trees
Air pollution 658w

Trent Regional Health Authority 73w, 381w
Cleaning services 381w
NHS finance 73w

Trident 422w, 900-1
Costs 422w, 423w
Defence contracts 422-4w
Defence expenditure 891-2
Finance 423w

Trinity House 533-4w

Trinity School, Newcastle 96w

Trippier, Mr David, Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Debates etc
British Telecom Computer Centre, Portsmouth (05.12.84) 475-80
Questions
Assisted areas 243-4w
Brother Corporation 629w
Community programme 243w
European Regional Development Fund 630w
European Regional Development Fund, Textile industry 437w
Government assistance to industry, Knowsley 126w
Manchester Airport, European Regional Development Fund 124-5w
Manchester Airport, Freight transport 439w
Manchester Airport, Regional aid 11w
Minerals, Resources exploration 557w
Pesticides 242w
Regional aid 121w, 314-5w, 555w
Regional aid, Cynon Valley 342w
Regional aid, Expenditure 344-5w
Regional aid, Knowsley 7-8w
Regional aid, North West region 438w
Regional aid, West Midlands 314w, 439w
Regional development grants, Yorkshire & Humberside 345w
Regional planning & development 555w
Regional planning & development, Merseyside 125w
Textile industry, EC action 121w

Tropical Development & Research Institute 16

Trotter, Mr Neville
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 398
Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 384

Tuberculosis
Greater Manchester 225-6w
Hospital staff 666w

Tucano aircraft 899

Tuition fees 299w
Overseas students 188w, 200w, 241-2w, 452-3w
Parental contributions 242w
Students 452w, 609w

Turkey
Peace treaties 450w
Treaties 628w

Twinn, Dr Ian
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1163
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 924

Type 22 frigates 48w, 427w, 903

Typewriters
Antidumping 629-30w
Japan 629-30w

Tyres
Motor vehicle safety 338w

Uganda
Human rights 1036

Ugandan Asians 1036-7

UHT cream (10.12.84) 883-8

UK companies abroad
Industrial production 341w

UK contributions
Arms control treaties 545-6w
EC budget 1207-8
UN Development Programme 604w

UK membership of EC
Attorney-General 180-1w
Dept of Education & Science 187w
Dept of Employment 192w
Dept of Energy 183w
Dept of Health & Social Security 226w
Dept of the Environment 180w
Dept of Trade & Industry 190w, 347w
Dept of Transport 179w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 200w
Home Office 185w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 197w
Ministry of Defence 181w
Northern Ireland Office 205w
Scottish Office 216w
Treasury 195w
Welsh Office 189w

UK trade with EC 346-7w, 1206
Manufactured goods 500w

Ulcers
Drugs 384w

Ulster Defence Regiment 348-9w, 413w, 415w, 417w
Armed forces deployment 415w
Armed forces recruitment 415-7w
Armed forces strength 415-6w
Convictions 418w
Costs 414-5w
Death 413-5w
Defence equipment 412-3w
Firearms 414w
Firearms certificates 349w
Injuries 413-4w
Length of service 416-7w
Military discipline 417w
Proscribed organisations 414w
Religion 413w

UN Committee on Disarmament 199-200w, 254w

UN Decade for Women 1976-1985 527-8w

UN Development Programme
UK contributions 604w

UN Disaster Relief Office 17

UN resolutions 524w
Namibia 524w

Unborn Children (Protection) Bill 1984-85
1R (05.12.84) 384

Underpayments 260w
Minimum wage 260w

Unemployed
Social security reciprocal agreements 323w
Social security reviews 384w

Unemployment 167, 233w, 359w, 447w, 499w, 501-3w, 557w, (07.12.84) 709-16, 1191-2, 1203
Building industry 230w, 449w
Costs 570w
Crimes of violence 275w
Dundee 511w
Economic models 568w
Greater London 449w
Greenock 150-1w
Gwynedd 356w
House of Commons questions 259-60w
Older workers 209-10w
Scotland 209-10w, 262w, 401w, 511w
South East region 312-3w
Statistics 259-60w
Teachers 595w
Travel-to-work areas 503w
Wales 726-7, 729
West Midlands 312-3w

Unemployment benefits
Earnings rules 78w
Expenditure 77w
Kelsey, Mr 360-1w
Scotland 262w

UNESCO 13-4w, 526-7w

Unfair competition
Boxing 584w

Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1984 (10.12.84) 754

Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Limits of Basic & Special Awards) Order 1984 (10.12.84) 754

United Kingdom Warning & Monitoring Organisation 4w

United Nations 450w
Sex discrimination 528-9w

Universities
Scotland 166-7

University finance 299w
Science education 333w

Unnecessary Dental Treatment Review Committee 217w

Unofficial Members of the Executive & Legislative Councils 527w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speakers rulings & statements (03.12.84) 109

Unruly children 305w

Upper Waiting Hall
Blond McIndoe Centre 540w

Urban development grants 348w, 507w, 657w
Northern Ireland 348w

Urban Traffic Control System 37w
Greater London 37w

Urban transport 613w

US bases 419w
Satellite communications 419w

USA
Conferences 308w
EC external trade 122-3w
Iron & steel 122-3w
Navy 181w
Plutonium 24w, 352-3w
Prime Minister visits abroad 545w
Scientists 308w

USSR
Cereals 436-8w
Human rights 526w
Nuclear weapons 429-30w
Official visits 522w

Vale of Glamorgan 356-7w

Value Added Tax (General) Regulations 1980 614w

Value Added Tax (General) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 1984 613-4w

van Straubenzee, Sir William
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 363
Questions
Gibraltar 523w
Ministry of Defence, Information 412w
Student grants, Parental contributions 155

VAT 371w, 568-9w
Air courier services 455w
Books 17w, 333-4w, 568-9w, 1194-6, 1203
Building industry 569w, 614w
Construction 455w
EC action 17w, 97-9w
EC countries 1196
Energy prices 904
Farmers 371w
Footwear 613w, 1202
Housing improvement 570w
Imports 614w
Local education authorities 187w
Magazine press 333-4w, 1194-5
Newspaper press 17w, 342w, 568-9w, 1203
NHS 455w
Postal services 613-4w
Riding hats 372w
Take-away food shops 248w, 570w
Tax yields 614w
Telephone charges 298w
Water 455w

VAT zero rated goods 568-9w, 1195

Venereal diseases
NHS 468-70w

Veterinary inspectors 284w

Veterinary investigation centres 284w

Vic Hallam Company 440w

Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering
Privatisation 901

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 738
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 894

Vitamins
Limited list prescribing 383w

Vocational training 57-9w
Women only courses 56w

Voluntary organisations
Greater London 120w
Handicapped 225w

Vosper Shiprepairers 315w

Vosper Thornycroft 189-90w, 348w
Pension funds 315w, 348w

Voting behaviour
General elections 185w

Voting rights (10.12.84) 754-838
British residents abroad 305w

Waddington, Mr David, *Minister of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc
Mundiya, Yasmin, Immigration (13.12.84) 1315-8
Questions
British citizenship 405w
Computer privacy 132w
Deportation 479w
Entry clearances, Fees & charges 636w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Home Office 129-31w
Personal records, Computer privacy 331w
Race Relations Act 1976 3w

Wages councils 258-9w, 501w, 1192, 1197-8

Wages Inspectorate
Complaints 260w
Manpower 260-1w

Wainwright, Mr Richard
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 529, 550-3, 582, 588
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 794
Questions
Economic models, Unemployment 568w
Education, Metropolitan districts 20-1w
Employment opportunities, Skilled workers 1192
Skillcentres, Scotland 210w
Skillcentres, Wales 159w
Skillcentres, Yorkshire & Humberside 51-2w
Supplementary benefits, Heating allowances 219w

Waiting lists
Legal aid 329-30w

Wakeham, John
Speakers rulings & statements (13.12.84) 1202

Waldegrave, Mr William, *Under-Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc
EC Environment Council, Ministerial statements (10.12.84) 741-6
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 302-6, 321-2
Questions
Acid rain 70w
Acid rain, Inland waterways 445w
Acid rain, Power stations 445-6w, 508w
Acid rain, Research 444-5w
Agricultural policy, Environment 583w
Air pollution, Plants 446w
Air pollution, Trees 658w
Ancient woodlands 658w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 506w
Art works, Exports 733-4
Arts, Local government reform 353w
Arts Council grants 354w
Arts finance 353w, 732
Arts sponsorship 731-2
Arts sponsorship, Tobacco industry 732
British Museum 494w
Civic trust, Government grants 395-6w
Common land 440w
Dog licences 180w
Eastern Arts Association 732-3
EC Environment Council 394w
English National Opera 734-5
Hares, Death 69-70w
Lead free petrol 506w
Lead free petrol, EC action 505-6w
Local government expenditure 68-9w, 387w, 441w

Local government expenditure, Child care 395w
Local government expenditure, Greater London 71w
Local government expenditure, Greater London Council 71w
Local government finance, Humberside County Council 442-3w
Local government reform, Arts finance 733
Local government revenue, Humberside County Council 442w
Local government services, Capital investment 70w
Local government staff, Manpower 62w
Museums & galleries, Admission charges 734
National Coal Board, Rates & rating 584w
Ordnance Survey 581w, 655-6w
Ozone, Plants 446w, 658w
Rate support grants 584w
Rate support grants, Brighton 65w
Rate support grants, Greater London 66-7w
Rates & rating, National Coal Board 394-5w
Royal Opera House, Finance 353-4w
Sites of special scientific interest, Pesticides 393w
Sulphur dioxide, Power stations 446w, 508w, 658-9w
Theatres, Arts finance 18w
Voluntary organistions, Greater London 120w
Wildlife Inspectorate 508w

Wales
Assisted areas 724-6
Building workers 230w
Bus services 730-1
Coal mining 189w, 720-2
Dairy farming 355w, 357w
Education 297w, 355w, 717
Educational finance 231-2w, 355w, 717-8
Educational publications 296-7w
Elderly 548w
Employment level 729
Employment opportunities 159w
Enterprise agencies 230w
Enterprise allowance scheme 231w
Enterprise zones 718-9
Factories 356-7w
Foreign investment in UK 354-5w
Forestry Commission 603w
Forests 548-9w
Free school meals 547-8w
Heroin 5w
High technology 356w
Hill farming 160w
Home helps 719-20
Hospital patients 719-20
Industrial development 724-5
Integrated operations 357-8w
International Garden Festival 1992 355w
Job release scheme 230w
Job splitting scheme 230w
Laura Ashley 549-50w
Manpower Services Commission 159w
Milk 723-4
Multiple sclerosis 296w
Nurses 719-20
Pensioners 548w
Pollution control 547w
Post Office 548w
Primary education 547w, 717
Private education 549w, 718
Pupil-teacher ratios 232-3w
Rate support grants (12.12.84) 1056-66
Redundancy 720-1
Regional aid 126w, 724-5
Regional planning & development 724-6
School meals 602-3w
Self-employed 230w
Skillcentres 159w
Special development areas 725-6
Tourism 729
Tree planting 549w
Unemployment 726-7, 729
Youth services 297w

Walker, Mr A Cecil
Questions
Training aircraft 1044-5

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 989-90
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1231
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 375
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 516
Questions
Business statement 1216
Crime prevention panels, Scotland 206w
Prosecutions, Scotland 203w
Teacher training, Scotland 331-2
Teachers, Scotland 336
Trident 901

Walker, Rt Hon Peter, *Secretary of State for Energy*
Questions
Blind, Dept of Energy 183w
Coal, Production 353w
Electricity tariffs, Air pollution 409w
Energy conservation 510w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Dept of Energy 23-4w
Overtime, Dept of Energy 23w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Energy 183w

Wall, Sir Patrick
Questions
Military aircraft, Training aircraft 899

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc
Examinations, Standing Order No 10 applications (12.12.84) 1076
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 931
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 372
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 517-8
Tachographs, EC action (03.12.84) 141
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 939
Torture, Public petitions (07.12.84) 648
Questions
BBC external services 518w
Fishing vessels, North of Scotland box 350w
Herring, North Sea 288w
Personal tax allowances, Merchant seamen 572w
Standard grade courses, Scotland 332
Student grants, parental contributions 91w
Trident, Costs 423w
Youth training scheme, Scotland 206-7w

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 768, 780-3
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 691-3
Questions
Bitumens, Road construction 309w
Bus services, Privatisation 4
Driving tests, Keighley 336w
Iraq, Ministers visits abroad 522w
Taxation, Pensions 1198

Walters, Mr Dennis
Questions
Dental health, Children 170w
Job centres, Westbury 52-3w
Job centres, Wiltshire 53w
Middle East 513-4w

Ward, Mr John
Questions
Export credit guarantees 556-7w
Pilotage, Redundancy 576w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Questions
Bacteria, EC action 117w
Sewage 117w
Water authorities, Financial targets 117w, 441w
Welsh Water Authority, Financial targets 159w, 399w

Wareing, Robert N
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 33, 110-3, 127 (04.12.84) 180, 188, 237, 260
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1090, 1094-7, 1118 (13.12.84) 1261, 1302-3
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 865-7, 878
Railway accidents, Salford (04.12.84) 299
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 917
Questions
Attendance allowance, Social security appeals 83-4w
Bus services, Privatisation 5-6
Civil defence, Nuclear war 279-80w
Community programme, Sex discrimination 168
Drug abuse, Merseyside 564w
Exceptional needs payments 84w
Lorazepam, Drug side effects 270w
Metropolitan Police, Travel concessions 282w
Nicaragua 516w
Nimrod aircraft, Early warning systems 272w
Skillcentres, Liverpool 258w, 313w
Takeovers 11w
Taxation, Lump sum payments 18w
Tranquillisers, Merseyside 269-70w
VAT 568w
Water charges 70w

Warnock Committee see In Vitro Fertilisation Departmental Committee

Warren, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 20
Questions
Government assistance to industry 555-6w
M25, Road accidents 911

Wars
Health services 466w

Warships 615w
Cammell Laird 903
Chile 617-8w
Shipbuilding 428w

Waste disposal
Polychlorinated biphenyl 118w

Water
VAT 455w

Water authorities
Financial targets 117w, 441w
Operating costs 396w
Public meetings (05.12.84) 385

Water Authorities (Meetings) Bill 1984/85
1R (05.12.84) 385

Water charges 70w, 115-6w
Rate rebates 375w

Watson, Mr John
Debates
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1074
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1066
Questions
Milk, Production quotas 283w

Watts, Mr John
Debates etc
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1320

"Way Forward" 484

Wealth distribution
Scotland 494-5w

Weapons
NATO 431w

Weetch, Mr Ken
Questions
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 506w
Dock labour scheme 448w
Dock labour scheme, Felixstowe 448-9w

Weighing machines
Lorries 31-2w

Weight limits 337w, 339w

Welfield
Public inquiries 582w

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc
International Development Association (11.12.84) 1005, 1013
Questions
Diplomatic immunity, Road accidents 101w
Leeward Islands, HS748 aircraft 5w
Lome convention 137-9w
Overseas aid 18
Overseas aid, Resettlement 603w

Wells, Sir John
Debates etc
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 663-6

Welsh, Mr Michael
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 932

Welsh Development Agency 722-3

Welsh language 356w
Education 550w
Primary education 547w

Welsh Office
Blind 159w
UK membership of EC 189w

Welsh Water Authority 159w, 399w
Financial targets 159w, 399w

Wessex helicopters 618w

West Germany
Armed forces deployment 273w
Defence procurement 430w

West Midlands
British Rail 1-2
Intervention stocks 295w
Orbital roads 32w
Perinatal mortality 175w, 476w
Pupil-teacher ratios 153w
Regional aid 314w, 439w
Road construction (04.12.84) 323-30
Unemployment 312-3w

West Midlands Regional Health Authority
Managers 82-3w, 226w, 271w, 381w

West Wales Hospital 160w
Kidney machines 160w

Westbury
Job centres 52-3w

Westdown camp 642w

Western European Union 1051-2
Ministerial speeches 341w

Western Isles
Radio 509w

Western Isles integrated development programme 152w

Wheat
Prices 623-4w

Wheelchairs 221w

Wheeler, Mr John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 121
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1158
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 844, 846-7
Questions
Customs & Excise, Dogs 16w
Customs & Excise, Drug crimes 194w
Customs & Excise, Drug seizures 194w
Customs & Excise, Manpower 175-6w
Multiple occupation, Fire prevention 443w

Whitney, Mr Ray, Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1359, 1377-81
Questions
Bed & breakfast accommodation, Greater London 538-9w
Child benefit 375-6w, 378w
Children, Poverty 79w
Christmas bonus 171w
Death grants, Departmental leaflets 659-60w
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices, Stockport 74-6w
Employers statutory sick pay scheme 168w
Exceptional needs payments 84w
Exceptional needs payments, Domestic gas appliances 538w
Exceptional needs payments, Funerals 379w
Family income, Low incomes 663-4w
Family income, Scotland 540w
Furniture grants 79w
Housing benefits, Children 164w
Housing benefits, Publicity 374w
Housing benefits, Supplementary benefits disregards of income 375w
Low incomes, Family income 73w
National insurance, Employees contributions 585w
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 167-8w
National insurance contributions, Sick pay 168w
Parkhurst Prison, Prisoners dependents 592w
Rate rebates, Water charges 375w
Rent rebates, Social security recipients 586w
Retirement age 78w
Retirement pensions 376-7w
Sick pay 167w
Social security, EC law 267w
Social security benefits, Administrative costs 266-7w
Social security benefits, Councillors 266w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 664w
Social security benefits, Publicity 168-9w
Social security reciprocal agreements, Unemployed 323w
Supplementary benefits 163w, 661-2w
Supplementary benefits, Board & lodging charges 221-2w
Supplementary benefits, Dundee 586w
Supplementary benefits, Heating allowances 163w, 219w
Supplementary benefits, Mortgages 539w, 540w
Supplementary benefits, Pensioners 223w
Supplementary benefits, Youth training scheme 165-6w
Unemployment benefits, Earnings rules 78w
Unemployment benefits, Expenditure 77w
Youth training scheme, Supplementary benefits 78-9w

Wiggin, Mr Jerry
Questions
Bristol Airport, Air accidents 576-7w
Credit card frauds, Office of Fair Trading 313w
Structure plans, Avon 118-9w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1073
Rate support grants, Wales (12.12.84) 1062
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 774, 813-6
Questions
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 892-3
Hospital patients, Wales 719-20
Merrell-Dow Corporation 74w
Milk, Production quotas 1049
Prime Minister domestic visits, Pwllheli 404w
Student grants 91w
Student grants, Parental contributions 160
Taxation, Pensions 1200
Unemployment, Gwynedd 356w
Welsh Development Agency 723

Wild animals
Poisoning 327w

Wildlife Inspectorate 508w

Wildlife & Countryside (Amendment) Bill 1984/85 1R (05.12.84) 384

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 29
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1166, 1171, 1172-3, 1176
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 844, 857-8, 860

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc
British Telecom, Ministerial statements (03.12.84) 19-20, 24
Representation of the People Bill, Procedure for Committee stage (10.12.84) 749-50
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 381

Wilson, Mr Gordon
Debates etc
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 761, 807-9, 827-8
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 361, 362, 364, 375-6
Student grants, Scotland (06.12.84) 510-1
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 939
Questions
Access to buildings, Scotland 40w
Hospital waiting lists, Dundee 40-1w
Minimum wage, Underpayments 260w
Student grants, Parental contributions 156
Student grants, Scotland 337
Wages councils 258-9w
Wages Inspectorate, Manpower 260-1w

Wiltshire
Job centres 53w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 546-7, 555-7
Local Government Bill, 2R (04.12.84) 187, 195
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 936
Oral question time points of order (12.12.84) 1053
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 366
Questions
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Surveillance 738
Intervention stocks 624w, 1048-9
Intervention stocks, Greater London 295w
Judges, Freemasonry 13
Paymaster-General 728
Unemployment, House of Commons questions 259-60w
VAT, Books 1194
Wages councils 1198

Winson Green Prison 2w, 282w
Dental services 282w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Limited list prescribing 381-3w
Limited list prescribing, Rural areas 383w
Namibia, Peace negotiations 199w
UK membership of EC, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 197w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 528, 540, 545, 549, 556, 577
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 455, 464
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 371
Questions
AIDS 470-2w
AIDS, NHS 471w
AIDS, Research 451w
Business statement 505
Cervical cancer, Age 471w
Concessionary television licences 276-7w
Concessionary television licences, Residential care 276-7w
Contraceptives 662w
Contraceptives, Expenditure 662w
Income tax, Pension funds 574w
Legal aid, Administrative delays 330w

Legal aid, Waiting lists 329-30w
Mandatory student grants 153-4w
Mandatory student grants, Parental contributions 154w
Medical research, Contraceptives 601-2w
Namibia, Peace negotiations 199w
NHS, Venereal diseases 468-70w
Student grants, Parental contributions 154w
Taxation, Pension funds 574w
UK membership of EC, Attorney-General 180-1w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Education & Science 187w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Employment 192w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Energy 183w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Health & Social Security 226w
UK membership of EC, Dept of the Environment 180w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Trade & Industry 190w, 347w
UK membership of EC, Dept of Transport 179w
UK membership of EC, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 200w
UK membership of EC, Home Office 185w
UK membership of EC, Ministry of Defence 181w
UK membership of EC, Northern Ireland Office 205w
UK membership of EC, Scottish Office 216w
UK membership of EC, Treasury 195w
UK membership of EC, Welsh Office 189w
UN Decade for Women 1976-85 527-8w
United Nations, Sex discrimination 528-9w

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Questions
M25, Road accidents 910
Ordnance Survey 655-6w

Women
Opticians 588w

Women only courses 51w, 55-8w
Greater London 57-8w
Manpower Services Commission 55-7w
Vocational training 56w
Youth training scheme 51w

Womens prisons
Northern Ireland 297w

Wood, Mr Timothy
Questions
Economic policy 496

Woodcock, Mr Mike
Debates etc
Lead, Petrol (04.12.84) 309-11
Questions
Lead free petrol 506w
Lead free petrol, EC action 505-6w

Workers Educational Association 161
Educational finance 161

Working hours
Lorry drivers (03.12.84) 132-45

"Working with Self-Help Groups" 225w

World Bank
Africa 196w
Overseas aid (11.12.84) 1002-24
Public appointments 137w

World Bank Sub-Saharan Facility 196w, 1039

World Health Organisation
Drugs 75w

World prices 105-16w

World War II
Members correspondence 508w

Wormwood Scrubs 132w

Wrigglesworth, Mr Ian
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 934
Questions
Labour costs 1196-7
Overtime, Dept of Energy 23w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 583
Questions
Business statement 502
Common commercial policy 1052
Inner London Education Authority, Finance 85w
Public sector borrowing requirement 1193
Railway electrification, East Coast railway line 7

Yorkshire Water Authority 190-1w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 190-1w

Yorkshire & Humberside
Bus services 4
Regional development grants 345w
Skillcentres 51-2w

Young, Mr David
Questions
British Rail, Investment 531w
Chemicals, Production 560w
Civil defence, Bolton 306w
Gibraltar 600w
Health services, Bolton 84w
Restaurants, Food labelling 345-6w

Young, Sir George, *Under-Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc
Housing improvement, Liverpool (03.12.84) 150-4
Local Government Bill, Money res (04.12.84) 289-92
Local Government Bill, Com (13.12.84) 1284-7
Questions
Asbestos, Construction 61w
Bed & breakfast accommodation, London boroughs 440-1w
Building regulations, Energy conservation 180w
Control orders, Compensation 443w
Council house sales, Greater London council 67-8w
Council house waiting lists, Greater London 238w
Council housing, Greater London 68w
Council tenants, Personal records 238w
Enterprise zones, Employment opportunities 238w, 441-2w
Enterprise zones, Trafford Park 441w
Enveloping schemes 63-4w
Falkland Islands, Housing construction 440w
Greater London Council, Seaside & country homes scheme 505w
Homelessness 234w
Homelessness, Greater London 443w
Housing associations, Greater London 67w
Housing construction, Greater London 61w
Housing improvement areas, Greater London Council 62w
Housing investment programmes 69w
Housing revenue accounts 67w
Housing starts, Greater London 443-4w
Housing stock, Greater London 392w
Housing subsidies 65-6w
Housing subsidies, Brighton 64-5w
Housing & elderly, London boroughs 68w
Inner city partnerships, Government grants 506-7w
Inner London Education Authority 61-2w
Local government land, Greater London Council 655w
Local government mortgages, Greater London Council 238w
Local government reform, Greater London Council 62-3w
Local government reform, Greater London Council research library 237w
Local government reform, Housing & elderly 68w
Local government reform, Joint boards 235w
Local government reform, Local government mortgages 235w
Local government reform, Seaside & country homes scheme 235w
Local government reform, Thamesmead 239w
London docklands, Employment opportunities 656w
London Docklands Development Corporation, Land 657w
New towns, Capital investment 301w
Sheltered housing, Greater London 236w
Streamlining the Cities Consultation Papers 69w
Streamlining the Cities Responses 392w
Tenants Charter 300w
Urban development grants 507w, 657w

Young offenders
Compensation 275w
Drug crimes 332w
Fines 275w
Parole 563w
Police powers 565w
Prison population 634-6w
Prosecutions 275-6w
Remand in custody 633-4w

Young people
Pay 191-2w

Young workers scheme 311-2w

Younger, Rt Hon George, *Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc
British Railways Order Confirmation Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 331
Rate support grants, Ministerial statements (13.12.84) 1220-35
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 376-7 (06.12.84) 508-18
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Scotland 263-4w
Blind, Scottish Ofice 210w
Criminal statistics, Scotland 42w
Fine defaulters, Scotland 262-3w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 215w
Further education teachers, Scotland 210w
Hill farming, Scotland 209w
Housing associations, Scotland 211w
Housing associations, Strathclyde 211w
Housing construction, Scotland 211w
Housing revenue accounts, Scotland 261w
Housing support grants, Scotland 261w
Local government functions, Scottish Office 217w
Manufacturing industries, Scotland 206w
Parole, Scotland 217w
Perth Prison 42w
Prison population, Scotland 41w, 262-3w
Prisoners release, Scotland 263w
Prisons, Scotland 42w
Rape, Scotland 216-7w
Regional aid, Lanarkshire 344
Regional development grants, Scotland 344
Regional planning & development, Scotland 207w, 340-1
Sheltered housing, Scotland 210-1w
Student grants, Scotland 336-7
Teachers, Scotland 206w, 333-6, 399-400w
UK membership of EC, Scottish Office 216w
Unemployment, Scotland 262w
Unemployment benefits, Scotland 262w
Western Isles integrated development programme 152w

Youth custody 485w
Parole 485w
Prison accommodation 633w
Prison population 634w
Sentencing 635w

Youth Service Provision Review 451w

Youth services
Wales 297w

Youth training scheme 358w, 447w, 905
Death 51w, 619w
Dundee 619w
Industrial accidents 50w, 256w
Mental hospitals 312w
Rank Xerox 51w
Scotland 206-7w

Stockport 254-6w
Supplementary benefits 78-9w, 165-6w
Take-up of employment 312w
Training allowances 50-1w
Women only courses 51w

Youth training scheme early leavers 165-6w

Youth unemployment
Liverpool 631w

Zimbabwe
Overseas aid 593w

Zoological Society of London 580w

Speaker and his deputies, *For rulings and statements see separate heading Speakers rulings & statements*
Debates etc
Amendments & new clauses (03.12.84) 27, (06.12.84) 622 (11.12.84) 942
Calling of Members (03.12.84) 6
Disallowed questions (03.12.84) 8
Orders & regulations motions (11.12.84) 941
Procedure (03.12.84) 6, 24, (05.12.84) 358, 418 (06.12.84) 486, 491, 505, 507, 512, 516, (10.12.84) 878 (11.12.84) 896, 929, 947, 998, 1016, 1018, (13.12.84) 1208 (14.12.84) 1327
Standing Order No 10 applications, Examinations, Scotland (12.12.84) 1076
Standing Order No 10 applications, Sunday trading (10.12.84) 747-8
Standing Order No 10 applications, Teachers (05.12.84) 383
Standing Order No 10 applications, Teachers, Scotland (12.12.84) 1075-6

Speakers rulings & statements
Access to Parliament (03.12.84) 25
Adjournment debates (11.12.84) 1033, (13.12.84) 1219
Business statement (10.12.84) 749
Calling of Members (03.12.84) 6, (06.12.84) 519, (10.12.84) 736, 855, (11.12.84) 908, 926
Command papers (11.12.84) 942
Committee stage (04.12.84) 275
House of Commons Library (12.12.84) 1077
House of Commons Questions (05.12.84) 382, (06.12.84) 497, 498, 519, 553
House of Commons select committees (05.12.84) 349-50
House of Commons standing committees (13.12.84) 1236-7
Hybrid bills (03.12.84) 26
Members conduct (04.12.84) 261, (06.12.84) 495, (10.12.84) 864, (11.12.84) 928, 935
Members interventions (03.12.84) 33, 100, (04.12.84) 262, (11.12.84) 1033
Members speeches (03.12.84) 27, 69, 71, 91, (04.12.84) 173, 223, 234, 240, (05.12.84) 389, 406, 433, 450, 417, (06.12.84) 537, (10.12.84) 750, 789, 799, 801, (11.12.84) 920, 924, (12.12.84) 1059, 1061, 1066
Members & Ministers (06.12.84) 491, (13.12.84) 1208
Ministerial duties (11.12.84) 940
Ministerial speeches (11.12.84) 1034, (12.12.84) 1077
Ministerial statements (04.12.84) 173-4, (05.12.84) 374, 375, 376, 380, 381, (06.12.84) 518, (11.12.84) 920, 924, 927, 939-40
Ministers (11.12.84) 1027
Official Report (05.12.84) 350
Oral questions (03.12.84) 10, (05.12.84) 363, (06.12.84) 486, 496, (12.12.84) 1054
Order of business (04.12.84) 173-4
Orders & regulations (10.12.84) 753, (11.12.84) 941, 1002, (12.12.84) 1055
Points of order (03.12.84) 34, (05.12.84) 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 378, (07.12.84) 666, (10.12.84) 740, (12.12.84) 1052, (13.12.84) 1208, 1318
Public bills (04.12.84) 275
Scope of debate (06.12.84) 607, 609, 613, 616, 630, 632, (10.12.84) 764, 772, 859, (11.12.84) 1010, 1015, 1020
Sub judice (05.12.84) 346, (11.12.84) 927
Supplementary questions (03.12.84) 10, 11, (11.12.84) 909, (12.12.84) 1040
Supply estimates (10.12.84) 751-2
Unparliamentary expressions (03.12.84) 109
Wakeham, John (13.12.84) 1202

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 947-8, 956-7, 987-9
European Council, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 355
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 30, 33, 53, 64, 92, 109, 116, 128, 129, (04.12.84) 240-2
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1130
Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 (Appointed Day) Order 1985 (10.12.84) 866
Questions
Business statement 506
Education Act 1944, Members correspondence 234w
European Union 1050
Freight transport, British Waterways Board 117w
Further education, Greater London 96w
London Regional Transport, Employment policy 37w
Overseas aid 16
Ronan Point, Public inquiries 507w
VAT, EC action 97-9w
VAT zero rated goods 568w

Special development areas
Wales 725-6

Special development orders 584-5w

Special education 452w
Deaf 93w
Statistics 595w

Special hospitals
Riot control weapons 228w

Specified documents (06.12.84) 604-37

Speed, Mr Keith
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1103-5
Questions
"Home Defence & the Farmer" 287w
M25, Road construction 33w
Road safety barriers 35w
Tyres, Motor vehicle safety 338w

Speed limits
Motorways 9-10, 910-1
Road traffic offences 485w

Speller, Mr Tony
Debates etc
Homelessness (14.12.84) 1346-9
Human embryo experiments, Public petitions (14.12.84) 1318
Questions
Employment opportunities, Ilfracombe 343w
European Regional Development Fund, Barnstaple 392w
European Regional Development Fund, Ilfracombe 396w
Government assistance to industry, Barnstaple 342-4w

Spence, Mr John
Questions
Milk, EC countries 29-30w
Milk, Outgoers scheme 435w

Spencer, Mr Derek
Debates etc
National Union of Mineworkers, Sequestration of assets (11.12.84) 929-30
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 924
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 772-5
Questions
Foreign students, EC countries 241w
Myasthenia gravis 270-1w
Overseas students, Tuition fees 241-2w
Students grants, Parental contributions 242w

Spicer, Mr Michael, Under-Secretary of State for Transport
Debates etc
Road construction, West Midlands (04.12.84) 327-30
Questions
Birmingham Airport 338w
Brazil, Airports 408w
Bristol Airports, Air accidents 576-7w
British Airports Authority, Privatisation 11-2
British Airways, Privatisation 29w, 612w
Civil Aviation Authority 532w
Civil Aviation Authority, Corporate plans 533w
Crop spraying 179w, 577w
Crop spraying, EC countries 577w
Crop spraying, Prosecutions 577-8w
Helicopters, Palace of Westminster 38w
Manchester Airport 32w, 336w
National Air Traffic Services 532w
Regional airports 338w
Tax evasion, Road tax 338w

Sports Council 387-92w

Sports Fields & Recreation Facilities Bill 1984-85 1R (05.12.84) 385

Sports sponsorship
Tobacco industry 237w

Squire, Mr Robin
Debates etc
Local Government (Access to Information) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 384
Local Government Bill, Com (12.12.84) 1168-9
Rate support grants (11.12.84) 922
Questions
Construction, Public expenditure 582w
Housing benefits, Children 164w
Personal taxation 246-8w
Tax yields, Married personal allowance 370w

Sri Lanka 597w

St Helena
Birds 340-2w

St Martins School of Art 21-2w

Staffordshire
Primary education 161

Stamp duties 249w

Stanbrook, Mr Ivor
Debates etc
Hong Kong (05.12.84) 397, 443-7
Motor-Cycle Crash Helmets (Restriction of Liability) Bill, 1R (05.12.84) 386-7
Questions
Business statement 504
Hong Kong, Citizenship of the British Dependent Territories, 200-1w
Hong Kong, Civil service 26-7w
Hong Kong, Nationality 200w
Hong Kong, Pensions 27w
Judiciary 13

Standard grade courses 208w, (11.12.84) 1027-34 (12.12.84) 1076
Scotland 208w, 332

Standing Charges (Abolition) Bill 1984/85 1R (13.12.84) 1237

Standing Order No 10 applications
Examinations (12.12.84) 1076
Sunday trading (10.12.84) 1075
Teachers (05.12.84) 383, (12.12.84) 1075

"Standing Orders of the House of Commons Relating to Private Business" (11.12.84) 891

Stanley, Rt Hon John, Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Questions
Air force bases 427w
Airland battle 272w
Antiship missiles 50w
Armed forces deployment, West Germany 273w
Armed forces training 426w
Armed forces training, Scotland 181w
Brazil, Military aircraft 432w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 409-10w
Conventional weapons, Defence expenditure 424w
Crown Proceedings Act 1947 614-5w
Cruise missile sites 894
Cruise missiles, Military exercises 427w
Cruise missiles, Nuclear weapons deployment 892-5
Cruise Watch 893
Defence expenditure 181w
Dual capable weapons 410w

Early warning systems, Shackleton aircraft 296w
Europe, Defence 427w
Exercise Autumn Train, Helicopters 903
Exercise Lionheart 430w
Falkland Islands, Armed forces pay 49w
Falkland Islands, Armed forces strength 432w
Falkland Islands, Costs 431w
Falkland Islands, Fishing vessels 617w
Falkland Islands, Postal services 181w, 272w, 431w
5 Airborne Brigade 99w
Flexible response 426w, 430w
General Belgrano 100w, 432-3w, 618w
HMS Conqueror 100w, 274w, 425w, 616w
HMS Conqueror, Log books 48w, 274w
Hong Kong, Armed forces deployment 426w
Lehman, John 181w
Lemnos 432w
Military aircraft 421-2w
Military balance, Conventional weapons 46w
Moss, Brian 616w
NATO 272-3w
NATO, Conventional weapons 615w
NATO, Europe 273w
NATO, Follow on force attack 273w
NATO, Nuclear weapons 28w
NATO joint exercises, Nuclear weapons 431w
NATO ministerial meetings 410w
Nuclear weapons 49w
Nuclear weapons deployment 894-7
Nuclear weapons deployment, Transport of radioactive materials 901-2
Project Cold Witness 50w
Radar 50w
Satellite killers 426-7w
Shackleton aircraft, Early warning systems 425w
Submarines 273w
Submarines, Military exercises 419w
Submarines, Scotland 181-2w
Type 22 frigates 903
USSR, Nuclear weapons 429-30w

Stansted Airport 301w, 546w, 584-5w

Stanton and Staveley 554w

Statutory Sick Pay Uprating Order 1984 (11.12.84) 941

Steel, Rt Hon David
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 362, 374-5
Questions
British Telecom, Shares 167-8
Christmas bonus 906
Criminal statistics, Scotland 42w
Perth Prison 42w
Prison population, Scotland 41w
Prisons, Scotland 42w
Student grants, Scotland 336

Steel leghold traps 486w, 555w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
USSR, Human rights 526w

Stern, Mr Michael
Questions
Arms trade 892
Financial management unit 497-8w
Income tax 907
Income tax assessment 569w
Special education, Deaf 93w

Stevens, Mr Lewis
Questions
Food, Rationing 286w

Stevens, Mr Martin
Debates etc
Local Government Bill, 2R (03.12.84) 48

Stewart, Mr Allan, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland
Debates etc
Teachers, Scotland (11.12.84) 1030-4
Questions
British Leyland, Bathgate 215-6w
Coal mining, Industrial disputes 342-3
Coal mining, Scotland 341-3
Composite classes, Scotland 210w
Corporal punishment, Scotland 205w
Employment by sector, Dundee 510w
Employment level, Scotland 509w
Employment opportunities, Scotland 208-9w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Scotland 140w
European Regional Development Fund, Scotland 42-3w, 263w, 339
Free school meals, Scotland 403w
Leisure facilities, Paisley 340
North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board, Fishing 302w
Nursery schools, Scotland 205w
Prestwick Freeport Company, Government assistance to industry 152w
Regional aid, Fife 208w
Rural areas, Strathclyde 350w
School closures, Midlothian 207w
School meals, Scotland 512w
Scottish Development Agency, Investment 264-5w
Skillcentres, Scotland 210w
Standard grade courses, Scotland 208w, 332
Student grants, Scotland 262w
Teacher training, Scotland 331-2
Teachers, Scotland 140w, 207w, 332, 351w, 619w
Unemployment, Dundee 511w
Unemployment, Greenock 150-1w
Unemployment, Scotland 209-10w, 401w
Youth training scheme, Dundee 619w
Youth training scheme, Scotland 206-7w

Stewart, Mr Andy
Debates etc
EC Agricultural Council (12.12.84) 1072
Tourism, Private Members motions (07.12.84) 649-52, 671, 698-9
Questions
Coal mining, Scotland 342
Milk, Production quotas 491

Stewart, Rt Hon Donald
Debates etc
Autumn statement (06.12.84) 547
Rate support grants, Scotland (13.12.84) 1227
Representation of the People Bill, 2R (10.12.84) 760
Questions
Acid rain, Inland waterways 445w
Acid rain, Power stations 445-6w, 508w
Air accidents, Stornoway Airport 509w
Air pollution, Plants 446w
Antiship missiles 50w
Armed forces training, Scotland 181w
Civil defence 4w
Defence contracts, British Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre 420w
Electricity tariffs, Air pollution 409w
Gruinard Island, Anthrax 420w
Lehman, John 181w
Military aircraft, Highlands restricted area 420w
Military aircraft, Low flying 419w
Military aircraft, Stornoway Airport 509w
Military exercises, RAF Stornoway 509-10w
Ozone, Plants 446w
Project Cold Witness 50w
Radar 50w
Radar, Tiree 531w
Radio, Western Isles 509w
Royal artillery range, Hebrides 508-9w
Submarines, Military exercises 419w
Submarines, Scotland 181-2w
Sulphur dioxide, Power stations 446w, 508w
Teachers, Scotland 334
US bases, Satellite communications 419w
Western Isles integrated development programme 152w

Stewart, Mr Ian, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc
EC budget (11.12.84) 968, 996-1000
£1 notes (12.12.84) 1186-90
Questions
Bank of England, Commercial bills 457-8w
Debts, Developing countries 572w
EC aid 497w
EC budget 177-8w, 370w, 571w
EC budget, Council of Ministers 495-7w
EC budget, Council 194-5w
Interest rates 571w
Interest rates, Public sector borrowing requirement 571w
Money supply 298w, 373w
National Union of Mineworkers 17w
£1 coins 569w
UK membership of EC, Treasury 195w

Stirling University 167

Stockport
Dept of Health & Social Security local offices 74-6w
Higher education 487w
Youth training scheme 254-6w

Stocks & shares
Bankruptcy 10-1w
Company investigations 10w
Complaints 9w
Fraud 11w
Licensing 8-11w
Trade associations 9w

Stokes, Mr John
Debates etc
Student grants, Ministerial statements (05.12.84) 369

Stoke-on-Trent 251w
Driving tests 251w

Stop & search 2w, 279w
Metropolitan Police 2w, 279w

Stornoway Airport 509w
Air accidents 509w
Military aircraft 509w

Stott, Mr Roger
Debates etc
Tachographs, EC action (03.12.84) 136-9
Questions
Educational maintenance allowance 89w
National Bus Company, Privatisation 11

Strudling Thomas, Mr John, Minister of State for Wales
Questions
A465, Road construction 355w
Blind, Welsh Office 159w
Bus services, Wales 730-1
Coal mining, Wales 189w
Conwy tunnel 399w
Conwy tunnel, Construction costs 232w
Education, Wales 297w, 355w, 717
Education, Welsh language 550w
Educational finance, Wales 231-2w, 355w, 717-8
Educational publications, Wales 296-7w
Employment opportunities, Wales 159w
Enterprise agencies, Wales 230w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Wales 231w
Enterprise zones, Delyn 718-9
Enterprise zones, Wales 718-9
Forestry Commission, Wales 603w
Forests, Wales 548-9w
Free school meals, Wales 547-8w
Hill farming, Wales 160w
Industrial development, Neath 719
International Garden Festival 1992, Wales 355w
Manpower Services Commission, Wales 159w
Primary education, Wales 547w, 717
Primary education, Welsh language 547w
Private education, Wales 718
Pupil-teacher ratios, Wales 232-3w
School meals, Wales 602-3w
Skillcentres, Wales 159w
Tiryberth school, Bilingual education 550w
Tree planting, Wales 549w
Youth services, Wales 297w

Strang, Mr Gavin
Debates etc